

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ELITISM, BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, AND NEO-PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

James O. Adeyanju, PhD

Abstract

The neo-Pentecostal movements' phenomenon, an offshoot of classical and second wave of Pentecostalism, has gained robust attention both in religious and academic discourse in Africa and global space. It has been tagged the "New African Pentecostalism" and "New prophetic movement," and thereby attesting to its new fangled nature. The movement's approach to biblical interpretation calls for scholarly concern. This essay studies Nigeria's version of neo-Pentecostalism, and augments the contemporary discourse on the phenomenal movement but from its elitist's point of view vis-a-vis its impact on biblical interpretation and Christian values. The anxiety hangs on the human actors in the movement: man ought to cherish and promote his self-esteem and elitism but when it is not properly managed such is capable of competing with biblical Christianity by aiding and abetting subjective Christian life. This essay frowns at elitist-driven neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics in which Christian fundamental doctrines are relegated but rather promotes social pride and exclusivism. It posits that socio-religious elitism bred in neo-Pentecostalism can hamper the social and religious values needed for socio-political transformation in Nigeria. The paper employs observation and evaluative methods alongside secondary sources as tools to elicit information in its discussion.

Keywords: Christianity, Neo-Pentecostalism/Pentecostals, Holy Spirit, elitism, Nigeria

Introduction

While the western nations currently deal with issues about secularization and postmodernism, Africa, like other allied majority world, is marked by incessant evolution of religious movements, including variations of Christianity. The emergence of neo-Pentecostal Christian movement with its unique socio-religious practices ranks among such developments. Although neo-Pentecostalism has its inherent edges in the moribund economic situations in the African continent particularly in Nigeria, nonetheless, its unique hermeneutics is coloured by elitism and its corollary effect expressed in subjective homilies, and imbalanced

pastoral care and Christian religious life among others. In this essay, I attach importance to the fact that one should understand classical Pentecostalism in order to acknowledge the peculiar, distinguishing traits of neo-Pentecostalism. In doing this, a surveyed history of Nigeria's general Pentecostal movement, incidentally with the second wave of the movement, is important and hence called for discussion. Thereafter, the essay takes on neo-Pentecostalism: its development and practices in Nigeria's Christian religious space paying attention to its elitist backdrop cum its corollary consequences on biblical interpretation, Christian practices and ideals.

A Survey of Nigeria's Pentecostal Movement in the Light of Global Incidence

The Pentecostal movement and/or Pentecostals constitute a special brand of Christian religious groups the world over. The group believes almost everything the Protestant Christianity upholds; but in addition Pentecostalism strongly claims that the phenomenon of Pentecostalism is supposedly based on the condescension of the Holy Spirit on the earliest apostolic band as told by Dr. Luke in the narrative of Acts 2. Hence, the Pentecostal movement can be referred to as a unit of Protestant Christianity but with a different doctrinal emphasis. However, technically speaking, the Pentecostal movement involves and incorporates the various Christian religious groups which emphasize the gracious manifestations and working of the Holy Spirit through spiritual endowments by individuals in their fold through tongue-speaking (*glossolalia*), faith healing, miracle, enthusiastic worship and glowing evangelical zeal. In the course of time e.g., in Nigeria, some Pentecostal movements form themselves into well established churches with strong administrative structures while some have independent outlook. They display general fundamental beliefs which revolve around the claims that all Christians should seek a post-conversion religious experience otherwise designated as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the light of the spiritual phenomenon of Acts 2, they also teach that those who experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit can and should receive one or more charismatic gifts including the abilities to prophesy or utter messages from God, speaking in unknown (spiritual) language, and/or interpreting the same (Majawa, 2020; Ojo, 2015; Ojo, 208). They attach importance to the charismata but most importantly emphasize that *glossolalia* should be the apogee of one's Christian religiosity. Furthermore, they teach that sanctification, as the second work of grace or Holy Spirit, is and/or should be consequent upon conversion. The Pentecostals shares this view with the

Wesleyan Holiness Churches which emphasized same view and whose activity reached its peak in the years between 1895 and 1905 (*Study Committee Reports, Synod 73, 1975*). The fact that they are currently gaining socio-religious grounds everywhere in the world including Africa, the Pentecostals forms a new phenomenal Christian religious movement that commands attention moreso as they progressively form themselves into a formidable and integral part of global evangelization (Adesoji, 2016, 1). They create opportunities for the incorporation of women into active ministry among others (Fatokun, 2006, 193). As at 2013, Africa's population stood at close to 900 million people out of which the Pentecostals represented 12% or about 107 million people then (Gyandu & Kwabena, 2013, 1-2). More Africans apparently are subscribing to the tenets and belief of the Pentecostal movement. While most Christian denominations believe in the person of the Holy Spirit and his activities in ecclesiastical setting, the pertinacious pneumatic emphasis of the Pentecostal denominations remain unparalleled.

Arguably, the Pentecostals' pneumatological emphasis, different from other Christian religious groups, attracts more followers into the group. It is apparent that, apart from that, the movement also employs Africa's cultural worldview and spiritual realities among others to attract large number of adherents to itself. In the 15th and 16th centuries, and finally in the 19th, Christianity made its contact with the geographical entity now referred to as Nigeria. Christian leaders and adherents in their Anglican, Catholics,' Methodists' formations and in other allied modern Christian groupings, e.g., as in the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Aladura Churches, have always thought and taught that all believers in Christ are inundated with the indwelling Spirit of God to lead pragmatic Christianity at conversion. But the emphasis of Pentecostal movement counters such notion as referred to above.

In his essay, Ukpong (2022) tends to rank the Pentecostal with the various forms of independent churches especially in Nigeria not minding the fact that it is not all Pentecostal denominations that are independent. For example, although, they began as independent groups carved out from some Christian denominations, classical Pentecostals such as The Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN), Assemblies of God (AG), Foursquare Gospel Church (FGC), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), and very few others are not that independent although some are prone to the engagements of dissensions and splinter groups. In Nigeria's Christian political umbrella body i.e., Christian Association of Nigeria

(CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) represents all the Pentecostal denominations in the country. In Ghana, the Pentecostal umbrella body is named Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) while in East African Kenya, such body is known as Pentecostal Assembly of God (PAG) among others. Modern Pentecostalism emerged from the circle of North America Holiness Movement of the 20th century which gave rise to the birth of Pentecostalism in America – the flame of which spread elsewhere in the globe, including Africa later (Adeyanju & Kaduna, 2019, 97-106). Willem Saayman links the beginning of American Pentecostalism with Parham's Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, and Pastor J. Seymour's Black Church in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, USA between 1901 and 1906 respectively (Saayman, 1993, 40).

Pentecostalism was born to Africa about the same time as in America as demonstrated in the religious awakenings and revival movements of William Wade Harris, Garrick Sokari Braide, Daniel Orekoya, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, Moses Orimolade, Simon Kimbangu, etc. whose successful gospel activities occurred in the early portion of 20th century. The ministerial career of these great Africans indicated manifestations of what should be properly referred to as Pentecostal movement in Africa even before the American version. Theirs was the first stage of African Pentecostal movement associated with African Independent Churches (AIC) such as the Aladura Prayer Groups – one of which metamorphosed to the Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC) (headquartered in Philadelphia, United States) and later joined to The Apostolic Church Great Britain between the years 1920 and 1960 (Iheanacho, 2016, 174). After this period came the second wave of Pentecostal groups particularly in the 1970s after previous visitations by God in some parts of Africa. In Nigeria, the second wave of Pentecostals include Christian groups, who left some mainline or mission churches; some came from African Independent denominations while some carved themselves out of the classical Pentecostal movements. But the second wave only existed for a few number of years (around 1970 and 1980). In Nigeria, the second wave conglomerate of churches includes Christian denominations such as Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Deeper Life Bible Church, the Church of God Mission, the Latter Rain Assemblies and a few others.

A Panorama of the Historical Evolution and Characteristic Outlook of the Neo-Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria

Neo-Pentecostal movement differs from the first and second waves of Pentecostal Christianity. The prefix *neo-* is from Hellenistic setting, indicating what is recent, i.e., a new or novel form of a phenomenon. It also describes what is new but not necessarily abnormal. Neo-Pentecostalism is a novel form of classical Pentecostal expression of Christianity. It is the third wave of the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria. Citing Deji Ayegboyin, Adesoji clarifies that the neo-Pentecostal Movement could be described as the latter generation of Pentecostal groups (Adesoji, 2016, 2). Omenyo & Adjei-Arthur (2013, 50; cf. Resane, 2022, 54) describe the new movement as culminating in “neo-prophetic churches” (or “New Prophetic Churches”), thus regarded as the most recent expression of Pentecostalism. Iheanacho (Ibid., 174) describes neo-Pentecostalism as an “embracive nomenclature for all churches, ministries, movements, theologians, and Christian activism aimed at re-energizing Christianity through adaptation to the episodic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and its directional absolutism of the pristine followers of Christ.” Chammah Kaunda (2015, 110) describes it as the “New African Pentecostalism” and while, citing Anderson, Resane (2017) refers to them as “nondenominational Christianity.” According to John MacArthur, Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Missions, United States of America, “the first wave was the Pentecostal movement, the second the Charismatic Movement, and now the third wave is joining them.” In MacArthur’s (1992, 155) view, the third wave has not “managed to avoid the ‘excesses’ of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.” In Nigeria, the movement can be referred to as postcolonial Christian expression. Although the neo-Pentecostals have constituted themselves into a socio-religious factor firmly rooted in the contemporary religious space of Nigeria and in other African sphere operating and leveraging on African worldview and spirituality, they lack traditional classical Pentecostal or mission churches’ denominational connections. The new movements’ emergence, by its emphasis, seeks and asserts relevance and religious influence in the Nigerian society. Surprisingly, the movement expresses itself across some denominations in some form or the other. E.g., in Catholic, the Christian phenomenon is known as the Catholic Charismatics. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria (CCRN) – are more or less neo-Pentecostals in nature except for some internal control mechanisms.

Furthermore, Anglican charismatism is called Evangelical Fellowship in Anglican Communion (EFAC).

The formation of the new Pentecostals was partly pedestalled on the growth and expansion of bodies such as Christian Students' Ministries (SCM), Scripture Union (SU) and Campus Crusade (CC) among others. Underlying this therefore was the foundation of higher education, affording Christian instruction inasmuch as the Bible, the basis for Judeo-Christian religion, is understandable to any dedicated believer to a degree with little or no formal training. The produced educated elites, joined by others with a similar Christian experience in higher education began, ministries in cities among the educated middle classes, forming Christian movements. Secondly, classical Pentecostalism and its second wave seemed to have created an apathetic spiritual atmosphere, along the Mission Churches, in which the neo-Pentecostal inquirers were seeking for some freedom from denominations they tagged as "without fire." In addition, Nigeria's economic stability and boom of the 1980s also contributed to the rise of the religious phenomenon. Moreover, the freedom afforded the neo-Pentecostal religious operation and services in the country's constitution coupled with its materialistic outlook also gave rise for its development in Nigeria. In their characteristic nature, the new wave of Pentecostals model in confessional statements, leveraging on traditions they gained or inherited from other parent-denominations. However, they possess and parade their own peculiar doctrinal package and distinctive ethos.

They are trans-denominational, socially inclusive, unorthodox, non-dogmatic and cosmopolitan when compared to their Classical and Second Wave of Pentecostal forerunners. They attach little or no importance to singing from Hymn Book in their liturgy. They bring Christianity closer to their followers since their liturgy lack elaborate rituals however. They are classed together under the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) in the nation's Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) because they are said to belong to the circle of believers known as the "Holy Spirit-filled Christian Churches," upholding the practice of the full gospel message of Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 (Amata, 2002, 88; *Study Committee Reports*, Synod 73, 1975). The distinctives that mark out the new Pentecostals include: (i) Idolization of the miraculous, healing and deliverance; (ii) Success and the enactment of bizarre church performances often performed by charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders; and (iii) Reflection of a popularized rendition of Christianity that provides for the disgruntled third world

peoples through provision of psychological and practical aids. But then, the movement helps people survive both socially and psychologically. It provides participation, support, emotional relief and sense of belonging (Kgattle, 2017). Like the classical and second wave of Pentecostals, the neo-Pentecostals assert the necessity of *glossolalia* and post-conversion spiritual baptism for all believers. Nevertheless, they are not the direct labour and fruit of the Holiness Movement like the Classical Pentecostals.

In Nigeria, the movement mostly consists of privately-owned Churches and Christian Ministries established from the 1980s to the present millennium. In this way, they include Living Faith Church (aka Winners' Chapel), The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM), Household of God, and many others too numerous to itemize (See Adeyanju & Kaduna, 2019, 407-408). The leaders of the neo-Pentecostal denominations usually assume bogus titles such as Bishop, Presiding Bishop, Senior Reverend, Prophet, and Apostle among others apparently to gain popularity and acceptance among their followers. Some of them also acquire honorary doctorate degrees. The movement domiciles in major towns and cities such as Abuja, Lagos, Akure, Ilorin, Ibadan, Warri, Kaduna, Uyo, Kaduna, Benin City, Enugu, Osogbo, Aba, Ado Ekiti, Auchi, Lokoja, Benin, Ogbomoso, Ilesa, Port Harcourt, Ile Ife, Gombe, Jos, Bauchi, and Owerri among others. The names given to their churches and/or ministries are within the prerogative of their founders and they usually advertize their Church's programmes and services through media outfits, sometimes privately-owned. However, the adherents of neo-Pentecostalism assume more practical and pragmatic outlook but with feeling laced with admixture of socio-spiritual and economic points. This is coupled with enthusiastic zeal and worship, laced by the manifestations of spiritual gifts, fidelity to biblical stipulations, faith healing, prosperity, deliverance by laying-on of hands, fiery prayers, and baptism in the Spirit. Their major belief system includes:

- i. Salvation, which should be a deep, profound and transforming experience in addition to confessional statements;
- ii. Importance of the Holy Spirit in applying salvation to sinners but on material terms in the similitude of liberation theologies;
- iii. Spiritual warfare, and the need for deliverance from family and ancestral spirits and yokes, resulting in "Falling under Anointing";
- iv. Awareness and orientation on demonism and exorcism. In this, the demonic worldview of Africans is exacerbated by the neo-Pentecostals;

- v. Conscious monetary contribution to the development of the ministries through sowing “Faith Seed”; (Kitause & Achunike, 2013, 7-19) and
- vi. Unflinching insistence on prosperity as the covenant right of Christians in general, thus necessitating their quest for securing liberty from poverty, sickness, and death.

These themes reverberate often in their sermons, songs and choruses. In general, they lack coherent doctrinal beliefs and practices; but then the belief systems mentioned above are common to majority of them.

While the Pentecostals share the aspirations of the economically and educationally deprived individuals, as expressed in their undisguised anti-intellectualism and extreme irrationalism in their religious expressions, the neo-Pentecostals, with a few exceptions, draw their participants from the middle and upper classes and from the better to the highly educated. Apart from the above belief system, the following socio-spiritual traits are also displayed in neo-Pentecostalism as deduced, with modifications, from *1975 Synod (73)’s Study Committee Reports 34 on Neo-Pentecostalism (402-403)*:

- i. A profound interest in the Holy Spirit, together with a Jesus-centered piety;
- ii. An assumption that all the extraordinary (miraculous) “gifts” of the Spirit are to be expected and sought by the Christians today;
- iii. Enthusiasm for sharing the faith and its triumphs;
- iv. A great emphasis on personal and corporate devotion;
- v. A tendency towards pneumatic, in digression from the traditional grammatical-historical-theological, interpretation of Scripture, a method of interpretation which tends on one hand towards fragmentation of the biblical literature, and on the other hand towards the paradoxical combination of a naively literal and an allegorical understanding of the biblical text;
- vi. The assumption that the truly spiritual man is characterized by a complete yielding to the Holy Spirit, frequently evinced by the total “yielding of the tongue” – man’s most “unruly” member – to the Spirit in glossolalia, so that he seeks and receives direct divine guidance apart from the normal processes of decision-making;
- vii. A distinctive “language” of faith which, however useful the participants may find it for prayer, praise, and testimony, lacks theological precision; and
- viii. Impatience with, if not distrust of, theology and disciplines intellectual effort generally.

Most importantly, one major socio-religious tools driving the theological system of neo-Pentecostalism is elitism, which would be taken up for discussion below.

The Syndrome of Elitism in Nigeria's Neo-Pentecostal Denominations

Elitism has to do with the quality or practice of being elite. It possesses both positive and negative connotations. At any rate, it is a phenomenon that suggests that every culture creates its caste system whereof distinction exists among citizens therein. There can be academic, social and political elites. When it is not properly curtailed, elitism is a social denotation for standing self-important, aloof, arrogant, lordly, presumptuous, superior, high-and-mighty, egotistic, etc. It denotes a niche for superiority complex. An elitist sees social barbarism in others, which he seeks to assail for his own gain. It is a form of subtle oppressive social philosophy. It seeks to elevate man to a "preternatural" realm and in the process, affirming in human term the Darwinian philosophy: "The survival of the fittest." It is a phenomenological class struggle of getting to belong to a social class, e.g., upper class, whereof one feels he is better than his friend and/or neighbour because he is imbued with some intrinsic qualities, intellectual capacity, wealth and/or experience. It is a phenomenal issue of those considered to be the best of a class and those considered in the hall of fame of a community as opposed to *hoi polloi* and the proletariats. It refers to aristocracy and aristocratic feeling in a given society (Webster's 2006, 589). Elitism lifts up man and engineers him to concentrate on his achievements, office, and attainments, thus breeding boast and pride. In the ancient Roman Empire, elitism was a social issue. The wealth and luxury of the provinces flowed to the city of Rome toward and in the 1st century AD, and acted as catalyst to bring about significant change in Roman social structures, struggles, and institutions. The elites - the social *personae*, who were the members of the upper class in Roman cities - constituted a group of some individuals characterized by "power, status, and wealth." The consciousness of, or pride in belonging to a select or favoured group was high. Eventually, it was employed to prevent egalitarianism, pluralism and populism. It greatly encouraged social stratification. The imperial elites were bound together by ties of privilege, education, culture, and connections or networks. To disentangle them required uncommon depth of tact and subtlety. The "elites club" included the Councilors, Senators and *Equites*, who had estates and were involved in the socio-political functioning of local communities (Slotjees, 2011, 36). The elites, with

political power, had economic resources to sponsor and finance their political careers. Consequently, in a bid to outdo their candidature rivals, individual elites resorted to corruption and means of extravagance as a method of increasing their chances of achieving Rome's most coveted position (deBlois, 1984, 358-377). Its appearance in modern societies still looms large. For example, among the Yoruba of the Southwestern Nigeria and other allied cultural groups, there is a difference between those classified as *Gbajumo* (or *Eniyan Pataki*) and *Mekunu*; the former are the well-to-do, the elites, while the latter comprises the commoners. These two groups are known as the *Maikudi* and the *Talakawa* among the Hausa-Fulani of Northern part of the country.

By observation, elitism has more or less assumed a fashionable trendy situation in Nigeria's neo-Pentecostalism – a style which pervades almost all the outlook and practices of the new movement. The neo-Pentecostals give little or no attention to such titles as *Mama Ijo* (Church Grand-matron) or *Baba Ijo* (Church Grand-patron) unlike the Mainline or Mission Churches. Rather, they display a unique elitist's assertions through self-assertion and self “hyper-consciousness.” They employ the medium of the pneumatic experience and material possession to boast. They place elitist assertions on their own private sense of infilling of the Holy Spirit, working of miracles, large congregation coupled with their choice material possessions. In Resane's (Ibid.) submission, the situation is exacerbated by the “Celebrity Cult” whereof the neo-Pentecostal leader's success is measured by wealthy appearance. Through a kind of self-created Christian education, the new Pentecostal denominational leaders and their adherents brag with *glossolalia* thereby creating an awareness of belonging to the body of few individuals who should rule and dominate the world system. Neo-Pentecostalism's great stress on individual religious experience combined with a measure of impatience with traditional churchly emphases on doctrine, liturgy, and institutional structures and orders is more or less driven by elitist behaviour. While surfing their YouTube Channels, it is discovered that the new Pentecostals think of themselves as persons who are “God's most choice people” and “divinely-lucky people,” who should exercise power over “unfortunate” others. Thus, they create a socio-economic apartheid between themselves and the less-successful individuals in society. Theirs is a life characterized by social and religious triumphalism. They also emphasize the manifold material blessings they derive from the patronage of the business, political and traditional class of their society. While creating a scene of elitism, they idolize miracles such as healing, deliverance, and enact bizarre church

performance often performed by their charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders. According to Adeyanju & Kaduna (2019, 251) when such leaders speak “ex cathedra,” their homilies and publications become a “law” that should be adhered to *in toto* thus competing with and replacing theirs with the preeminence of Christ in their folds. They operate an unopposed and self-favoured basic hierarchy of administrative system (Adesoji, 2016). Therefore, they entertain little or no question and thereby deficient of internal check and balance. The leaders claim divine inspiration for any action whether biblical or not. They can, therefore, order their congregation to eat grass, snakes, and to drink petrol in the similitude of occultic acts among others (Kgattle, 2017, 1). Such behavioural patterns are a product of elitist neo-Pentecostal society where leaders operate from the template of perceived “impeccability.”

Elitist-Driven Neo-Pentecostal System of Hermeneutics

The Judeo-Christian scriptures form the basis of the formation and the very life of the Church. But such orthodoxy and orthopraxis is not an easy task because it is influenced by a number of factors. The term “hermeneutics” derives from the Greek infinitive *hermeneuein*, and it was deployed in the Hellenistic setting to refer to three basic things: (i) to express aloud in words or to vocalize; (ii) to explain; and (iii) to translate. In all the three cases, something foreign, strange and separated in time, space or experience is made familiar and comprehensible; such conceptual things are interpreted and explained in order that the unfamiliar would assume familiarity (Nel, 2015, 2-3). In a Christian theological perspective, the sense is almost the same in that the Bible has a diversified unity different from other writings and it has difficult contents which require formal principles for their interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics is a classified field of knowledge, dealing with the task of interpreting the coded biblical revelation. It denotes the science and art of understanding, translating and explaining what the scripture text originally meant. It is noteworthy to state that major streams of theology within Christianity occur largely as a result of the hermeneutical methods the subsets employ to make sense of what the Bible says (MacArthur, 1992, 101). The situation is reminiscent of the early, medieval, Protestant and/or contemporary church’s methodological engagement of biblical interpretation. A thorough engagement of the Bible should take into consideration some background situations behind the text(s). These include: the socio-political and historical situation; the cultural dimension; the linguistic context; the topological,

geographical, and/or geo-physical situation; and the psychic or psychological situation of the writer(s) or the receiving communities. All these points are woven into the biblical documents, thereby necessitating that a scientific - critical approach be applied when unearthing the meaning of the biblical statements. In Christianity, it is taught that the task requires the agency of God's Spirit alongside versatility and thoroughness in trained skills about it.

In several Christian denominations, prospective Pastors undertake theological educational or ministerial training in order to understand the rudiments of the Christian religion especially the Judeo-Christian traditions preserved in the Bible to be able to access gainful employment in a local parish (cf. Nel, 2021). This is because Christ and his historic redemptive event, a central topic in Christianity, require skilled and formal understanding and application. Conversely, neo-Pentecostalism cares little or nothing about formal theological education and its encumbrances including hermeneutics. Rybarczyk (2015, 587) generally describes the Pentecostals as "spiritual enthusiasts" who follow the Spirit more regularly than they follow the Bible. Rybarczyk's description better fits the neo-Pentecostals than the Classical Pentecostals. In Nigeria's Christian religious past, the challenge of the establishment and sustenance of theological education centres for the purpose of training personnel who receive God's call into the pastoral ministerial vocation has steered major classical Pentecostal denominations in the face. But the situation has received attention, and the attending resulting is getting fruitful in that viable theological seminaries have been established to address the concern. The neo-Pentecostals deride thorough formal training for the ministerial vocation but rather opt for a few weeks' theological training bereft of in-depth and effective knowledge and understanding of the ensuing evangelical task. They are show little or no concern about the historical development of the Israelite nation or of Christian theologies but rather that the "Spirit should speak to their spirits" (Davies, 2009, 219). According to Marius Nel, hermeneutics, in neo-Pentecostal sense, possesses some elements namely: "the interrelationship between the Holy Spirit as the One, animating Scriptures and empowering the believing community with the purpose that members be equipped for ministry and witness in culturally appropriate ways." In this way, the experience of God through the Spirit is what is imperative; and interpretation of the information contained in the Bible is determined by their praxis (Nel, 2015, 3, 16). Proof-texting is aptly at hand as a tool while emphasizing the experiential at the detriment of orthodox doctrinal practice. For

lack of skillful, concrete, and cognitive training need for ministry, neo-Pentecostal preachers and teachers mostly leverage on spiritualization and allegorization to present biblical truths. M. S. Kgattle & T. R. Mofokeng (2019) capture this thought in the following statements:

... While a Pentecostal hermeneutic as the work of the Holy Spirit makes it distinct from other hermeneutics, the danger is when Scriptures are quoted or used out of context in order for a pastor or prophet to drive his or her own agenda. The danger is when the word spoken by a prophet is taken as the final word on one hand but abusing the listeners or believers on the other.

A choice hyper-charismatism, deficient of objectivity, leads in neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics. Hence, a typical neo-Pentecostal gathering is laced with two levels of authority: biblical authority, and the preacher's. In the words of Rybarczyk (2015, 587), the group's hermeneutics is learned mostly through the Church's kerygmatic practice. In their homiletical engagements, the neo-Pentecostal movement leverages on the tales of the biblical miraculous events e.g., the Israelites' miraculous exodus from Egypt, Jesus' miracles, Elisha's healing of the Jordan River, Peter's and Paul's healing acts and other miraculous portions of the Bible to address their audience. Disregarding the socio-historical and cultural context needed for balanced interpretation, they engage those narratives from the lens of spiritualization while feeding on the theological incognizance of their audience. While evading the scientific approach to biblical interpretation, they dabble into motivational talks laden with materialistic topical themes bereft of biblical ethics and morality.

Listening to their programmes through the electronic media, one derives some insights into the group's biblical hermeneutics. For example, they subject biblical giants e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, etc. to vigorous citation but only as formulae for victory and dominion without due recourse to the patient endurance, longsuffering and diligence of the heroes. Fear of failure, death and sickness informs this typical "exegesis." They reconstruct the stories of these figures as though their "success stories" happened in a jiffy, reading the Bible "literally, collapsing the distance between the original context of Scripture and the context of the reader" (Martin, 2018, 2-3). To boost their presentations, they invoke secular celebrities such as Elon Musk, Bill Gate, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckenberg, Warren Buffet, Larry Page, Michael Blomberg, Aliko Dangote,

Nicky Oppenheimer, Mike Adenuga, etc. Hence, they evolve formulaic preaching revolving around topics such as “Seven Keys to Breakthrough,” “Nine Principles for Dominion,” “Three Days’ Appointment with Destiny” and so on. Neo-Pentecostal subjective elitist interpretation unduly crop up in a “higher anointing” that enable worshippers to indulge in the drinking of anointing water, eating of anointed apple, sipping of anointed orange, and so on for deliverance purpose and for protection from ancestral issues, ill-luck, affliction, diseases and sicknesses and abject poverty. Some go to the extent of physically sleeping with, and having carnal knowledge of the opposite sex in the view of the worshipping public in their gatherings (Adeyanju & Kaduna, 251). The situation has degenerated into syncretic aberrations. E.g., for the fact that Elisha employed salt for healing in the biblical narrative, there is presently anointed salt in the group’s camp. This is what Kgattle & Mofokeng (2019) again describe as “spiritual pride,” involving a sense of aloofness because of one’s certain spiritual experiences, including the charismata. According to Omenyo & Adjei-Arthur (2013, 50), the new Pentecostal denominations display a syncretic theology coupled with a literalist biblical interpretation, over-spiritualization of the biblical texts and its inherent issues, a strong inclination for material success and fulfillment in life. In addition, they employ imprecation derived from some biblical portions to invoke curses and spells on their perceived human enemies. This is aside the use of the Holy Communion (the Lord’s Supper) to invoke material prosperity (Bitrus, 2016, 334).

Critique of the Situation, Recommendations and Conclusion

This essay is not an attempt to undermine the dignity of the human person and downplay his self-esteem in God’s economy. In theistic creationism, man has always been regarded as the acme of creation to coordinate and manage the affairs of other creatures. The paper is to the effect that man should always acknowledge his God-defined limitation by recognizing his fickleness, and not employ his delegated innate capacity to overshadow his duties to God and fellow men even in religious affairs. To their credit, the neo-Pentecostal movement display enthusiastic zeal and worship in their corporate liturgy just as they have helped in bridging the leadership gap between men and women in ecclesiastical setting and thereby fostering social cohesion. They have also consciously increased privileges for leadership capacity and leadership visibility which over time have eluded common men and women. Through the platform of neo-Pentecostalism, some women have had the opportunity of founding and managing their own self-

established Churches (Iheanacho, 2016, 167). Again, through their ecstatic and charismatic-laden services, many souls have been delivered from psycho-spiritual burden, and thereby possessing renewed hope to face life better.

In spite of these, the essay's blue-print is to argue for the necessity or for the indispensability of biblical imperative to gain ascendancy over matters of personal status, personal achievements, opinions, and assertions as *sine qua non* in Christianity.

The elitist-driven neo-Pentecostals' hermeneutics is deficient of orthodoxy thereby resulting in daunting poverty of essential Christian religious fundamentals in their camps. It disallows due morals, ethical ideals and values needed to transform the Nigerian nation in all facets, to be fed to parishioners because the group's religious excesses have the capacity to give rise to licentiousness, nudity, libertinism, avarice, greed, and other corrupt behaviours. Neo-Pentecostal elitist-driven hermeneutics undermines the rigorous task of arriving at the meaning of the biblical texts through critical and scientific interpretive method. It is rather replaced by charismatic and titular achievements on the altar, drawing attention to self rather than God. The "easy-going" exegesis of the neo-Pentecostals brings disparity between the rich and the poor against the tenor of the NT teaching which frowns at elitism but upholds equality and egalitarianism (cf. Gal. 3:27-28, Eph. 2:11-17; Col. 3:11). Biblical figures such as Cornelius, Dorcas, and Barnabas and so on did not manifest elitist behaviour in the primitive Church. Instead, they displayed kenotic attitude and shared their material possessions among the *Talakawa* in their communities each. The persuasion done to their congregants by the neo-Pentecostal leaders that they stand out from other Christians due to their participation in a particular ministry of which they are the head should be carried out with caution.

This article solemnly submits that there are no extraordinary Christians but that being an ordinary Christian in itself is an extraordinary thing. Inherent charisma is an added grace supplied to expand the influence of the Christian religion. Government's failure in the provision of jobs and some basic social infrastructures seems to have aided the spread or propagation of new Pentecostal movement's practices in Nigeria. The researcher calls for improved socio-economic and political situation in the country. Unemployed young people seek refuge for living under the movement. Finally, both the PFN and CAN should set out certain criteria that would checkmate and regulate the activities of all denominations, including the neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria. The two Christian

Bodies should curb the excesses of the new Pentecostals alongside other related Christian bodies so that moral and theological crisis would not dent the image of Christianity in the nation.

References

- Adesoji, A. O. "The New Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria and the Politics of Belonging," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (2016), 1-15. Downloaded from [researchgate.net/publication/304455658_The_New_Pentecostal_Movement...](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304455658_The_New_Pentecostal_Movement...) Accessed June 17, 2022.
- Adeyanju, James O. & Kaduna, Joshua T. *Biblical Christianity and the Challenge of Syncretism in the Church in Africa*. Ilorin, Nigeria: Amazing Grace, 2019.
- Amata, O. B. E. J. *The Nigerian Pentecostal Movement: The People, The Purpose and the Power* 2nd Ed. Lagos, Nigeria: Pillars House, 2002.
- Bitrus, Ibrahim. "The Means of Prosperity: The Neo-Pentecostal Interpretation of the Lord's Supper in Nigeria," *Dialog* 55/4 (2016), 334-342. Retrieved from Wiley Online Library <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>. Accessed July 05, 2022.
- Davies, Andrew. "What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as a Pentecostal?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* Vol. 18 (2009), 216-229. Retrieved from <https://cte.org.uk> Accessed December 13, 2023.
- de Blois, Lukas. "The Third Century Crisis and the Greek Elite in the Roman Empire," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd, 33, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1984), 358-377. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4435894>. Accessed June 28, 2022.
- Fatokun, Samson A. "Women and Leadership in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* (December 2006) Vol. XXXII/3, 193-205.
- Gyandu, Asamoah & Kwabena, J. *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
- Iheanacho, N. N. "The Rise and Boom of Neo-Pentecostal Women Ministry in Nigeria: An Enterprise of Liberation and Empowerment," *Rom. Journal of Sociological Studies*. New Series 2 (2016), 167-183.
- Kaunda, Chammah. "Towards Pentecopolitanism: New African Pentecostalism an Social Cohesion in South Africa," (2015), 110-134. Retrieved from [https://www.ajol.info>view](https://www.ajol.info/view). Accessed August 15, 2022.

- Kgatlhe, M. S. "The Unusual Practices Within Some Neo-Pentecostal Churches in South Africa: Reflections and Recommendations," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73/3 (September 2017), 1-8. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4656>. Accessed June 18, 2022.
- Kgatlhe, M. S. & Mofokeng, T. R. "Toward a Decolonial Hermeneutic of Experience in African Pentecostal Christianity: A South African Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74/4 (2019), a5473, 3 of 9. <https://doi.org.10.4102/hts.v75i4.5473>. Accessed December 28, 2022.
- Kitause, C. H. & Achunike, H. C. "A Historical Discourse on Tithing and Seed Sowing in Some Nigerian Pentecostal Churches," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 (November-December 2013), 7-19. Retrieved from www.iosrjournals.org. Accessed January 15, 2023.
- MacArthur, John F. *Charismatic Chaos*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Majawa, C. C. A. "Rethinking Pentecostal Inclusive Paradigms, Methods and Direction in the Third Millennial Africa." Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net>3579...> Accessed June 15, 200.
- Majawa, C. C. A. "Theological Analysis of a New Contexts of Charismatic Pentecostalism in Africa." Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net>3579...> Accessed June 15, 2022.
- Martin, Lee Roy. "Characteristics of Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Pharos Journal of Theology* online Vol. 99 (2018), 1-9. Retrieved from <https://www.pharosjot.com>. Accessed December 13, 2023.
- Nel, Marius. "Attempting to Define a Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Scriptura* 114 (2015:1), 1-21. Retrieved from <http://scriptura.journals.ac.za>. Accessed December 22, 2022.
- Ojo, Matthews A. "The Charismatic Movement in Nigeria Today," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (1995), 19/3. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693939501900306>. Accessed January 11, 2024.

- Ojo, Matthews A. "Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in Nigeria: Factors of Growth and Inherent challenges," *The WATS Journal: An Online Journal of West Africa Theological Seminary* (2018) 3/1. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/watsjournal/vol3iss1/5>. Accessed January 11, 2024.
- Omenyo, Cephas N. & Adjei-Arthur, Wonderful. "The Bible Says! Neo-Prophetic Hermeneutics in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 19/1 (April 2013), 50-70.
- Resane, Kelebolige T. "Evangelicals in Africa Encountering New Prophetic Churches," *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* Vol. 47. No. 2 (2022), 46-63.
- Resane, Kelebogile T. "Commercialization of Theological Education as a Challenge in the Neo-Pentecostal Charismatic Churches," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* (Online, 2072-8050) (2017), 1-7. Retrieved from <http://www.hts.org.za>. Accessed December 20, 2022.
- Rybarczyk, Edmund J. "New Churches: Pentecostals and the Bible," Part IV: Reception of the Bible Confessionally Published online by Cambridge University Press Edited by John Riches (2015), 587-605. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/books> Accessed December 13, 2023.
- Saayman, W. "Some Reflections on the Development of the Pentecostal Mission Model in South Africa," *Missionalia* 21/1 (April 1993), 40-56.
- Slootjes, Danielle. "Local Elites and Power in the Roman World: Modern Theories and Models," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XLII/2 (Autumn 2011), 235-249.
- Study Committee Reports (Synod 73), 1975, "Report 34 neo-Pentecostalism." (Articles 74, 76) Supplement – Report 34, 398-493. Retrieved from <https://www.crcna.org/files> Accessed June 15, 2022.
- Ukpong, D. P. "The Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria," 56pps. Retrieved from <https://www.glopent.net/pre...> Accessed August 15, 2022.
- Webster's New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Federal Street Press, 2006.