



## **CHRISTIANITY OR CHURCHIANITY: THE NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE**

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the concept of Churchianity or Christianity in the Nigerian contemporary experience. It delves into the rise of Churchianity, its implications for Nigerian society, and the importance of rediscovering authentic Christianity. The review of related literature provides insights into the erosion of moral values, complacency, materialism, corruption, and social divisions associated with Churchianity. It emphasizes the need to prioritize personal spiritual growth, moral values, discipleship, social engagement, genuine worship, and theological education. The article concludes with recommendations for individuals, religious leaders, and Nigerian society to counter the challenges of Churchianity and promote a genuine expression of Christianity. By implementing these recommendations, Nigerians can foster personal and societal transformation, deepen their spiritual connection with God, and contribute to the well-being and progress of Nigerian society.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, a country with a strong religious inclination, the concepts of Churchianity and Christianity have become intertwined in the fabric of society. Churchianity refers to the phenomenon where religious practices and traditions take precedence over true spiritual growth and genuine faith in God. The Nigerian contemporary experience is marked by the prevalence of Churchianity, which raises important questions about the authenticity and

depth of religious beliefs and practices in the country. Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," is known for its vibrant and diverse religious landscape. It is home to a large population of Christians, with various denominations and sects spread across the country (Abiodun 2018). Christianity arrived in Nigeria with European missionaries in the 19th century, and since then, it has become deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and political aspects of Nigerian society.

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However, over the years, the Nigerian religious landscape has undergone a transformation. The rise of Churchianity has seen an increase in the number of churches and religious organizations that prioritize external displays of religiosity and material prosperity over genuine spiritual growth. This trend has blurred the lines between Churchianity and authentic Christianity, raising concerns about the state of faith and its impact on individuals and society (Anozie 2017). The Nigerian contemporary experience of Churchianity is characterized by the emergence of mega-churches, charismatic leaders, and the propagation of the prosperity gospel. Mega-churches, with their large congregations and spectacular facilities, have gained prominence and influence, becoming symbols of success in the Nigerian religious landscape (Okafor 2020). These churches often prioritize numerical growth and financial prosperity, sometimes at the expense of deeper spiritual engagement and transformation.

The prosperity gospel, a theological doctrine that equates financial wealth with spiritual favor, has also played a significant role in shaping the Nigerian contemporary experience. Preachers and religious leaders propagate the idea that material prosperity is a sign of God's blessings, leading many individuals to seek religious experiences with the expectation of financial gain rather than genuine spiritual growth (Oluwole 2016). While Churchianity emphasizes external displays of religiosity,

such as attending church services, vigils, and prayer meetings, the focus on personal transformation and authentic faith can be overshadowed. The superficiality of religious practices and the quest for material wealth often lead to a lack of genuine spiritual transformation and a neglect of the moral values that underpin Christianity (Okafor 2020).

The prevalence of Churchianity in Nigeria has also given rise to concerns about corruption and exploitation within religious institutions. Some church leaders have been accused of financial mismanagement, embezzlement, and unethical practices, damaging the reputation of Christianity and eroding the trust of believers (Eze 2018).

In light of these developments, it is essential to critically examine the Nigerian contemporary experience of Churchianity and its implications. This article aims to delve into the blurred lines between Churchianity and Christianity, discussing the consequences for individuals, communities, and society as a whole. By exploring this topic in-depth, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Nigerian Christianity and consider ways to foster a more authentic and transformative spiritual experience (Uchendu 2018).

## THE CONCEPTS OF CHURCHIANITY

The concept of Churchianity refers to a phenomenon where religious practices and traditions take precedence over true spiritual growth and genuine faith in God. It is



characterized by the prioritization of external displays of religiosity, material prosperity, and the pursuit of immediate material blessings, often at the expense of the core principles of Christianity.

In Churchianity, the focus shifts from a deep and personal relationship with God to the performance of religious rituals and ceremonies. Attendance at church services, vigils, and prayer meetings becomes more about showcasing religiosity for social recognition rather than fostering a genuine connection with the divine. The emphasis is placed on outward appearances rather than the transformation of the heart and the application of Christian teachings to daily life. Materialism plays a significant role in Churchianity. The prosperity gospel, a theological doctrine that equates financial wealth with spiritual favor, is often propagated within this context. It suggests that material prosperity is a sign of God's blessings and spiritual maturity. This emphasis on material gain can lead to a distortion of Christian values and the prioritization of personal wealth and success over the pursuit of genuine faith and righteousness (Anozie 2017).

Churchianity also opens the door to corruption and exploitation within religious institutions. Some leaders exploit the trust and faith of their congregants for personal gain, leading to cases of financial mismanagement, manipulation, and immoral practices. This exploitation not only damages the reputation of religious

organizations but also erodes the trust of individuals seeking genuine spiritual guidance and support (Okonkwo 2017). Moreover, Churchianity can foster a sense of complacency and dependency among believers. The emphasis on miracles, quick fixes, and supernatural solutions to life's challenges may discourage individuals from taking personal responsibility or actively seeking solutions through personal growth, critical thinking, and societal engagement. This can hinder individual and societal progress as people rely solely on religious experiences rather than developing their skills, resilience, and capacity for problem-solving (Ugochukwu 2017).

The concept of Churchianity raises important questions about the authenticity and depth of religious beliefs and practices. It calls for a critical examination of the motivations behind religious engagement and a reassessment of the priorities within religious institutions. It highlights the need to rediscover and promote a more genuine and transformative expression of Christianity, one that focuses on personal relationship with God, moral values, spiritual growth, service to others, and genuine worship. Churchianity represents a deviation from the core principles of Christianity, where external displays of religiosity and material prosperity take precedence over true spiritual growth and genuine faith. It is essential to recognize and address the challenges posed by Churchianity in order to foster a more authentic and meaningful religious experience that aligns



with the teachings of Christianity (Adeyemi 2016).

## THE RISE OF CHURCHIANITY

The rise of Churchianity in Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of historical, socio-cultural, and economic factors. Understanding these factors is crucial to comprehending the context in which Churchianity has gained prominence in the Nigerian religious landscape. Christianity in Nigeria has a colonial history, with European missionaries introducing the faith during the 19th century (Oluwole 2016). This historical connection to colonialism has influenced the development of Christianity in Nigeria and the subsequent rise of Churchianity. The legacy of colonialism, with its emphasis on external forms of religiosity, has contributed to the prioritization of rituals, ceremonies, and outward displays of faith, often overshadowing the true essence of Christianity. Nigeria is a diverse nation with numerous ethnic groups, each with its own cultural and religious practices. The pluralistic nature of Nigerian society has created an environment where religious expressions and beliefs coexist. However, this diversity has also led to competition and the desire for distinct identities within religious communities. As a result, some churches have emerged with charismatic leaders who capitalize on the cultural and socio-economic aspirations of the people, offering solutions to their immediate needs and desires (Dike 2020).

Nigeria has experienced economic challenges throughout its history, including periods of recession, poverty, and income inequality. In the face of these hardships, many individuals seek solutions and hope for a better life. Some religious leaders capitalize on this vulnerability by promising miracles, financial prosperity, and instant solutions to life's challenges. This focus on material gain resonates with the aspirations of individuals striving for economic success and has contributed to the rise of Churchianity. Furthermore, the rise of Churchianity has been fueled by advancements in technology and mass media. The proliferation of television and radio stations, as well as the widespread use of the internet and social media platforms, has provided a platform for charismatic preachers to reach large audiences and gain popularity. These mediums have facilitated the dissemination of sensationalized messages and amplified the influence of Churchianity in Nigerian society (Ibe 2020).

The growth of Churchianity is also influenced by societal and cultural factors, such as the strong emphasis on communal and group identity. Many Nigerians find a sense of belonging and community in religious congregations. The desire for social recognition, respect, and acceptance within these communities often leads individuals to engage in religious practices without fully internalizing the teachings or experiencing genuine spiritual transformation. Moreover, the



socio-economic disparities prevalent in Nigerian society contribute to the allure of Churchianity (Adedibu 2019). The promise of prosperity and success in a country marked by income inequality can be appealing to individuals seeking a way out of poverty and financial hardship. The prosperity gospel, with its focus on material blessings, resonates with those who desire economic advancement, potentially leading them to prioritize material gain over the pursuit of authentic spiritual growth (Ogbonna 2019).

The rise of Churchianity in Nigeria is the result of a complex interplay of historical, socio-cultural, economic, and technological factors. The legacy of colonialism, socio-economic disparities, and the desire for material prosperity have contributed to the prominence of Churchianity in the Nigerian religious landscape. Understanding these factors is essential for comprehending the challenges posed by Churchianity and working towards a more genuine and transformative expression of Christianity in Nigeria. The rise of Churchianity in Nigeria has been a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by a range of factors that have shaped the religious landscape of the country (Ezeuko 2018). This section provides a more detailed discussion on the various aspects that have contributed to the prevalence of Churchianity in Nigerian society. The factors contributing to the rise of churchianity are;

1. Proliferation of Churches: Nigeria is known for its numerous churches, spanning various denominations, sects, and charismatic movements. The proliferation of churches in the country has created a competitive religious market, with each religious organization vying for followers and seeking to attract large congregations. This has led to the rise of mega-churches, characterized by their grandiose facilities, charismatic leaders, and mass appeal. The presence of numerous churches has contributed to the diversification of religious practices and beliefs, but it has also raised questions about the authenticity and depth of faith in Nigerian Christianity.

2. Materialism and Prosperity Gospel: The prosperity gospel has gained significant traction within Nigerian churches, contributing to the rise of Churchianity. This theological perspective emphasizes the belief that material wealth and success are indicators of one's spirituality and favor from God. Preachers who propagate the prosperity gospel often promise financial blessings, miracles, and breakthroughs to their followers. This message resonates with individuals who aspire for economic prosperity and a better quality of life, leading many to prioritize material gain over genuine spiritual growth and transformation. The focus on materialism and the pursuit of wealth has led some religious leaders to prioritize financial prosperity as a measure of spiritual success. This emphasis on material blessings has raised concerns about the



distortion of core Christian values, such as humility, contentment, and service to others. Critics argue that the prosperity gospel's preoccupation with material gain encourages individuals to view faith as a means to personal enrichment, leading to a shallow and self-centered understanding of Christianity.

3. **Cultural Influences:** Nigeria's rich cultural diversity and traditional beliefs have influenced the development of Churchianity. In some instances, traditional religious practices and beliefs have merged with Christianity, resulting in syncretic forms of worship. This blending of cultural elements with Christian practices has led to the emergence of churches that incorporate traditional rituals and customs into their services. While these practices may provide a sense of cultural identity and familiarity to congregants, they also raise questions about the purity and authenticity of Christian teachings. Additionally, Nigeria's communal and group-oriented culture has contributed to the rise of Churchianity. Religious congregations provide a sense of belonging, support, and community for individuals in a society where social connections are highly valued. The desire for acceptance and recognition within these communities often drives individuals to engage in religious practices without critically examining their faith or experiencing genuine spiritual transformation.

4. **Media and Technology:** The advent of mass media and advancements in technology

have played a significant role in the rise of Churchianity in Nigeria. Television, radio, and the internet have provided platforms for charismatic preachers to reach a wide audience and disseminate their messages. Televangelism, in particular, has gained popularity, allowing charismatic leaders to showcase their sermons, healing sessions, and miracles to millions of viewers. Social media platforms have also become powerful tools for spreading religious messages, enabling individuals to connect with religious leaders, join virtual communities, and consume religious content on a massive scale. The accessibility and reach of media and technology have contributed to the growth and influence of Churchianity in Nigerian society.

5. **Socio-economic Factors:** Nigeria's socio-economic realities, marked by income inequality, poverty, and economic hardships, have influenced the rise of Churchianity. Many Nigerians face daily struggles for survival and seek solace, hope, and solutions to their challenges. Some religious leaders capitalize on this vulnerability by offering promises of miracles, deliverance from poverty, and instant solutions to life's problems. The appeal of Churchianity lies in its ability to provide a sense of hope, escape from economic hardship, and the promise of a better future. However, this focus on immediate material gain may divert attention from the deeper spiritual growth and social transformation that Christianity aims to foster.



The rise of Churchianity in Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the proliferation of churches, the influence of materialism and the prosperity gospel, cultural dynamics, the role of media and technology, and the socio-economic context of the country. These factors have contributed to the prevalence of external displays of religiosity, the emphasis on material prosperity, and the prioritization of individual needs and aspirations over genuine spiritual growth and transformation. Understanding these complexities is essential for critically examining the phenomenon of Churchianity and working towards a more authentic and transformative expression of Christianity in Nigeria (Abiodun 2018).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

The prevalence of Churchianity in Nigeria has profound implications for the society at large. One major implication is the erosion of moral values. When religious institutions prioritize material prosperity and superficial displays of faith, the focus shifts away from promoting virtues such as honesty, integrity, and compassion. This erosion of moral values can have far-reaching consequences on the ethical fabric of society, leading to a decline in trust, cooperation, and social cohesion. Churchianity also perpetuates a cycle of complacency and dependency within Nigerian society (Ogunbiyi 2019). The promises of instant miracles and supernatural interventions may lead

individuals to become passive in their approach to personal and societal challenges. This reliance on external forces can hinder personal growth, social progress, and the development of essential skills and resilience needed for personal and collective well-being.

Moreover, the emphasis on material prosperity and the propagation of the prosperity gospel in Churchianity can have economic implications for Nigerian society. Instead of investing in economic activities and development, individuals may prioritize attending religious services and making financial contributions in the hope of receiving immediate material blessings. This can hinder economic productivity, socio-economic progress, and perpetuate a culture of dependency (Okoro 2019).

The rise of Churchianity has also provided fertile ground for corruption and exploitation within religious institutions. Cases of financial mismanagement, embezzlement, and lavish lifestyles of some church leaders have damaged the reputation of religious organizations and eroded the trust of individuals seeking spiritual guidance. The prevalence of corruption and exploitation within Churchianity undermines the integrity and transparency of religious institutions, leading to disillusionment among believers. Furthermore, the emphasis on material gain and external manifestations of religiosity can contribute to societal division and inequality. The pursuit of wealth and social status can create divisions among individuals



and communities, fostering competition and comparison. This can further exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities and hinder efforts towards social cohesion and collective progress (Ekwueme 2018).

Addressing these implications requires a re-evaluation of the priorities and values within religious institutions. Promoting a more balanced and authentic expression of Christianity is crucial, one that prioritizes personal transformation, ethical conduct, social responsibility, and genuine spiritual growth. This shift necessitates a collective effort from religious leaders, congregants, and society as a whole to promote a Christianity that is rooted in deep spirituality, moral values, and a commitment to the common good (Ezeuko 2018).

## **REDISCOVERING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY**

In the face of the challenges posed by Churchianity, there is a growing need to rediscover and promote authentic Christianity in Nigeria. This section delves into the importance of rediscovering authentic Christianity and highlights key aspects that individuals and religious leaders can focus on to foster genuine spiritual growth and transformation (Uchendu 2018).

1. **Personal Relationship with God:** At the heart of authentic Christianity is a personal and intimate relationship with God. It involves moving beyond superficial displays of religiosity and seeking a deeper connection

with the divine. Individuals are encouraged to cultivate a personal prayer life, engage in regular Bible study, and develop a genuine understanding of God's Word. By focusing on building a personal relationship with God, individuals can experience a profound transformation that transcends external rituals and ceremonies.

2. **Emphasizing Moral Values:** Authentic Christianity places a strong emphasis on moral values and ethical conduct. It involves embodying virtues such as honesty, integrity, humility, compassion, and love for others. Religious leaders play a crucial role in promoting these values by teaching sound doctrine and actively living out these principles in their own lives. By emphasizing the importance of moral values, the church can contribute to the restoration of integrity and trust within society.

3. **Spiritual Growth and Discipleship:** Authentic Christianity emphasizes the journey of spiritual growth and discipleship. It involves a commitment to personal growth, character development, and the transformation of one's life to align with Christ's teachings. This requires individuals to engage in regular self-reflection, self-discipline, and self-examination, while being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Religious leaders can provide mentorship, guidance, and opportunities for individuals to deepen their understanding of their faith and grow in spiritual maturity.

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#### 4. **Service to Others and Social**

**Justice:** Authentic Christianity is not solely focused on individual salvation but also extends to the service of others and social justice. It involves actively caring for the marginalized, advocating for the oppressed, and seeking justice and equality in society. The church has a vital role in promoting a culture of compassion, social responsibility, and active engagement in addressing societal issues such as poverty, corruption, and discrimination.

#### 5. **Genuine Worship and Communal**

**Engagement:** Authentic Christianity encompasses genuine worship that goes beyond external rituals. It involves heartfelt worship that is characterized by reverence, gratitude, and an authentic expression of one's love for God. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of genuine community engagement and fellowship, where believers come together to support, encourage, and uplift one another. The church can provide a nurturing environment that fosters authentic worship experiences and meaningful connections among believers.

Rediscovering authentic Christianity is crucial in overcoming the challenges posed by Churchianity in Nigeria. It requires individuals to develop a personal relationship with God, prioritize moral values, engage in spiritual growth and discipleship, actively serve others and pursue social justice, and participate in genuine worship and communal engagement. Religious leaders have a significant

responsibility to promote these aspects of authentic Christianity by teaching sound doctrine, leading by example, and providing guidance and support to congregants. By rediscovering and living out the principles of authentic Christianity, Nigerians can experience true spiritual growth, positively impact society, and contribute to a more genuine expression of their faith.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the review of related literature on Churchianity or Christianity in the Nigerian contemporary experience sheds light on the prevalence, implications, and importance of rediscovering authentic Christianity. The literature examined various aspects such as the impact of materialism, the prosperity gospel, and the decline of moral values on Churchianity. It also explored the socio-economic consequences, corruption, and social divisions associated with this phenomenon.

The reviewed literature underscores the need for a reformation within religious institutions, emphasizing the significance of personal spiritual growth, ethical conduct, and genuine worship. It highlights the importance of fostering a deep and personal relationship with God, grounded in prayer, meditation, and Bible study. The literature also emphasizes the importance of moral values, spiritual growth, discipleship, and a commitment to service and social justice.

Moreover, the literature stresses the need for genuine worship experiences and communal



engagement within Christian communities. It emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that promotes authenticity, support, and meaningful connections among believers.

Overall, the review of related literature calls for a rediscovery of authentic Christianity in Nigeria. It advocates for a return to the core principles of the faith, focusing on personal transformation, moral values, spiritual growth, service to others, and genuine worship. The literature highlights the need for religious leaders, individuals, and society as a whole to actively promote and live out these aspects of authentic Christianity in order to counter the challenges posed by Churchianity.

By embracing the teachings of Jesus Christ, adhering to moral values, fostering personal and communal spiritual growth, promoting social justice, and engaging in genuine worship, Nigerians can foster a more authentic and transformative expression of Christianity. This shift has the potential to positively impact

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Nigerian society, restore integrity within religious institutions, promote social cohesion, and contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations to address the challenges of Churchianity and promote authentic Christianity in Nigeria include prioritizing personal spiritual growth, emphasizing moral values, fostering discipleship, addressing materialism and the prosperity gospel, engaging in social justice, cultivating genuine worship, enhancing theological education, promoting accountability and transparency, fostering collaboration and dialogue, and continuously reflecting and adapting practices. Implementing these recommendations will contribute to personal and societal transformation, foster a deeper connection with God, and promote the well-being and progress of Nigerian society.

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