

Deceptive Influence of Self-Proclaimed Prophets: Exploitation of Vulnerable Christians in Nigerian

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20399588>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>The essence of Christian leadership is to guide Christians to achieve the Great Commission, which is preaching and teaching people to observe all things that Jesus has commanded. The early church leaders were committed to this assignment so much that not only were the lives of individual members of the church impacted, but there was a social transformation of the environment in which the church found itself. Surprisingly, over the recent years, there has been a noticeable shift from the church being an agent of transformation in Nigeria to a centre for exploitation of people for economic gain by self-proclaimed prophets and preachers. To investigate this trend, the phenomenological method of enquiry was adopted because it is the most suitable for exploring a qualitative study of this nature. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, which were presented and descriptively discussed. The study revealed that African worldview, negligence of prophecy, miracle and divine healing, economic hardship, among others, are factors responsible for the increase of self-proclaimed preachers and prophets, while exploitation, defrauding of members and the large-scale loss of Christian spirituality in the church and society are the consequences. The study concluded by recommending that Nigerians, especially youths, should embark on skill acquisition, not depending only on prophecy or miracle for livelihood. The second coming of Christ and holy living should form the preaching and teaching of Christian leaders, and theological educators should develop a tailor-made curriculum to address the spiritual gap already existing in Nigeria.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Christian leadership, church transformation, religious exploitation, phenomenological study, Nigeria.</p>
Received: 02-04-2026	
Accepted: 06-05-2026	
Published: 26-05-2026	
<p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Very Rev Dr. Uchenna Michael Ugorie & KOKEY, Grace Chinedum, PhD. (2026). Deceptive Influence of Self-Proclaimed Prophets: Exploitation of Vulnerable Christians in Nigerian. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS), 2(5), 104-113.</p>	

Introduction

Records revealed that the church was officially established in Nigeria by the Methodist Missionaries in 1842 at Badagry, followed by other missionary agencies.¹ Towards the end of the 19th Century, some indigenous churches started to emerge. During that missionary era, there was a social transformation in Nigeria. Many primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, as well as their personnel, now administered by the Government of modern

Nigeria, were the achievements of the Christian Missionary Agencies.² "Christianity fought against cannibalism, superstitious beliefs, the killing of twins, trial by ordeal and human sacrifice. It contributed so much to alleviating human misery in the country. Motherless babies' homes, mentally ill-destitute homes, physically challenged homes and leprosy centres were built to give hope to the hopeless."³

¹ Michael Crowther, *History of Nigeria*, (London: (Faber and Faber 1962), 126.

² S.S. Balogun, "Islam in Nigeria: It's Historical Development". J.A. Atanda, Garuba Ashiwaju and Yahaya Abubakar, eds. *Nigeria Since*

Independence: The First Twenty-five Years. IX, Religion 1989, 55-56.

³ D.O. Okoronkwo, *History of Nigeria in a New Setting from the Earliest Time to 1961*. (Aba: The International

After the missionary period, especially in the early 1970's and late 80s, there was a movement of Christian spirituality in Nigeria, and the stress then was strongly on the second coming of Christ and holy living. Christians were fervently dedicated to holy living, contentment and humility.⁴The values that have traditionally distinguished Christian ministry, such as compassion, selfless service, servant leadership and prudent lifestyle, were common practice. Today, many churches and ministries in Nigeria have become an arena for the exploitation and manipulation of people for economic gain by preachers and prophets.⁵Manipulation of the gospel for material enrichment, power, popularity and self-aggrandisement with little or no emphasis on the salvation in Christ Jesus is the order of the day. This cancerous trend leads to living below the biblical standard in relation to employing the gospel as a medium for socio-religious transformation of a given society.

Therefore, the questions for us to grapple with here are (1) what are the factors responsible for the evolving trend of self-proclaimed prophets and preachers in Nigeria? (2) What indicators in the activities of self-proclaimed prophets and preachers in Nigeria suggest manipulation of the vulnerable Christians? (3) What are the implications of this trend for the Christian faith and Nigeria as a nation? The answers to these questions would be explored through the phenomenological method of research, which investigates everyday experiences of human beings as were gathered from personal observations, interviews, newspapers, journal articles, magazines and internet sources.

It will be necessary at this point to have a clearer view of the concept of deceptive influence, exploitation, self-proclaimed prophets and vulnerable Christians. Deceptive influence, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "refers to the act of using false, misleading, or manipulative tactics to sway or control someone's thoughts, feelings, or actions. It involves exploiting trust, vulnerability, or lack of knowledge to influence someone's decisions or behaviour, often for personal gain or benefit."⁶ In this context, it means self-proclaimed prophets using false prophecies to make predictions or claims that are not genuine in order to influence the decision of vulnerable Christians for personal gain.

Press,1962,170-172. Assessed 14/9/2022

⁴Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, "Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions" *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418, <https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 14/9/2022

⁵Benjamin Diaraand Michael E. Mokwenye, A critical analysis of the social implications of gospel merchandising among Nigerian Christians today. http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines exploitation as "the act of taking unfair advantage of someone or a group for personal gain or benefit, often in a way that is unjust, cruel, or manipulative. It involves using power, influence, or resources to exploit someone's vulnerability, trust, or labour, usually for financial, emotional, or social profit."⁷ There are forms of exploitation, such as economic exploitation: unfair labour practices, wage theft, or profiting from someone's work without fair compensation. Emotional exploitation: manipulating someone's emotions, trust, or vulnerability for personal gain. Sexual exploitation: using coercion, manipulation, or power to exploit someone for sex or commercial sex acts. Psychological exploitation: using tactics like guilt-tripping or intimidation to control or manipulate someone. In the case of this study, we are considering a prophet using his position to extort money from vulnerable church members or followers.

Self-proclaimed prophets are certain persons (pastors, evangelists, teachers, prophets and apostles) who, out of their selfish interests and in some cases, did not receive needed ministerial training but claim special connection to God and set themselves up as sources of spirituality and authority. They mostly operate personal churches, ministries and prayer houses, and their focus is mainly on miracle, healing, deliverance, prophecy and problem-solving. Their messages are not Christo-centric; they speak what the people want to hear so that they can make a handsome living. On the other hand, the predictions and preaching of some of them could create anxiety, fear, and distress. Generally, their messages do not offer corrections that edify the church or inspire the transformation of personal life or society.

The Bible describes false prophets as those who prophesy from their imagination and follow their own spirit without any direction from God (Ezekiel, 13:2). The Lord did not send them and their divinations were rooted in falsehood (Ezekiel, 13:3). The analysis of prophets here is similar to the characteristics of self-proclaimed prophets, pastors, evangelists, preachers or men of God in Nigeria. Such people in the New Testament were described as "peddlers of God's word" and wolves in sheep's clothing, deliberately setting out to distort the truth and devour their prey (2 Cor 2:17; 11:13-15; Matt 7:15; 10:16). So, without fear of

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⁶ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, "Definition of vulnerable," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulnerable>. Assessed 6/9/2022

⁷Cambridge Dictionary Online Dictionary, "Vulnerable," <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vulnerable>. Assessed 6/9/2022

contradictions, one can boldly say that self-proclaimed prophets and preachers are synonymous with false prophets and preachers. In this study, therefore, self-proclaimed, false or fake will be used interchangeably, while prophets, preachers, pastors, evangelists, teachers, apostles and men of God will also be used as having the same connotation with preachers.

Vulnerable Christians are those who believe in Jesus Christ and follow his teachings, those who worship in a Christian church building and those who dwell in geographical locations normally known as Christian areas that are prone or accessible to certain heretical Christian concepts, ideas, doctrines and values as a result of their ignorance or lack of protection from such influences.

Factors behind the Evolving Trend of Self-proclaimed Prophets in Nigeria

Various writers and scholars, such as Kistler, Chinwokwu, Michael, Biwul, Agazue, Ogundabe Onah, Ugwu and Iheanacho, and many more have carried out studies individually on the causal factors for the fast-growing trend of self-proclaimed, fake and false prophets, preachers and pastors in Nigeria. Their respective findings range from the influence of the African worldview as a remote cause, negligence of miracle, divine healing and prophecy by the missionaries, socio-economic meltdown, excessive desire for wealth, position and power and relevance attached to prophecy. For instance, Kistler discovered beliefs that misfortunes, uncertainties, fears, anxieties of life and sicknesses are spiritual experiences requiring spiritual approaches to deal with⁸, which compelled many Nigerians to resort to divinations, sacrifices and charms to seek explanations.⁹ These traditional religious methods of meeting their spiritual needs were objected to by the Western Missionaries, who also instructed their Nigerian converts to reject the practices without adequately addressing the spiritual needs of the people. Miracle, divine healing and prophecy were not taken seriously as issues of

their practical involvement; instead, the missionaries were mainly anxious about the evangelisation of Nigerians.¹⁰ Although the missionaries set up health centres in their missions to which they referred the sick among their members, they could not substitute explanations for the cause of their sickness, and as a result, a spiritual vacuum was created. Therefore, the healing centres, prayer houses, miracle centres and many African Indigenous (Pentecostal) Churches have emerged to fill up this vacuum. This explains why prophecy is placed in the limelight in today's church, and prophets are held in high esteem in Nigeria.¹¹ It also clarifies why some people understand the ministerial work from the socio-cultural and traditional religious point of view without recourse to the biblical tradition. Their orientation and practice of ministry are guided by that worldview and those beliefs. The Bible is used only as a tool to Christianize their activities.¹²

Economic meltdown in Nigeria contributes to the sudden rise in the number of self-proclaimed preachers cum prophets, thereby becoming a prophet and starting ministries in Nigeria has been considered as a solution to poverty and an entry to affluence.¹³ Biwul have revealed that some who are in the pastoral ministry in Nigeria today are not called to the office, but they are there as the last option.¹⁴ The current economic hardship, unemployment and poverty triggered a sudden upsurge in the number of false prophets, miracle centres, prayer houses, pastors, teachers and healing homes, who embark on such ventures for survival from economic unfriendliness in the country.¹⁵ Due to the increased level of poverty in Nigeria, some people have emerged as preachers and converted their living room into churches since they can quote some verses of the Bible and thereafter intensify the growth of their churches.¹⁶ Some graduate and poor Nigerians, as a result of unemployment, see being a preacher as a lucrative business and the easiest way of becoming rich in the pretence of a divine call.¹⁷ A few of them “undergo six-month courses in one of the Bible Colleges in the nation and thereafter

⁸Uchenna Ugorie, “Sickness and Healing” (unpublished material Abia State University, Uturu 2011)

⁹Uchenna Ugorie, “Sickness and Healing” (unpublished material Abia State University, Uturu 2011)

¹⁰Emmanuel N Chinweokwu, “Religion and Spirituality” (Lecture note Abia State University Uturu, 2015).

¹¹Emmanuel N Chinweokwu “Religion and Spirituality”

¹²Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2013), 63.

¹³ Iheanacho, N.N., ‘A critical look at contemporary Nigerian Christianity’, *International Journal of Theology & Reformed Tradition* 1, no.1, 2009, 104–117. Assessed 14/9/2022. Assessed 14/9/2022.

¹⁴Tihitshak Joel Kamsen Biwul, “A paradigm shift in pastoral ministry in twenty-first century Nigeria: An examination of the trends, causes and its implications” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*

4, No. 1, 2018, 73–89. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2018.v4n1.a05>. Retrieved 2/9/2022. Assessed 14/9/2022.

¹⁵ Eze J O Muruako, “Demons in Priestly Garb” *Express*, 2nd edition Thursday Sept 7- Sept 10, 2006, 5

¹⁶Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020, 63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418, <https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 14/9/2022.

¹⁷Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020, DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418, <https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

establish a church and thereby become prophets and gradually get on with life.”¹⁸That is how socio-economic decay, with its attendant miseries in Nigeria, presents a good platform for the rise of self-proclaimed ministers.¹⁹This socio-economic driven approach to pastoral, prophetic and preaching ministry negates the Biblical standards of the ministry.

Excessive desire for wealth, greed and getting rich quickly syndrome have also been identified as the motivating factors for the increase of self-proclaimed pastors and apostles in Nigeria. In so doing, it is astonishing that within a few years of operating as a prophet, the person starts driving big expensive cars, building mansions, wearing costly clothes, shoes, watches and so on. Hence, emphasis on their preaching focuses on offerings, payment of tithe and prosperity with little or no emphasis on spirituality.²⁰“In the recent past, a breed of prophets has sprang up whose message is to realise the hope of heaven here on earth. Their God is neither poor nor is he a God of the poor. The sign of God’s blessing is the Mercedes car, the impressive mansions or the expensive clothes they wear. They promise to make their followers millionaires.”²¹Ogunbade has maintained that many so called men of God are so engrossed with worldly materials and inordinate desire to ride a bullet proof jeep, to build castle all over the world, to have personal private jet, to own a treasury and to be in possessions of all the money in the Church and that is why some of them bury all sort of things including life cows in other to attract members.²²In the same vein, “The Daily Post of 25 January 2016, reported

that three dead bodies were discovered in a foundation of a church under construction in Ugwuaji, Enugu State, Nigeria. According to the report, some residents claimed that the building, believed to be a proposed place of worship, belonged to a man of God.”²³

Another factor that leads to the rise of self-proclaimed pastors is position and power. Nobody wants to serve; everybody wants to be the prophet-founder or apostle and a lord having many people to serve under him, and this, most of the time, leads to schism.²⁴Some are cultic, arrogant, proud, popularity-conscious, oppressive, power-conscious, and money-conscious, and some are accused of performing fake miracles.²⁵

Agazue’s findings revealed that a growing number of self-proclaimed men of God have chosen “prophet” as their title because of the reverence or idolization attached to it in Nigeria.²⁶As they become universal, a large number of Nigerians, including members of the mainline churches who hold healers and prophets in high esteem, patronise them. This has led to many of the pastors coming up with dubious prophecies and staged miracles to present themselves as legitimate.²⁷Some pastors consult medicine men and spirits before going to their prayer houses, and that gives them the ability to gain insight and information about their members. Those involved in this kind of healing power more often than not use objects and instruments to attract powers and diagnose ailments.²⁸

It should be noted here that this trend is subtly creeping into many mainline churches whose pastors and ministers have

¹⁸Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. 13/9/2022. Assessed 14/9/2022

¹⁹Onah, N.G. & Ugwu, C.O.T., ‘Prayer as a panacea for human problems: Nigeria Christian experience’, *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 1,no.1, 2008,66’

²⁰Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

²¹Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418.

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

²²Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

²³Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

²⁴Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020,63. DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

²⁵Chidinma P. Ukeachusim, 2 Timothy 2:15 and the ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who twist the gospel <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2407/5683>. Assessed 12/9/2022

²⁶Chima Agazue, *Role of a Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), 16-17

²⁷Chima Agazue, *Role of a Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), 16-17

²⁸Chima Agazue, *Role of a Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), 16-17

resorted to prophesying to their members, whether the prophecies are from God or not, to retain their members. Some even go as far as blessing water, selling stones and other objects for miracles, healing, deliverance from demonic operation, and even faking miracles. This development runs contrary to the early followers of Christ and early 1970s Christians in Nigeria, whose attraction was the second coming of Christ, which formed the basis of a good deal of moral teachings and practices of their respective days.

On the other hand, Bertrand argues that the delay of the second coming of Christ may be responsible for the undue pursuit of prophecy and healing miracle in today's church. According to him, the belief of the second coming of Christ, which was imminent, was the basis of a good deal of moral teachings and practices of Jesus' early followers, and that is why ordinary mundane affairs did not count for them.²⁹ Maybe mundane affairs count for today's Christians because Jesus is seen to have delayed his second coming.

Manipulation of Vulnerable Christians by Self-proclaimed Prophets and Preachers in Nigeria

Ogunbade, Chidinma, Lekwauwa, Olawole, Essien, Onwukwu and Inyima, Adelowo, Diaora and Ona and Agazue, have traced various forms of manipulation of vulnerable Christians in Nigeria to Biblical admonition to "believe in God and his prophets to succeed," erroneous teaching of the Bible, seed sowing, selling of religious products and divination. For instance, Christians are admonished to "believe in God and his prophets to succeed" (2 Chronicles 20:20). This passage paves the way for the manipulation of unsuspecting Christians by wolves in sheep's clothing.

Erroneous Bible teaching, preaching and prophecy are veritable tools used to control the vulnerable Christians by

some preachers and prophets who give the impression that their teachings are based on the Bible.³⁰ Agazue noted that false prophets and pastors have deceitfully learned to echo what needy or distressed followers are anxious to hear about, thereby exploiting them.³¹ They play on the psychology of unsuspecting Christians who are desperate for help in their numerous problems. Their tactics to win people's hearts are planned accordingly and made to balance with the Bible message, making it hard for many susceptible Christians to detect falsehood.³² A good number of Christians, as a result, have fallen victim and have regrettably been exploited financially, sexually, and even psychologically without their knowledge.³³ They take advantage of their privileged position to exploit members of their hard-earned resources, such as buildings, cars, properties and money, by deceiving them with false prophecies.³⁴ Some of those preachers are well acquainted with the word, but they manipulate it to rouse their congregations, stand approved, and to achieve their ulterior motives. They, by being clever, cunning, subtle and eloquent, communicate the word erroneously.³⁵

³⁶False prophets make people believe that success does not depend on hard work but on sowing seeds.³⁷ The poor ones who want to be rich, including school leavers, sow seed in order to be successful. They deceive people into buying wrist bands, stickers, holy water, miracle oil, miracle candle, magical handkerchiefs, blessed pen and pencils.³⁸ In some of the miracle healings, magical powers are combined with Christian faith.³⁹ Another strategy they use is through divination or other diabolical means to mention the mobile phone numbers or bank account numbers of their prey, which will actually surprise the person, and that may lead them to comply with whatever demands they may place on the person.⁴⁰

²⁹Bertrand Russel, "Why I am not a Christian" (public lecture delivered at London 1927), 1.

³⁰"What is Scriptural Manipulation?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-manipulation.html>. Retrieved 11/9/2022

³¹ Chima Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria." *Dignity: A Journal of Dignity and Sexual Exploitation* Vol.1 issue 1, 2016, 1-18. 1

³²Chima Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria." *Dignity: A Journal of Dignity and Sexual Exploitation* Vol.1 issue 1, 2016, 1-18. 1

³³Chidinma P. Ukeachusim, "2 Timothy 2:15 and the ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who twist the gospel" <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2407/5683>. Retrieved 12/9/2022

³⁴Chima Agazue, "Role of A Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria"

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257815424_The_Role_of_A_Culture_of_Superstition_in_the_Proliferation_of_Religio-Commercial_Pastors_in_Nigeria. Assessed 12/9/2022

³⁵Chidinma P. Ukeachusim, "2 Timothy 2:15 and the ordained and self-styled Nigerian ministers of God who twist the gospel" <https://verbumeteclesia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2407/5683>. Assessed 12/9/2022

³⁶Charles Lekwauwa "An Exegetical Analysis of False Prophets in Onitsha in the Light of 1 Kings 22:23-28 (B.A project, University of Port Harcourt, River State, 2017), 36

³⁷A. Olawole, 2005, *A critique of the Pseudo-Nigerian Bourgeoisie*, from <http://www.dawodu.com/olawole2.htm>. Assessed 5/9/2022

³⁸A. Olawole, *A critique of the Pseudo-Nigerian Bourgeoisie*, from <http://www.dawodu.com/olawole2.htm>. Assessed 5/9/2022

³⁹Adelowo, F.A., 2006, 'Miracles in Nigeria: An evaluation of unusual occurrences', *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors Seventh Day Adventist* 3 no.1, 2005, 4-11.

⁴⁰Uche Akaeme, in discussion with the author September, 2022

Agazue emphasised economic hardship and social ills such as insecurity and violence as channels through which the manipulation of gullible Christians in Nigeria is fueled, because religious participation and activities tend to be higher in societies experiencing economic hardship.⁴¹ A society which is passing through economic recession: anxiety, desperation, sicknesses and diseases are bound to ravage the citizens. It is most likely that anything (physical or spiritual) that fakes itself as a solution is acceptable so long as it relieves the condition. These helpless situations push many people to seek divine protection, which the prophets often promise to relief. Financial exploitation in particular has become a major job of these so-called prophets.⁴² Research has shown that those who suffered more misfortune and hardship while growing up are more likely to succumb to peer pressure, be more easily misled by others, or be more influenced by the media.⁴³ Nigeria's economic challenges have left many enduring long-term suffering and feeling hopeless, resulting in many people becoming gullible to false prophets.⁴⁴

Many believers have also become gullible to false prophets due to ignorance. Instead of identifying false prophets and preachers for what they are by their strange evil fruits (Matthew 7:16), some think highly of them. They assume they are honest and carelessly follow them without enquiring into their sincerity.⁴⁵ Some Christians are biblically ignorant and illiterate, and because of this, they accept anything as the "word of God" and would do anything the false prophet says.⁴⁶

Sometimes, the fake men of God proffer solutions to people's problems via mystic powers, giving of spiritual objects like staff, chains and rings. Some give miracle water and a whole range of stones, herbal medicines and ritual

bathing in the river around 12 mid night as a guarantee to riches, fame, marriage, good life, healing and everything the heart can yearn for.⁴⁷ At the end of the day, innocent men and women living with diabetes, cancer, HIV and Aids, evil spirits, and other ailments and challenges are looted in the name of miracle, healing or solving problems. Some of these so-called men of God threaten their members with sickness or death if they refuse to comply with their demands.⁴⁸

Women are more exposed to exploitation than men because of cultural expectations in Nigeria. For instance, if an unmarried woman is approaching her menopause, she would be vulnerable to financial exploitation and sexually exploited by the fake prophets cum preachers as they desperately seek husbands while still able to conceive.⁴⁹ Even when in marriage, without childbearing, women are more desperate and are thereby exposed to wolves in sheep's clothing.⁵⁰ The cases of women who were victims of sexual abuse and financial exploitation in Nigeria, as outlined by Agazue, are a study of their own.⁵¹

Implications of Self-proclaimed Prophets and Preachers on the Christian Faith and Nigeria

The implications of the so-called men of God on the church and Nigeria as a nation are enormous. Gaby, Alighili, Ogunbade, Onah, Ugwu, Ejiogu, Uzodimma, and Biwul found sowing discord, less emphasis on the second coming of Christ, death of members, imprisonment, decline in the dignity of labour and exploitation as the implications. Alighili has discovered that some of the prophecies, visions and their interpretations have many times informed actions of hatred and disunity among people.⁵² There have been cases where women and children were accused by prophets of witchcraft who are responsible for the misfortune in their

⁴¹Chima Agazue "He Told Me My Waist And Private Parts Have been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria, DigitalCommons@URI, 2016.

⁴²Essien, A.M., 2010, 'Proliferation of churches: A leeway to commercialization of religion', *European Journal of Scientific Research* 45, no.4, 2010, 649-657. Assessed 14/9/2022

⁴³Kim, Jen. What Makes People So Gullible? September 30, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/valleygirl-brain/201909/what-makes-people-so-gullible> .Assessed 14/9/2022

⁴⁴Kim, Jen. What Makes People So Gullible? September 30, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/valleygirl-brain/201909/what-makes-people-so-gullible>. Accessed 14/9/2022.

⁴⁵Pastor Kamthian Vaiphei, Joazinho da S. F.A. Martins. *False Prophets and Their Blind Followers: A Critique of Contemporary Preachers and Their False Evangelical Messages*. Houston: Strategic Book Publishing, 2013.

⁴⁶Brother Amartey. "The Menace of False Prophets and Pastors in Africa." *Modern Ghana*, January 12, 2014: Archive

⁴⁷Charles Lekwauwa "An Exegetical Analysis of False Prophets in Onitsha in the Light of 1 Kings 22:23-28 (B.A project, University of Port Harcourt, River State, 2017), 36

⁴⁸Onukwufor, N. & Inyima, E., 'Impacts of commercialization of the Christian religion on church growth in the contemporary Nigerian society', paper presented at the 7th annual CITRAC conference at Calvary College of Theology, Port Harcourt, 03-05 September 2018.

⁴⁹Chima Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria." *Dignity: A Journal of Dignity and Sexual Exploitation* Vol.1 issue 1, 2016, 1-18. 1

⁵⁰Chima Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria." *Dignity: A Journal of Dignity and Sexual Exploitation* Vol.1 issue 1, 2016, 1-18. 1

⁵¹Chima Agazue, "He Told Me that My Waist and Private Parts Have Been Ravaged by Demons:" Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria." *Dignity: A Journal of Dignity and Sexual Exploitation* Vol.1 issue 1, 2016, 1-18.

⁵²Loveday Chinenyeze Alighili, "The Challenges of Prayer Houses to the Contemporary Church, 29

respective families. Those branded witches or wizards are abandoned by their families, whilst some are maimed or killed in the process of exorcism by these prophets.⁵³Continuous pursuit of prophecy and miracle could result in loss of life, as people are made to believe that their loved ones are responsible for their problems. Sometimes such prophecies cause problems that could lead to manslaughter.

Self-proclaimed prophets and preachers are more concerned with the physical well-being of the individual, forsaking that of the soul. Absence of sound biblical doctrines and most importantly messages geared towards the salvation of the soul, creates a big loophole in the souls of the individuals.⁵⁴Ogunbade notes that “most teachings flooding Christian churches today are centred on materialism, self-projection, self-making and avarice. These teachings cannot produce the quality of Christians Christ had in mind when he commanded us to ‘... go and make disciples of all nations.’”⁵⁵Preaching by the self-proclaimed evangelists and pastor which focused on earthly treasures and material comfort has taken over holiness, righteousness, temperance and virtues as observed by Onah and Ugwu.⁵⁶If this continues, social vices would increase in society more than it is today. The churches that maintain and preach holy living to their members may be forced to imitate their counterparts who are making it the other way round, which will not depict the church of Christ. Christianity may be adulterated so much that there will be no difference between Christianity and indigenous religious practitioners because the level of syncretism will be high. Ejiogu, therefore, rightly observed that a disruptive moral crisis has regrettably overtaken the contemporary Nigerian society as fake prophets and preachers keep on increasing by leaps and bounds, parading millions of fake 'born again'.⁵⁷

⁵³Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020, DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418, <https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

⁵⁴Loveday Chinenyeze Alighili, “The Challenges of Prayer Houses to the Contemporary Church: a Case Study of Methodist Church Nigeria Diocese of Umuahia East” (B.Th. project Methodist Theological Institute, Umuahia, 2015), 29.

⁵⁵Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020, DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418, <https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

⁵⁶Ogunbade Adewale Olusegun, “Proliferation of churches in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and likely solutions” *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12, no.3, 2020, DOI: 10.5897/JASD2016.0418,

Oftentimes, innocent women get so harassed by these people that they even have to give up their bodies or are raped, and some of them ruin their marriages, get pregnant and lose cash after being incessantly blackmailed by these prophets.⁵⁸Gaby articulated some Nigerian popular prophets and preachers who have been sentenced to various prison terms ranging from three (3) years to thirty-four (34) years as a result of defrauding, kidnapping, rapes and sexual abuses, stealing and killing of their members for wealth, fame, popularity and authority.⁵⁹Some horrible religious practices, such as human sacrifice and ritual killing, which were previously abolished by the missionaries, are being resuscitated in Nigerian society as a result of various forms of craving for wealth, including gospel adulteration.⁶⁰

Most Nigerian youths are usually carried away by the prophecies of prosperity. This has, in a great way, triggered the desire to have wealth by any means possible, including rituals and drug paddling, to mention but a few. The dignity of labour is gradually fading out as working-class citizens depend on miracles and prophecies. Even the pastoral dignity has been generally disrespected as a result of the ways most of these self-proclaimed pastors comport themselves in society. One cannot imagine the damage that this paradigm shift has done to the church and our nation as a whole.

There are many prophets in Nigeria “whose exorcism methods include ‘anointing’ the genitalia (private parts) of women whom they allege are possessed by witchcraft, mermaids or marine spirits.”⁶¹ One incident in Nigeria occurred in Umuahia, where a prophet anointed the vagina of two daughters of a minister whose wife was attending a prayer house owned by one Prophet Godspower. Upon discovering this, the minister involved the police, who arrested both his (the minister’s) wife and the prophet.

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JASD/article-full-text-pdf/42AF4C564325>. Assessed 13/9/2022

⁵⁶Onah, N.G. & Ugwu, C.O.T., , ‘Prayer as a panacea for human problems: Nigeria Christian experience’, *Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 1,no.1, 2008,66

⁵⁷Ejiogu, A., *Morality and national development: A case for national rebirth*, (Enugu:Chuka Educational Press, 2000),

⁵⁸Charles Lekwauwa “An Exegetical Analysis of False Prophets in Onitsha in the Light of 1 Kings 22:23-28 (B.A project, University of Port Harcourt, River State, 2017), 36

⁵⁹Gabby, Popular Nigerian Self Acclaimed Pastors Or Prophets That Are In Prison For Crime

⁶⁰Uzodinma, E., 2016, *Dead bodies buried in the foundation of Enugu Church*, viewed 23 November 2018, from www.dailypost.ng/2016/01/25. Assessed 14/9/2022

⁶¹Chima Agazue, *The Role of a Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015),16-17

The large-scale loss of Christian spirituality in society is the most obvious result of this theological compromise in Nigeria. Biwul noted that based on the prevalence of the misleading theologies from the false ministers, a lot of Christians in Nigeria can hardly distinguish good from distorted biblical doctrine or differentiate between false and true Christian spirituality. Anything that is thrown at them is accepted as good. There is a general ignorance of what the scriptural standard is, and little yearning to pursue such knowledge. The worst still is that a rising number of congregations are becoming spiritual nonconformists, insisting that their minister should give them what is acceptable to them, else they will vacate the church or ministry for another.⁶²

Suggested Solutions to the Problems

Churches, genuine Christian leaders and ministers should rise from their slumber and provide spiritual solutions to the challenges of their members. They should earnestly, deliberately and committedly seek spiritual gifts and use the same in the church freely without attaching any condition to it. The activities of self-proclaimed prophets and preachers, fake churches and Christian ministries are in vogue because the genuine ones have failed to rise up to their responsibility of providing solutions to the problems of their members.

The theological education model in most of the theological institutions in Nigeria is more European in application than African. Curriculum is developed to solve societal problems through education. So there should be a rethink of the prevailing theological education model, including a reconsideration of the theological curriculum used to train ministers in Nigeria. Theological educators should develop a tailor-made curriculum to address the spiritual gap already existing in Nigeria.

It is very necessary that all the ministers in Nigeria should revert to the preaching and teaching about the second coming of Christ and holy living, and not neglect prophecy, miracles and healing. This will form the basis of a good deal of moral teachings and practices of Jesus' early followers and those of the early 1970s Christians in Nigeria.

Nigerians, especially youths, should embark on skill acquisition, not depending only on prophetic declarations or miracle for livelihood. Ministers running prayer ministries, miracle centres and private ministry should endeavour to obtain ministerial or pastoral training from a

credible Bible college or theological institution at least for knowledge's sake.

Obtaining ministerial training from a credible theological school in Nigeria by church founders should be one of the requirements for registering churches by Cooperate Affairs Commission.

Spinsters should, in addition to their personal prayers, work hard on their personality and comportment, rather than relying on miracle centres and prophets for marriage. There is no reasonable man who will consciously marry an ill-mannered girl, no matter the level of prayer said. Again, Christian couples who seem to have a delay in childbearing should, in addition to prayer, consult a medical doctor for a solution.

Any church, ministry or prayer home whose attention is only on prophecy, miracle, healing and deliverance from satanic bondage at the expense of repentance, righteousness, holy living and the second coming of Christ should be identified as false and should be avoided by Nigerians.

The government, through the Society for Human Rights, should teach citizens of Nigeria to report to the appropriate quarters whenever any minister makes an attempt to defraud them. Those who are raped, sexually molested and abused in the process of counselling, casting out demons or performing miracles should report to law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of self-proclaimed ministers has obviously done more harm than good to the Nigerian church and society. It is essentially an aberration to the Christian tradition. It runs counter to the tenets of sacredness, purity and holiness of the Christian faith and profession. The worst of its implications include the promotion of corruption, fraud, murder and other criminal activities, and the resuscitation of horrible religious practices in the Nigerian society. This does not portray the image of Christianity that has the capacity for social transformation. Therefore, it calls for a rethink and urgent collaborative action by Christian leaders, government and concerned Nigerians to sanitise the society from falsehood, heresy, exploitation and moral collapse.

⁶²Tihitshak Joel Kamsen Biwul, "A paradigm shift in pastoral ministry in twenty-first century Nigeria: An examination of the trends, causes and its implications" *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*

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