

Prophet Jonah Is not Alone: Understanding the History of Pentecostal Evangelism in Light of Contemporary Missionary Endeavours in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines reasons for the increasing neglect of rural evangelism in Nigeria. Some Pentecostal missionaries, churches and faith-based communities seem unwilling to go on evangelism missions to rural areas; thus the increasing number of churches and missionaries in the city compared to rural Nigeria. Missionary impacts have been felt in schools, hospitals and microfinance banks. Historiography reveals that missionaries before the last decade were willing to go to rural areas. Most churches and schools in rural areas were established by missionaries. However, Pentecostal missionaries are now shifting their interests from urban-rural to urban-urban evangelism. In this qualitative analysis, data were gathered from primary and secondary sources. Oral interviews and relevant academic literature form the sources of the data. Many scholars have written on the history of church missionary activities in Nigeria, but literature is scarce on reasons for the current decrease in the number of missionaries in rural areas. Why do Christian missionaries relegate rural evangelism to the background? What has been the impact on the church? Our findings show the reasons as the advent of mega-churches in Nigerian cities, financial reward from city missionary activities, resistance of some communities, punishment, increased financial burdens, the quest for popularity, intimidation, the few rural evangelists, and the lack of sufficient assistance. Missionary activities, if revived, will lead to the development of rural areas spiritually, morally, educationally, socially, and economically. The church should not restrict the spread of the gospel to specific places. Churches sending missionaries to rural areas should also provide financial support to strengthen these missionaries, as they serve as crucial links between the host church and the local community.

Keywords: history of evangelism; church planting; mission; missionary; rural areas; villages; Nigeria



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Introduction

Evangelism, carried out by Pentecostal churches in rural Nigeria, historically involved the spread of Christian teachings and beliefs to communities outside of urban centres. In Nigeria, European missionaries primarily focused their efforts on rural areas, concentrating their activities and outreach in those communities. This was a historical episode in Nigeria (Nunn 2008). When the missionaries arrived in rural areas, there were significant impacts. Ajayi Crowther (cited in Mgbemene 1996) explained:

When we arrived at Onitsha in 1857, we found the people in a state of idleness, and with its attendant evils, they were scantily and filthily clothed and in a state bordering on starvation. The introduction of cassava plants into the country is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest temporal blessings brought to them by their zealous minister. (Mgbemene 1996, 398)

Thus, rural evangelism in Nigeria was something that missionaries were willing and able to venture into. Scholars such as Ilogu (1965) explain that rural people were quick to receive Christianity because of the challenges they were going through. In the words of Adaeze and Uzochukwu (2019, 44):

Pentecostals, with their charisma, challenge the spiritual powers and forces that have kept Africans in bondage for decades by involving power encounters and prayers of deliverance, thereby loosening the hold of these malevolent spirits on Africans. Again, Africans who were often tortured by fear could not save themselves. Spiritual power was in the hands of the few specialists and spiritualists such as the diviner, the magician and sorcerer or the priest. These Africans living in fear experience Christ and those who are powerless receive charisma from on high.

Ilogu (1965) further explains that before 1900, individuals who adopted Christianity were often those who felt marginalised within traditional society, faced social disadvantages, or encountered various natural hardships.

When the European missionaries left Nigeria, they had succeeded in gaining some Christian followership; thus, those Christian converts started fellowships in the rural areas. Some of these converts started Pentecostal churches and movements. Pentecostal missionaries no doubt learned from the Western missionaries in theory and practice. In the words of Viera (2007, 257): “They took from it its conventional features, building churches and schools in the European style and imposing the habits and ethos of the Western Christian civilisation on their converts.” Ubah (1988) notes that the European missionaries trained Nigerian missionary personnel and had agreements with these local missionaries on the *modus operandi* to continue in their quest to project Christianity in rural areas. Some of these Nigerian Christian missionaries knew the various hardships that the European missionaries faced. In the words of Viera (2007, 253), the “commencement of missionary work in areas with non-urban settings was attended by many hardships and trials.” He further states that after a very short time, many missionaries fell victim at a young age to the unhealthy tropical climate, were killed, or

had to be invalidated from their homes. However, things began to change in the last two decades. The reverse became true as Pentecostal churches in rural areas began shifting to city centres and also shifting their personnel and their missionary activities to the city areas. According to Jedwab, Selhausen, and Moradi (2022), missionary activities were mostly established in healthier, more accessible, and richer places before expanding to economically less-developed places. Rural areas, which were considered economically less developed, suffered from a lack of missionary activities. In fact, some of the churches that were established by the European missionaries were moved to city centres.

There are Pentecostal churches with large congregations that began as fellowship centres in rural areas. These churches, which also pride themselves on being one faith-based organisation or another, have succeeded in sending missionaries to developed areas, neglecting the rural areas. Thus, missions are focused mostly on cities, probably because rural dwellers have little or no hope for advancement in this life (Challenge 2017). In fact, there is a mass movement of Nigerian-penetrating missionaries to developing countries who are sponsored by their churches. One begins to wonder about the reason for this diversion. The expectation was that these churches or faith-based organisations would have developed a model for going back to rural areas and re-evangelising the people, which may include Bible evangelisation and social action evangelism.

Some scholars have written on the history of church missionary activities in Nigeria (Adamolekun 2012; Adedeji 1971; Ayandele 1966; Isiani, Okonkwo and Obi-Ani 2021), but finding literature on reasons for the current rejection of rural evangelism by Pentecostal churches and their missionaries is problematic. It is on this basis that this study examines the reasons why Nigerian Christian missionaries and churches reject rural evangelism. Contemporary developments show that Pentecostal missionaries in Nigeria are not willing to go to rural areas for evangelism activities or to engage in welfarism. This challenge is similar to what happened during the time of Prophet Jonah, who refused to engage in missionary activities in Nineveh but ran away to the city, but God still pursued him to that place. Thus, why do Christian missionaries relegate rural evangelism to the background? What has been the impact so far on the church in general?

Methodology

This is a qualitative analysis using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis involves examining and interpreting the stories of a given set of people (Hassan 2024), with evidence from real-world life situations (Bolívar 2002). Data were gathered from oral interviews and relevant academic literature. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit responses from the informants.

Table 1: List of informants

	Names	Status	Centre	Faith
1.	Bernard	Missionary	Rural	Pentecostal
2.	Timothy	Missionary	Urban	Pentecostal
3.	Okafor	Missionary	Rural	Pentecostal
4.	Elizabeth	Missionary	Rural	Pentecostal
5.	Robert	Traditional worshipper	Rural	Pentecostal
6.	Cletus	Missionary	Urban	Pentecostal
7.	Princess	Wife of missionary	Rural	Pentecostal
8.	Philip	Lay person	Rural	Pentecostal
9.	Christopher	Lay person	Rural	Pentecostal
10.	Ifeanyi	Missionary	Rural	Pentecostal
11.	Joshua	Lay person	Rural	Pentecostal
12.	Esther	Lay person	Rural	Pentecostal
13.	Alfred	Layperson	Urban	Pentecostal
14.	Caroline	Layperson	Rural	Pentecostal
15.	Anyanwu	Layperson	Rural	Pentecostal
16.	Ade	Layperson	Rural	Pentecostal

Source: Author's compilation

The general aim of the study is to analyse the reasons why contemporary Nigerian Pentecostal missionaries refuse to go to rural areas for missionary activities. First, this study gives an analysis of Prophet Jonah's refusal to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. Second, it sketches Pentecostal evangelism historiography in Africa, and third, it explores why missionaries refuse to engage in rural evangelism.

Rural Evangelism of Prophet Jonah

The divine commission was given by Jesus to the disciples in all the synoptic gospels. It was a command for the disciples to go to the villages, spreading the gospel of salvation and deliverance from devils and demons. However, even before the time of Jonah, Yahweh has also been bringing people to do his will. The prophets in the Old Testament usually served as oracles, relaying the mind of God to the people. Scott (1948) sees the prophets as witnesses. Scott says: "The God we profess to believe in and to serve has made himself known through many witnesses across the years and centuries." Coggins (1987) notes that the prophets were more involved in the moral teachings that God had given them. One such prophet is Prophet Jonah.

The book of Jonah was probably written by Prophet Jonah. The prophet was told by God to go to Nineveh for missionary activities. According to God, the people were ignorant of their wrongdoing; hence, Yahweh's decision to send the prophet to serve as a rescue for them. Instead of Jonah going for this missionary work, he rejected God's instructions and decided to go to the city of Tarshish. It brought about the conflict God had with Jonah. God was worried about Jonah, his servant, starting with the directive to go to Nineveh (Room n.d.). Some scholars believe that Nineveh was the capital of

Assyria, and historical records show that Assyria was the nation that conquered northern Israel, which Jonah, an Israelite, was very aware of. It was on this premise that Levine (1984) avers that Jonah represents angry Hebrews. Thus, it is apparent that the plot of Jonah's narrative centres on a conflict between Jonah and God and conveys a message of salvation, not only for the chosen people of Israel, but also for Israel's enemies (Abegg 1999). God was not happy with Jonah. God sent a mighty wind that came upon the transport means that Jonah used. The ship was about to sink based on the anger of God. After some divination, Jonah was discovered to be the cause of the ship's tendency to sink. Immediately, he was thrown off the ship.

Evangelism Historiography in Nigeria

Literature has revealed the negative and positive marks that early Christian missionary activities brought. In fact, in the words of Frank (2022), it brought both positive and negative consequences. Christian missionaries made several attempts to enter Nigeria. However, Isichei (1995) notes that the second attempt by Christian missionaries in Nigeria (from roughly 1841 to 1914, when Protestant missionaries from Britain arrived with the goal of converting Africa to Christianity) was more successful. The exploration of the Niger River (1830–1857), which aimed to stop the slave trade and make the interior of Africa accessible to trade and Christianity, is noteworthy in this context. The Niger Expedition, which included Samuel Ajayi Crowther, subsequently the first African Anglican bishop, emancipated slaves and educated Christians, laying the groundwork for the Christianisation of cities along the Niger and in Igboland (Nengel and Wogu 2021). According to historical accounts, Christian missionary activities began in West Africa in the 19th century and were carried out by Protestant churches in Europe and America, including the Baptist Mission, the Basel Mission, the Glasgow Mission, and later the Roman Catholic Mission. These churches included the London Baptist Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and the Baptist Mission. The first fruitful Christian evangelisation in West Africa took place in the slave colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia, from which it spread to neighbouring nations such as Nigeria, Togo, Gambia, and the Gold Coast (Frank 2022).

Contrary to what the missionary theorists and philosophers of the 19th century advocated, Christian missionary endeavour was crucial to the Westernisation of Africa. Despite this, the invasion of Western cultural standards, ways of life and beliefs brusquely tore apart African cultures (Viera 2007, 258). Positively, a significant portion of the original Africans had their rationalism replaced by Christianity. Hence, Oduyoye (1978, 264) notes:

In spite of their pietistic theology, the early missionaries came from a culture that kept only one eye fixed on heaven, while the other was focused quite firmly on the earth. The advanced technology and high standard of living that were beginning to emerge as beneficial effects of the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom were regarded as benefits that God bestowed upon his Christian people. Therefore, in the first human

relations between Britain and Nigeria, the sharp distinction between mission and trade was not strictly observed.

For instance, in traditional Igbo culture, it is required for a “real” man to wed two or more wives. The women of the clan are aware of this and have accepted this ritual; in some cases, the first wife can even suggest to her husband that he look for a younger wife. The younger wives are also expected to respect the first wife. These women, along with their husbands, live together in peace and help each other with taking care of the children and other household chores. However, the White missionaries were against polygamous marriages, based on some scriptures (for example, Malachi 2:16) found in the New Testament that forbid Christians against such an act (Kenalemang 2013, 8).

The History of Pentecostal Evangelism in Nigeria

The history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is characterised by a dynamic blend of local and global influences, marked by significant growth and transformation over the years. Pentecostalism found its roots in Nigeria in the early 20th century through the efforts of both indigenous leaders and foreign missionaries. One notable figure is Joseph Babalola, who is often credited with sparking the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria. According to Ogungbile and Akinade (2010), there were prophetic and evangelistic activities carried out by Joseph Ayo Babalola on faith healing that stimulated growth and change until the early 1960s. He laid the foundation for indigenous Pentecostal leaders, emphasising divine healing and prophetic gifts such as visions, dreams, and discernment as remedies to personal problems confronting Nigerians at that time. Babalola (1988), influenced by his own spiritual experiences and encounters with the Pentecostal movement in the United States, began spreading the Pentecostal message throughout Nigeria in the 1920s.

Throughout the mid-20th century, Pentecostalism in Nigeria continued to expand and diversify. Indigenous leaders emerged, establishing their own Pentecostal churches and ministries. These leaders often emphasised spiritual gifts, divine healing, and deliverance, attracting a growing number of followers. In numerous Pentecostal congregations, the practice of deliverance varies, and despite personal reservations regarding certain methods employed, it is undeniable that the ministry of deliverance addresses the genuine existential needs and fears of individuals in a culturally comprehensible manner, thus providing psychological satisfaction (Daneel 1990, 220). As expressed by Sundkler (1976, 318–319), deliverance emancipated Africans from fear, witchcraft, and the influence of darkness, granting them liberation from reliance on European manifestations of grace and favour and encouraging the pursuit of loftier ideals and heightened sensitivity.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the charismatic movement swept through Nigeria, bringing a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit and spiritual experiences to various Christian denominations. This movement further fuelled the growth of Pentecostalism, blurring the lines between traditional Pentecostal churches and other Christian denominations.

Pentecostalism gradually gained mainstream acceptance and influence within Nigerian society. Pentecostal churches grew in size and number, attracting followers from various social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The emphasis on prosperity theology helped to promote the membership of Pentecostal churches. The end of the 20th century saw the rise and flourishing of neo-Pentecostal churches, mostly urban-centred mega-sized churches employing innovative appropriations of modern, sophisticated media technologies to market themselves (Nel 2019).

Impacts of Early Pentecostal Missionary Activities in Nigeria

The impact of early Pentecostal missionary activities cannot be overemphasised. They include the following spheres:

Jungle Justice

The issue of jungle justice involves the practice of lynching suspected offenders by angry community members. Onyekwere (2023) calls it mob lynching or trial by ordeal. The coming of Pentecostal missionaries to Nigeria helped curb mob action. According to Esther (personal communication 2023), “when the Pentecostal church came into our village, they started preaching to the youth not to take anyone’s life. They told the youth the spiritual and legal implications of engaging in jungle justice.” The missionaries preached against it, and this really helped in saving lives and preventing the destruction of properties.

Killing of Twins

The killing of twins was a phenomenon that was much practised in Calabar and other communities. Many innocent twin children were killed, and their families were left in permanent grief. In the words of Caroline (personal communication 2024):

In some communities, women will hide when they give birth to twins; some of them used to hide their twins in the Pentecostal church in the village. The church will hide the mother and twins until the children are strong enough to walk on their own.

The Pentecostal missionaries, apart from hiding those who gave birth to twins, started to preach against it. This encouraged love and respect among the people. While the usual tradition of killing twins persisted, their parents and families were also treated as outcasts. Sometimes, it got so bad that some mothers of the “forbidden twins” were banished from the land without any means of support (Ade 2021). In addition to the regular practice of killing twins, their families were also treated as outcasts. However, Alfred (personal communication 2024) noted that the Pentecostal missionaries took these outcasts and those who were exiled from their communities into their sanctuary for safety.

Building of Schools

The Pentecostal missionaries succeeded in building schools in villages where they went to school. These schools were used to educate boys and girls, irrespective of gender. Before their arrival, the girls were groomed in the informal education of sweeping the house, cooking food, and bearing children. In the words of Rafiu (2021, 1):

Noble were the exertions, labour and sacrifice that went into giving Nigeria foundational materials for human capital development, which provided the building blocks for our social and economic development, cultivation of refinement and civilization.

Anyanwu (personal communication 2023) narrated that the Pentecostal churches built schools that either took lower fees compared to private schools or charged no school fees at all. It was on this premise that Ozigi and Ocho (1981, 33–35) note that even though the Christian missionaries' major objectives in establishing schools were the propagation of Christianity, their greatest legacy was their educational work and the development of indigenous languages into writing. These Pentecostal schools laid the foundations for rural growth and development. It was the missionaries who provided Christianity and education, which gave Africans access to the ideas and ideologies of Western societies (Mills n.d.). The Pentecostal missionary activities in Nigeria have brought about a number of positive achievements, especially their educational programmes, which helped to promote the consciousness of a shared identity. This also helped to train many people who championed the cause of nationalism and constituted a virile leadership for the young nation at independence (Adeyinka 2022).

Health Institutions

The Pentecostal missionaries built hospitals, pharmacies and hospitals. The health centres help take care of sick and pregnant women. Ade (personal communication 2023) explains that these health institutions serve as a place of quarantine for the homeless and for Pentecostal missionaries. The equipment in those medical centres was brought in and bought by those hospitals. Adetiba and Msindo (2022) opine that chiefs were also expected to encourage their subjects to patronise Western medicine and to control unregistered indigenous healers. This was to ensure that the drugs the people were to take were certified by the missionaries, who were health professionals. By 1927, there were three missionary hospitals and about 10 dispensaries in south-western Nigeria (NAI 1927). The foundation of American and European civilisation is centred on their faith in Christ (Nwadiakor 2013, 189).

Why Nigerian Pentecostal Missionaries and Churches Pay Less Attention to Rural Evangelism

Rural evangelism is becoming a thing of the past in Nigeria. Unfortunately, many missionaries have reasons for rejecting rural evangelism. Below are some of the reasons.

Advent of Mega Pentecostal Churches in Nigerian Cities

Most of the big Pentecostal churches are located in predominantly urban areas in Nigeria. Most of the city areas are the state capitals of the various states in Nigeria. In the view of Bernard (personal communication 2023), “Nigerian Pentecostal missionaries find it easier going from one urban centre to another urban centre because most big men live in urban centres and attend these mega-churches.” According to Simwa (2023), these mega Pentecostal churches include Redeem Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church, Mountain of Fire, the Apostolic Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, Dunamis International Gospel Centre, Doctor Jesus City, Christ Embassy, Commonwealth of Zion Assembly, and The Lord’s Chosen Charismatic Revival Movement. Also, there has been an increase in the number of people migrating from rural areas to urban areas. This makes the population concentrated in urban areas. In the view of Timothy (personal communication 2023):

If you see very well, people are moving from villages to cities in search of a better life. Also, more of them are doing better jobs. Those who are in the village do not really have anything good to do; hence, Pentecostal missionaries like sending their people to urban areas.

This shows that some people are migrating to urban centres in Nigeria due to the availability of essential services such as good jobs, good schools, better opportunities, good drinking water, and better housing and accommodation facilities, among others. It is necessary to state that improvements in household economic status and migration are positively correlated. People who move from rural to urban areas sometimes discover greater career prospects in their new cities, which also pay higher salaries than those in their original communities (Qiu, Yang, and Zhang 2011). Also, Nigeria’s economy is based on oil revenue. On a month-to-month basis, money from oil is shared between the federal government and the states. This has had the implication of limiting the financial and other resources available to rural areas, even though the bulk of the oil comes from rural areas. This causes people to migrate from rural to urban areas. This also means the development of the city and the abandonment of rural areas. According to Zabbey, Giadom, and Babatunde (2019), net migration is a result of Nigeria’s lack of national and regional policies to encourage “rural pull.”

Financial Reward from City Missionary Activities

There are indications that Pentecostal missionaries are no longer interested in the impact they could make in rural areas, but in the financial gains they could make from their host church and the population they are going to educate. Okafor (personal communication 2023) states that:

Missionary work is seen as an avenue to amass wealth. Some Pentecostal churches are also not interested in sending missionaries to rural areas because they are afraid of establishing churches in these areas. All they care about is the financial returns they can make.

This is in line with the assertion of CGAP (2003) that the majority of the world's poor live in rural areas and also lack access to the range of financial services they need. The rural areas are known to be poor financially. This is one reason why churches and faith-based communities no longer feel okay sending their missionaries to villages and other underdeveloped towns. Even though Uroko (2021) notes that God has a special concern for the poor and that all are called to provide for the poor and the needy, Irekamba (2016) notes that "tithes that come to the parish are used for church maintenance." Thus, church maintenance is more important than the welfare of the people. This is because they consider these rural areas unprofitable financially. Moreso, contemporary Nigerian missionaries usually have an interest in establishing a church in the area. So, when they see that the tithes and offerings in that particular area will not be sufficient for them to live a flamboyant life, they refuse to go there or continue their mission there.

Resistance in some Communities

Some of the interviewees mentioned that some rural communities are sometimes hostile to the missionaries. According to Elizabeth (personal communication 2023), "some of the Pentecostal missionaries that have attempted missionary work in some communities were chased away. The youth usually say that Christianity wants to take away their culture from them and that they will not allow it." Some Pentecostal missionaries have actually made attempts aimed at the rural areas of Nigeria. Some churches have also gone as far as establishing schools in some of these villages. However, some of the villagers chase away some of the missionaries for fear of those missionaries changing their customs and traditions. Regarding the reason for this hostile approach to missionaries, Robert (personal communication 2023) lamented thus:

When these Pentecostal missionaries come, they will condemn everything that is in our traditional religion. They preach against our ancestors. Unfortunately, it is our traditional religion that sustains us spiritually. If we throw it away, how do we survive the challenges of this life?

According to Adekola and Egbo (2016, 120), the traditions and customs of a people encompass their belief system, settlement pattern, greetings, language, artistic heritage, and behaviour pattern. Some of the villagers resist any attempt by missionaries to change their traditional beliefs, which they believe the church has come to. This tends to have prevented other missionaries from going to the villages.

Punishment

Some of the informants mentioned that if a Pentecostal church wants to punish a person, he is sent to rural areas. Cletus (personal communication 2023) lamented thus:

When a superintendent tells you what to do, and you resist, he will write a letter so that you can be reposted to another place, mainly a village. There are some pastors who were posted to the villages because their superintendent perceived them as threats to their church government.

Some Nigerian Pentecostal missionaries usually see their posting to villages as a form of punishment. Most Pentecostal missionaries feel comfortable going to serve in the city rather than in the village. For them, when they are posted to the village, it may be a form of chastisement against them because of their behaviour. According to Princess (personal communication 2023), “my husband was sent on missionary work to a village, while his close friend was sent to the city. We inquired and discovered that it was because my husband was always challenging the bad policies of our superintendent.” There have also been cases where leaders of churches sent some missionaries to villages to serve based on certain disagreements they had with the person. Sometimes, these Pentecostal missionaries may be sent to these villages with little or no financial or material assistance.

Increased Financial Burdens

There are reports that rural dwellers have a poor congregation that needs help, which scares churches and faith-based communities. In the words of Philip (personal communication 2024):

When you go on missionary work in rural areas, they will bring their problems to you. Some are in need of food. Others are in need of clothes. Some are in need of a house. So, the need is great, and this tends to scare missionaries from engaging in this kind of activity.

This is in line with the assertion of Cox (1998) that the rural population has a greater proportion of people with higher socioeconomic wants and those with lower pay than the urban population. Thus, Pentecostal churches feel that going to rural areas adds to the material and financial burden of the church. For these churches, when they go to the villages to evangelise, and those villages begin to join their newly formed church, they become liabilities to the church because the church will have the burden of catering for their bills. There have been cases where Pentecostal churches and faith-based organisations spent millions of naira to buy evangelistic instruments, build expensive churches in rural areas, and find it difficult to raise the money they have spent doing some of these things. Most often, the churches in the cities end up paying the money used to buy the equipment and build the edifice.

Quest for Popularity

Some Pentecostal missionaries in Nigeria feel that going into missionary activity in rural areas does not give them the opportunity to be popular. In the words of Christopher (personal communication 2013):

When you are sent to a rural area for evangelism, they will forget that you need good things. Sometimes, you do not even have a good house to live in. This is the reason that most missionaries prefer to go to the city where they will be known and also have the opportunity to meet with well-to-do members of society.

For this set of Pentecostal missionaries, when they are sent to the cities, they have access to social media, other technological services, and gazettes that broadcast their activities. With social media, all their preaching, miracles, and philanthropic activities will be made public, and people will be looking for them and blessing them with more financial and material benefits.

Intimidation

Nigerian Pentecostal missionaries sent to villages and rural areas usually feel less important compared to missionaries sent to cities. According to Ifeanyi (personal communication 2023):

Some of the missionaries in the cities also have a subtle and degrading way they treat missionaries sent to the villages. When missionaries arrive at their headquarters to give reports of the mission field, the regard given to the city missionaries seems better than the regard given to the village missionaries.

This tends to dissuade and discourage missionaries from venturing into rural evangelism. Joshua (personal communication 2023) further attested that the discouragement comes from the fact that city missionaries return with better cars and cash, while most often, the rural evangelists return with little or nothing.

The Few Rural Evangelists Lack Sufficient Assistance

Some of the informants reported that Pentecostal missionaries sent to villages and other interior areas were not given adequate financial and material support. Rose (personal communication 2023) reported that “sometimes the missionary is told that ‘God will provide for him.’ The missionary goes with faith and suffers.” Some of these missionaries even die from starvation or other health challenges because, even when they fall sick, no one cares for them. This has discouraged rural evangelists from continuing with their work in rural areas. More financial assistance and consideration are given to missionaries sent to the city compared to those sent to rural areas.

Recommendations

The following suggestions may help to reduce the level of rejection of rural evangelism by Pentecostal missionaries in Nigeria:

1. The decision to preach the gospel is a divine command. Pentecostal churches should not segregate areas for the spreading of the gospel based on place.
2. There is also a need for Pentecostal churches that are sending missionaries to rural areas to strengthen the missionaries financially because it is these local missionaries that serve as a bridge between the host church and the neighbourhood. They can accomplish this by raising money to support evangelists and missionaries like these.
3. Pentecostal churches that are keen on rural evangelism should actively look for possibilities to help the community’s practical needs. This may entail providing

food, clothing, healthcare, and other essentials to rural dwellers who are willing to receive the gospel.

4. Pentecostal missionaries should be careful with communities' religious and cultural practices and avoid imposing church doctrine and beliefs on the audience. They should be more involved in open, respectful dialogue about faith and spirituality.
5. Pentecostal missionaries should also be able to sensitise and train the missionaries they are sending to rural areas that their posting is not punishment but a call to fulfil the great commission.

Conclusion

This article looked at the factors contributing to rural evangelism's growing neglect, which used to be one of the fundamental pillars of Nigerian Pentecostal churches. It examined the phenomenon of Old Testament missionary work from the point of view of the prophet Jonah. It presented a historiography of evangelism in Nigeria. It also analysed the impacts of early missionary activities in Nigeria, such as jungle justice, the killing of twins, the building of schools, and the erecting of health institutions. It was discovered that the reasons why Pentecostal missionaries refuse to promote rural missionary activities include the advent of mega-churches in Nigerian cities, the financial reward from city missionary activities, the resistance of some communities, punishment, increased financial burdens, the quest for popularity, intimidation, and the fact that the few rural evangelists lack sufficient assistance. As expected, the impacts have been negative, as it has led to an increase in the number of commercialised Pentecostal churches and an increase in crime rates in villages due to the famine in the gospel of Jesus Christ's redemption of man. Pentecostal missionary activities, if revived, will lead to the development of rural areas spiritually, morally, educationally, socially, and economically. Religious leaders' greedy shift in attention from the spiritual to the earthly, from soul salvation to the economic advancement of both themselves and their target audiences, is what led to the demise of rural evangelism.

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