

# The Paradox of Piety: Religiosity, Internal Conflict, and the Pentecostal Denomination's Experience in Rivers State, Nigeria.

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DOI: [10.56201/jpslr.vol.11.no4.2025.pg1.15](https://doi.org/10.56201/jpslr.vol.11.no4.2025.pg1.15)

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## Abstract:

*This study explores the paradoxical relationship between religiosity and internal conflict within Pentecostal denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria. Conflicts within Pentecostal churches emerges from a variety of sources. Divergent perspectives, competing interests, and emotional attachments can lead to disagreements, disputes, and emotional tensions. Differences in biblical interpretation, worship styles, and church governance can create divisions. Leadership struggles, power dynamics, and succession disputes can also fuel conflicts. Furthermore, financial mismanagement, disagreements over giving, and exploitation by church leaders can contribute to tensions. Additionally, social and cultural factors such as ethnic tensions, class differences, and economic disparities can also play a role in creating conflict within these faith communities. Understanding these complexities can help in navigating the challenges that arise within Pentecostal churches. Given the above, the study aims at investigating how the intensity of religious beliefs and practices contributes to the emergence and escalation of internal conflicts within Pentecostal churches. The study adopted a triangulation methods of data gathering techniques such as surveys and in-depth interviews with church leaders and members. The findings reveal that while religiosity can foster a sense of community and shared values, it can also create an environment conducive to conflict, particularly when religious beliefs are used to justify power struggles and personal interests. The study highlights the need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms and leadership accountability within Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The study recommends amongst others for the establishment of robust conflict resolution mechanisms within Pentecostal churches to mitigate internal conflicts and promote peaceful resolution*

**Keywords:** *religiosity, internal conflict, Pentecostal churches, Nigeria, church leadership, conflict resolution.*

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## Introduction

Religiosity is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions, including cognitive, affective, behavioural, and identity aspects (Hill and Hood, 1999). The human-religion dynamic has been a profound and enduring phenomenon, transcending cultural, civilizational, and temporal boundaries (Durkheim, 1912). Religion has played a pivotal role in shaping human history, influencing thought patterns, behavioral norms, and cultural values (Weber, 1922).

Human engagement with religion is diverse, ranging from devout commitment to casual affiliation (Stark and Finke, 2000). Some individuals embrace spirituality without formal religious affiliation, while others reject religious beliefs altogether (Hout and Fischer, 2002). As Marx (1843) noted,

religion has a profound impact on human society, shaping values, norms, and institutions. Religion has inspired artistic expression, architectural marvels, and literary masterpieces, reflecting its profound influence on human culture (Eliade, 1957). Moreover, religion has played a significant role in moral development, guiding individuals toward compassion, justice, and righteousness (Gilligan, 1982). During times of crisis, religion has provided solace, offering hope and resilience (Pargament, 1997).

Despite existing challenges and criticisms, the profound impact of religion on human society remains unequivocal. As individuals navigate life's complexities, religion continues to play a pivotal role in guiding, comforting, and inspiring people (Pargament, 1997). Research has demonstrated that religiosity can have a dual effect on internal conflicts, both alleviating and exacerbating them (Kalu, 2008). Religion provides a conceptual framework for understanding the world, offering insights into fundamental questions about existence, purpose, and morality (Geertz, 1973). Religion furnishes a sense of belonging, identity, and community, connecting individuals to a larger collective and transcendent reality (Durkheim, 1912). Through various rituals, practices, and sacred texts, religion cultivates spiritual growth, emotional comfort, and psychological well-being (Hill and Hood, 1999). This multifaceted role of religion underscores its enduring significance in human society.

Recently, the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria has experienced remarkable growth and expansion globally, with an estimated 500 million adherents worldwide (Johnson, 2023). This phenomenon has garnered significant attention from theologians, particularly those specializing in missiology, sparking extensive research and analysis into its rapid expansion and far-reaching impact. Pentecostal churches have evolved into megachurches, characterized by large congregations, with some attracting over 2,000 attendees weekly. While megachurches are not a new phenomenon, researchers largely regard them as a recent development (Thumma and Travis, 2007). Miller (2023) observed that these large churches have developed innovative worship styles, appealing to non-churchgoers and eschewing traditional views on worship. The "seeker-friendly" approach aims to create a non-threatening environment, often avoiding labels like "Charismatic," "Evangelical," "Fundamentalist," or "Pentecostal" (Sargeant, 2000).

In an effort to attract a broader demographic, some Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and beyond have adopted a more relaxed, "come as you are" approach. This shift is evident in the increasingly informal dress code, with women wearing pants, adornments, and jewelry, and attending church services without traditional head coverings. This departure from traditional Pentecostal norms has contributed to a decline in attendance and economic influence among some denominations, as they struggle to adapt to changing societal values (Anderson, 2013). The emergence of new, more flexible Pentecostal churches has led to a shift in the religious landscape, with some traditional denominations experiencing a decline in membership and influence (Kalu, 2008). This phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria, as similar trends have been observed in other parts of the world (Corten and Marshall-Fratani, 2001).

Despite the robust growth and doctrines of Pentecostal churches, they are not exempt from internal conflicts, which are an inherent aspect of human existence (Ogele, 2023). Conflicts arise naturally from divergent perspectives, competing interests, and emotional attachments, manifesting as disagreements, disputes, and emotional tensions (Burr, 2015). The convergence of differing opinions, beliefs, and loyalties creates a fertile ground for conflict (Galtung, 1996). Also, internal conflicts within Pentecostal churches can stem from various sources, including differences in scriptural interpretation, disagreements over charismatic gifts such as glossolalia (Adeboye, 2023; Synan, 2023), variations in worship styles, conflicts over church governance and leadership, power

struggles between pastors and church elders, succession disputes, authoritarian leadership styles, and lack of transparency and accountability (Kalu, 2023a). Furthermore, conflicts can arise from mismanagement of church funds, disagreements over tithing and offerings, financial exploitation by church leaders, competition for resources and funding, ethnic and tribal tensions, issues related to social class and economic status (Ojo, 2023), and other factors.

The phenomenon of pastors establishing their own churches after leaving their former affiliations can be attributed to various factors, including personal gain, greed, and materialism (Olukoya, 2013). Disagreements over financial practices often serve as a catalyst for this decision. Specifically, when pastors are prohibited from charging members for prayer services, requiring payment for counseling sessions, or selling forms for spiritual guidance, they may choose to establish their own churches to pursue exploitative financial practices (Gifford, 2009). Hence, Wariboko (2018) observed that some prosperity gospel preachers prioritize wealth accumulation over the well-being of their congregations, often using manipulative tactics to extract financial resources. This phenomenon has led to the commodification of Pentecostalism, where religious practices are reduced to market-driven transactions (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). The emphasis on material prosperity has created a culture of exploitation, where the poor are further marginalized and the wealthy are legitimized in their pursuit of power and influence (Meyer, 2010). Given the above, the study interrogates the correlation between religiosity and internal conflict inherent in Pentecostal churches, examined how religiosity influence internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Religiosity**

Religiosity refers to the degree of commitment, devotion, and adherence to religious beliefs, practices, and values. It encompasses various dimensions. It is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that integrates topics from social sciences, including peace studies, psychology, and sociology of religion. Religiosity can be understood as the degree of commitment, devotion, and involvement in religious practices and beliefs (Hill et al., 2000). This definition acknowledges the diverse ways individuals express their religiosity. Modern religiosity is characterized by a focus on personal experience and subjective spirituality, rather than traditional religious practices (James, 1902). It is a vital aspect of human identity, influencing individuals' values, attitudes, and behaviors (Glock, 1962). Research has identified several key dimensions of religiosity, including belief, practice, experience, knowledge, community, moral, and spiritual (Stark and Finke, 2000). Various factors influence religiosity in daily activities, including upbringing and family background, cultural and social context, life events and experiences, psychological factors, and community involvement (Pargament, 1997). Understanding these factors is essential for grasping the complex and multifaceted nature of religiosity.

### **Internal Conflict**

The concept of conflict originates from the Latin term "conflictus," denoting collision or clash. Conflict arises when two or more parties perceive their interests as incompatible and take action based on this perception. Given its enduring nature, conflict has been an inherent aspect of human experience throughout history (Kriesberg, 2023). Conflicts emerge from diverse sources, including misinformation, deep-seated biases, differing perspectives on justice, cultural and socio-economic disparities, and personal convictions (Markosyan, 2024). These factors contribute to complex conflicts spanning racial, ethnic, religious, ideological, cultural, economic, political, and social

domains (Ogele, 2023). The concept of conflict has been interpreted differently by scholars and experts, often in response to specific historical events or contexts. Conflict arises when individuals, groups, organizations, or nations clash due to incompatible objectives or differing approaches to achieving shared goals, leading to disharmony, hostility, or antagonism. Internal conflict is a pervasive and complex phenomenon affecting individuals, communities, and nations worldwide. It typically arises from substantive disagreements or emotional antagonisms, generating friction among organizational members (Amason, 2023). According to recent research, internal conflict encompasses various forms of opposition, disagreement, and friction between two or more parties (Elegbe, 2024).

### **Pentecostal Church**

Pentecostalism is a diverse and dynamic movement, encompassing various churches and denominations, rather than a single unified church (Kalu, 2023b). It also manifests as a renewal or revival force within existing denominations, fostering spiritual revitalization and growth. At its core, Pentecostalism is a Christian renewal movement emphasizing direct personal experience of God through salvation and Holy Spirit baptism (Synan, 2023).

The term "Pentecostal" originates from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, commemorating the Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus' followers (Acts 2) (Adeboye, 2024). Identifying Pentecostal churches can be challenging, as many denominations do not explicitly include the term "Pentecostal" in their names. Instead, they often emphasize characteristics such as Spirit-baptism, charismatic worship, and emphasis on spiritual gifts (Anderson, 2023). The movement's name originates from the biblical account of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), where the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples, empowering them to speak in multiple languages (Nwosu, 2025). This event symbolizes the Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's transformative power and presence in believers' lives. Pentecostals hold that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by the tangible evidence of speaking in tongues, mirroring the biblical account in Acts 2:1-4 (Elegbe, 2024).

### **Theoretical underpinning**

This study employed the Managerial Efficiency Theory as its theoretical framework. The theory, developed by Henri Fayol in 1916, posits that managerial efficiency is achieved when a manager optimizes output with minimal input (Fayol, 1916). Fayol identified five essential management functions: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling (Fayol, 1916). He also outlined 14 principles of management, including division of work, authority and responsibility, discipline, and unity of command (Fayol, 1916). Fayol's theory emphasizes the importance of planning, organization, and control in achieving managerial efficiency (Akpore, 2023). Effective management involves planning and organizing work, as well as controlling the execution of plans to ensure goal achievement (Fayol, 1916). The Managerial Efficiency Theory has significantly influenced management practice and theory, with many organizations adopting Fayol's principles to improve efficiency and productivity (Wren, 1994; Nwosu, 2024).

By applying the Managerial Efficiency Theory to internal conflicts in Pentecostal churches, it becomes apparent that mismanagement and corruption are significant contributing factors (Ojo, 2023). The theory suggests that church crises often result from the misuse and corruption of church resources, such as embezzlement of church funds, leading to poverty and violent conflicts (Elegbe, 2024). Furthermore, the theory implies that church leadership, under certain stimuli or

environments, may infringe upon the rights of others, fostering emotions and tensions that encourage conflict (Kalu, 2023). In essence, managerial efficiency involves allocating resources, both material and non-material, to achieve common interests (Adeboye, 2024). However, inefficiencies in resource allocation can lead to injustice, inequity, and marginalization, ultimately culminating in conflict and secession (Nwosu, 2025).

### Methodology

The study adopted the triangulation of data sources which allows researchers to focus on the use of primary and secondary data to examine or investigate a particular phenomenon. The data collected for this study was through 292 questionnaires and textual documents. The questionnaires were structured and administered to respondents on the following arrangements such as the nexus between religiosity, internal conflict, and Pentecostal denomination; and examined how religiosity influence internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The study relied on secondary data for its content analysis using published and unpublished books, journals, newspapers, internet sources, among others.

### Data Presentation

This part presents and analyses the outcomes of the questionnaire. Out of a total number of 292 questionnaires that was distributed, 280 were retrieved, 30 were roughly handled, torn and illegible to read making it difficult to ascertain responses while 250 were properly filled by the respondents and this forms the basis of our analysis.

**Table 4.1: Social and Demographic Background of all Respondents**

Variables	Categories	Frequency (F)	Percentages (%)
Age bracket	18 - 35	102	41
	36 – 55	125	50
	56 - Above	23	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Gender distribution	Male	140	56
	Female	110	44
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Educational qualifications	FSLC	10	4
	SSCE/ND/NCE	60	24
	HND/BA/B.Sc/PGD	130	52
	MBA/MPA/M.Sc/Ph.D	50	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Category of respondents	Pastors	50	20
	Ministers	45	18
	Church workers	80	32
	Public	75	30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, 2025.



Item 1 of table 4.1 above shows that 102 respondents representing 41% are within the age bracket of 18-35 years: 125(50%) are within the age bracket of 36-55 years; 23 representing 9% fall in the age bracket of 56 years and above. The study has a productive number of respondents within the age brackets of 18-35 and 36-55 years in terms of age and years of experience. This indicates that they are all adults who understand the issues under study. Their responses are highly regarded.

Item 2 of the table also shows that 140 questionnaires representing 56% were administered to male while 110 questionnaires with 44% were female. This demographic statistics reveals that the staff of the respondents who attended to the questionnaires are mainly males. Notwithstanding, responses from both genders are analysed for a valid judgement.

Item 3 of the table above depicts that 4% of the respondents have FSLC; 60(24%) have SSCE/ND/NCE; 130(52%) respondents possess HND/BA/B.SC/PGD while 50 respondents representing 20% are holders of MBA/MPA/M.SC/Ph.D. This shows that the respondents are dominated by different levels of graduates with various certificate holders. This suggests that the respondents have good knowledge about religiosity and internal conflict in Pentecostal churches.

The table also shows that 50 (20%) of the respondents are pastors, 45 (18%) of the respondents are ministers, 80 respondents representing 32% are church workers while 75 (30%) are the public.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

**Table 4.2: The correlation between religiosity and internal conflict in Nigeria.**

Questionnaires		Gender	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Total
Religion enhances proliferation and duplication of churches in Pentecostalism.		Male	20 (8%)	15(6%)	70(28%)	35(14%)	140(56%)
		Female	10 (4%)	5 (2%)	60 (24%)	35(14%)	110(44%)
		Total	30(12%)	20 (8%)	130(52%)	70(28%)	250(100%)
Poor religious sermon has caused internal conflict in Pentecostal churches.		Male	60(24%)	50 (20%)	25 (10%)	5 (2%)	140(56%)
		Female	35 (14%)	35 (14%)	25(10%)	15 (6%)	110(44%)
		Total	95(38%)	85(34%)	50(20%)	20(8%)	250(100%)
Religiosity has increased the level of poverty and internal conflict among members in Pentecostal churches.		Male	70 (28%)	30 (12%)	30 (12%)	10 (4%)	140(56%)
		Female	55 (22%)	25 (10%)	20 (8%)	10(4%)	110(44%)
		Total	125(50%)	55(22%)	50(20%)	20(8%)	250(100%)
Religion has created more confusion in the mind of worshippers as regard the true God.		Male	50 (20%)	50 (20%)	30 (12%)	10 (4%)	140(56%)
		Female	30 (12%)	45 (18%)	20 (8%)	15 (6%)	110(44%)
		Total	80(32%)	95(38%)	50(20%)	25(10%)	250(100%)
Religiosity engenders spiritual growth among		Male	60 (24%)	60 (24%)	20 (8%)	0	140(56%)
		Female	42 (17%)	41 (16%)	17 (7%)	10 (4%)	110(44%)
		Total	102(41%)	101(40%)	37(15%)	10 (4%)	250(100%)

members of  
Pentecostalism.

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**Source:** Field Work, 2025.

Table 4.3 shows the views of respondents on the connection between religiosity and internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The table shows that 30 respondents which represent 12% of the 250 respondents strongly agreed with 20 respondents representing 8%. However, 70 (28%) “Strongly disagreed” while 130 (52%) “disagreed” This infers that religion does not enhance proliferation and duplication of churches in Pentecostalism.

The table also reveals that 95 (38%) and 85 (34%) respondents confirmed to “strongly agreed” and “agreed” that poor religious sermon has caused internal conflict in Pentecostal churches. 50 respondents representing 20% strongly disagreed with 20 respondents which represents 8% disagreed. It indicates that poor religious sermon has caused internal conflict in Pentecostal churches.

On whether religiosity has increased the level of poverty and internal conflict among members in Pentecostal churches, 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, with 55 respondents representing 22% agreed while 50 respondents represent 20% strongly disagreed with 20 respondents representing 8% disagreed. This implies that religiosity has increased the level of poverty and internal conflict among members in Pentecostal churches.

On whether religion has created more confusion in the mind of worshippers as regard the true God. The table above also displays 102 respondents representing 41% “strongly agreed” with 101 which represents 40% “agreed”. 37 respondents which represent 15% strongly disagreed while 10 respondents with 4% disagreed that religion has created more confusion in the mind of worshippers as regard the true God. The majority of the respondents agreed that religion has created more confusion in the mind of worshippers as regard the true God.

On whether religiosity engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism, the table above shows that 80 (32%) respondents strongly agreed with 95 (38%) agreed that religiosity engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism. 50 representing 20% and 25 representing 10% of the respondents. This implies that religiosity engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism.

**Table 4.3: Influence of religiosity on internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.**

Questionnaires	Gender	Strongly Agreed f (%)	Agreed f (%)	Disagreed f (%)	Strongly Disagreed f (%)	Total
Multiplicity of religious preachers has led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches.	Male	25 (10)	20 (8%)	50 (20%)	45 (18%)	140 (56%)
	Female	15 (6%)	10 (4%)	50 (20%)	35 (14%)	110 (44%)
	Total	40(16%)	30(12%)	100(40%)	80 (32%)	250 (100%)
Religiosity has influenced the pattern of messages to prosperity preaching.	Male	60 (24%)	50 (20%)	5 (2%)	25 (10%)	140(56%)
	Female	50 (20%)	50 (20%)	5 (2%)	5 (2%)	110(44%)
	Total	110 (44%)	100(40%)	10(4%)	30(12%)	250(100%)
Religiosity has opened the floor of extortion of money from members.	Male	70 (28%)	40 (16%)	5 (2%)	25 (10%)	140(56%)
	Female	60 (24%)	20 (8%)	5 (2%)	25 (10%)	110(44%)
	Total	130 (52%)	60 (24%)	10(4%)	50 (20%)	250(100%)
It has led to lack of total dependence on God.	Male	50 (20%)	50 (20%)	30 (12%)	10 (4%)	140(56%)
	Female	40 (16%)	45 (18%)	15 (6%)	10 (4%)	110(44%)
	Total	90(36%)	95(38%)	45(18%)	20 (8%)	250(100%)
Most religious preachers parade anointing but lack Godly character in Pentecostalism.	Male	60 (24%)	65 (26%)	10 (4%)	5 (2%)	140(56%)
	Female	40 (16%)	60 (24%)	10 (4%)	0	110(44%)
	Total	100 (40%)	125(50%)	20(8%)	5(2%)	250(100%)

**Source:** Field Work, 2025.

Table 4.3 reveals that out of 250 respondents, 40 (16%) respondents strongly agreed, and 30 (12%) respondents agreed that multiplicity of religious preachers has led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches while 100 (40%) respondents strongly disagreed with 80 (32%) respondents disagreed that multiplicity of religious preachers has led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches. This indicates that multiplicity of religious preachers has not led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches.

The table also indicates those 110 (44%) respondents “strongly agreed” and 100 (40%) of the respondents “agreed” that religiosity has influenced the pattern of messages to prosperity preaching while 10 (4%) “strongly disagreed” and 30 (12%) of the respondents “disagreed”. That religiosity has influenced the pattern of messages to prosperity preaching. This indicates that religiosity has influenced the pattern of messages to prosperity preaching.

Furthermore, it is observed that 130 respondents representing 52% “strongly agreed” and 60 representing 24% of the respondents and “agreed” that religiosity has opened the floor of extortion of money from members while 10 respondents representing 4% “strongly disagreed” and 50 respondents representing 20% “disagreed” that religiosity has opened the floor of extortion of money from members. This implies that religiosity has opened the floor of extortion of money from members.



Discussing the table above, religion has led to lack of total dependence on God. This is strongly agreed by 90 respondents representing 30% and “agreed” with 95 respondents representing 38% that religion has led to lack of total dependence on God. Meanwhile, 45 respondents representing 18% “strongly disagreed” that religion has led to lack of total dependence on God while 20 respondents which represent 3% “disagreed” that religion has led to lack of total dependence on God. This implies that religion has led to lack of total dependence on God.

Stating further, the table also indicates that 100 (40%) of the respondents strongly agreed that most religious preachers parade anointing with Godly character in Pentecostalism, 125 respondents representing 50% also agreed that most religious preachers parade anointing with Godly character in Pentecostalism. However, 20 (8%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with 5 respondents representing 2% disagreed that most religious preachers parade anointing with Godly character in Pentecostalism. This implies that most religious preacher’s parade anointing with Godly character in Pentecostalism.

### **Discussion of findings**

**The correlation between religiosity and internal conflict:** Data analysis shows the views of respondents on the connection between religiosity and internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The table shows that 30 respondents which represent 12% of the 250 respondents strongly agreed with 20 respondents representing 8%. The table also reveals that 95 (38%) and 85 (34%) respondents confirmed to “strongly agreed” and “agreed” that poor religious sermon has caused internal conflict in Pentecostal churches. On whether religiosity has increased the level of poverty and internal conflict among members in Pentecostal churches, 125 (50%) respondents strongly agreed, with 55 respondents representing 22% agreed. The table above also displays 102 respondents representing 41% “strongly agreed” with 101 which represents 40% “agreed”. On whether religiosity engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism, the table above shows that 80 (32%) respondents strongly agreed with 95 (38%) agreed that religiosity engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism. However, secondary data revealed that Religiosity, or the degree of religious commitment, can have a profound impact on internal conflict. Internal conflict refers to the psychological struggle within an individual, often involving conflicting values, beliefs, or goals. The positive effects of religiosity on internal conflict include spiritual coping; moral guidance, and social support. Religious teachings can offer clear moral guidelines, reducing internal conflict. It also provides a framework for coping with stress and adversity. The nexus between religiosity and internal conflict is complex, influenced by various factors. While religiosity can provide coping mechanisms and moral guidance, it can also exacerbate internal conflict through dogmatism and guilt. Religion has become a business where the interest of a church or individual most time clashes with the interest of another church or individual. When there is this clash of interest, there is usually a conflict. In line with this, Adeyemo (2006) argued that church conflict is an area that has not caught much interest in academic discourses. He noted that the success of the Pentecostal churches, is due to African realities of poverty. Poverty has opened up Africans hearts to the Pentecostal influence which inspires congregations with biblical messages such as: cheerful givers never lack. He contended that the strive to overcome poverty is the reason for internal conflict in many Pentecostal churches. Gifford (1998) observes that Pentecostalism has also spread due to sale of recorded sermons, conferences and mammoth crusades, established learning institutions and the motivational books that appeal to many people. A critical view of the above revealed that the establishment and growth

of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are riddled with conflict. The conflicts usually subdue the efforts put forth to resolve them. Christopher (2021) pointed out that there were several Pentecostal churches that had been established in Abuja before CCI was established. Some of these churches were the Gospel Outreach, Revival and Hope, Deliverance Church, United Pentecostal Church and Glorious Worship Centre among others. These churches grew and had influence in Nigeria. They attracted many followers from this town and its neighbourhood. However, all these churches were later embroiled with conflicts which led to their closure. Similar conflicts and subsequent splits in Pentecostal churches are also common in Nigeria. In 2008, the Full Gospel Churches of Nigeria (FGCK) was involved in a succession dispute that broke the sixty-year old unity which it had enjoyed. This dispute effectively split the church into two factions namely the original FGCK and a faction called Worldwide Full Gospel Churches. Earlier in the year 2000, similar conflicts had split the Gospel Outreach Church of Nigeria forming a new faction called Gospel Revival Centre (GRC). In 2014, the DC Nyeri branch which had about 300 members got involved in leadership conflicts which split it into two. A large group of members led by the deputy pastor left this church and established a church called Prime Ministry International (PMI).

As noted by and Albert (1999), whether conflict is viewed as normal or abnormal, it is reoccurring, natural or even a pathological fact; it is inherent in all kinds of social relationships/institutions, be it economic, political, or religious. It is therefore pertinent to state categorically that religious conflict is becoming more threatening to societal unity and human peaceful co-existence in Nigeria than any other form of conflict. That of the Pentecostal churches is evident in the proliferation and duplication of churches at the slightest disagreement and all kinds of social drama ensue between General Overseers (G.O) and their subordinate pastors, a section of the congregation and deacons/deaconesses/elders against the pastors/members on the other side (Onyima, 2007).

It is in the light of the above discussion that 70 respondents disagreed that religion does not enhance proliferation and duplication of churches in Pentecostalism while 100 respondents disagreed that religiosity does not engenders spiritual growth among members of Pentecostalism. By implication, religion, particularly the activities of Pentecostal churches do not engender spiritual growth but caused more internal wrangling among pastors and other church workers. The end result according to this investigation is personal gain.

**Influence of religion on internal conflict in Pentecostal churches:** Data analysis revealed that, the multiplicity of religious preachers has led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches. The study also found that religiosity has influenced the pattern of messages to prosperity preaching. Primary data exposed that religiosity has opened the floor of extortion of money from members. Also, religion has led to lack of total dependence on God while most religious preachers parade anointing without Godly character in Pentecostalism. Conflict captures church's unity, and this occurs over matters which but for human frailty could be settled amicably. Schism is the division of the whole church into two or more groups because of differences of opinion and disagreement about aims and beliefs. Schismatics are those who for ecclesiastical cause or personal interest diverge for reasons not incurable. Schism rarely involves doctrinal issues, consequently those who break away continues to retain essentially the same mode of worship as their parents' churches except the heretics who are altogether lost and strange to faith because their beliefs disagree with the principles of Christianity and they deviate from the right doctrine and basic tenets of Christianity. Secession has led to widespread of the gospel, a ready employment for the unemployed youth as a result of biting economy, untold hardship to families, destruction of lives and properties, adulterated word of God and false prophecy. The view above has been corroborated

by different religious scholars and authors. For instance, Domigoeze (2006) argued that most of these religious preachers are not after the anointing but the money. Poverty, greed and the quest for material wealth have driven many preachers into religion; religion of “stomach infrastructure not of Godly anointing. Supporting this claim, Onyima (2007) noted the following as religious influence over internal conflict in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

**Anointing without character:** Onyima (2007) stated that biblical truth is not enough for some of the seceded pastors. There must be more. As a result, they are always looking for something new. They care little about doctrine, proper exegesis or biblical integrity are not spiritual enough. They want anointing, power, visions, revelations or any semblance of such whether genuine or fake. According to Olukoya (2013), some of these Pastors cannot just say what they have to say without fanfare and commotion, because they feel that preaching must be done in an anointed manner. One could expound the word of God eloquently and would receive economic applause. Some Pentecostals don’t even know the difference between the anointing and crowd control and the presence of God and carnal display. Chaddie (2007) states, that no one has a greater propensity for exaggeration than some of the seceded pastors. According to him, some pastors do have a great time in God’s presence to heal the sick and carry out several other “mighty miracles” while others who wallow in poverty organise “fake miracles” to earn a living to the detriment of the reputation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.

**Extortion of money from their members for their personal use:** They psyche their members with their sugar-coated tongue by telling them close your eyes and put all you have in the offering box, give the widow’s mite, God loves a cheerful giver. In a worship service, they can call for offering for ten times by giving it different names tithe, first fruit, breakthrough offering, evangelism offering, poverty offering, sickness averting offering, bondage destroying offering etc. Many of them are carnal minded and not heavenly minded, they are very carnal or worldly. They are money conscious. Many of them are in a hurry to make wealth as such they extort money from their members through selling of fake anointing oil, anointed handkerchief, seed faith, launching, filling of form with money before seeing them for prayer and counselling. The money realized are used for their personal comfort, such as living in affluence, buying of expensive cars, building of magnificent edifices for themselves and the establishment of schools which will be inherited by their wives or children when they die. Some even send their children abroad for studies and travel abroad as they like at the expense of their poor members. Genuine love is lacking in some quarters. They do not love God and their members with all their hearts as such they disobey God at will and do not pray and visit their poor members because they will not be able to appreciate them with gifts.

**Lack of total dependence on God:** Nyamiti (2007) asserts that, many of them are not prayerful. They lack total dependence on the Holy Spirit which made some to enter occult society in order to acquire more power. One of them imported evil powder from India so that whenever he is preaching people will be falling under the anointing. Many people became members of his church and the church was filled to capacity. One fateful day, his wife ignorantly rubbed the evil powder and went to market. As she was pricing fish, she waved her hand and the fish seller fell down, this attracted the attention of the traders who accused her of witchcraft practice. She said she was not responsible for the fish seller’s fall as she waved her hands again the people around her fell down and she was arrested by two police men who interrogated her and she took them to her house and

explained to them how she prepared for the market. She said the only thing she did before going to the market was the powder she rubbed which she never rubbed before. One of the police men took the powder and rubbed it and as he waved his hands, the people around him fell down. Then the attention of her husband who was the owner of the powder was needed as he came, he was arrested and given a serious beating before he confessed how he got the powder and the purpose of the powder; his secret was revealed and his church members scattered, today the church is closed down. Some of the seceded pastors do not preach sound doctrine so that their members will not run away. They always preach about the love, grace and mercy of God without emphasizing on salvation and holy living. They lost heavenly focus and try to lower the standard of the bible. Prosperity preaching Nnodim-Onyebuagu (2007) posits that the rise of corruption in Nigeria is due to the impact of prosperity preaching, because this has given a religious coverage for the people craze for ill-gotten wealth. The flamboyant nature of the prosperity pastors has made the number of graduates who opt for the church ministry to be on the increase without been called by God. According to Dim (2012) some of these pastors lay more emphasis on miracles and prosperity to the detriment of holiness and salvation. Their preaching has made people to look for miracles instead of looking for the salvation of their souls and the miracle worker. The man of God is looked upon as the source of the miracle and the members become highly possessive and materialistic. The mark of a pastor is humility and passion to glorify and exalt the name of Jesus Christ who is the miracle worker and no one should take credit for any miracle done by God through him. True Christians for prosperity preachers are those who have given more donations to the church. Irrespective of the source of wealth whether genuine or dubious the uncontrolled quest for money and fame, make prosperity preaching dubious and at the expense of hard work and righteousness. Groves (2002) states that, instead of them to listen to the preacher's sermon, they will be busy spraying him or her money which is a worldly act. And also causes distraction because they have been indoctrinated to believe that for what the pastor is preaching to manifest in their lives, they must give offering while he is preaching.

**Scriptural misinterpretation:** According to Dim (2012), there is a basic problem with the interpretation of the sacred scriptures. These pastors land into error in their biblical interpretation because are not properly acquainted with the basic tools of biblical exegesis. They make the scriptural passages to have any meaning they intend it to have. Some preachers are styled after prosperity preaching while some are styled after holiness or deliverance preaching. Their interpretation of scripture is according to their personal biases and ideas. They read into the text rather than the textural meaning being read out of it. They over emphasize their area of interest at the expense of other areas which make their members not to have balance teaching which made some of the members to worship and praise them instead of God. Some deviate from their areas of call because of ambition which made them to lose focus and lost the vision of God for their lives.

Though, some of the respondents disagreed that multiplicity of religious preachers has led to scriptural misinterpretation in Pentecostal churches, the study however found that religiosity has a multidimensional influence on the pattern of sermon which are induced into prosperity message leading to extortion of money from members. This, without doubt revealed the lack of total dependence on God.

## **Conclusion**

The study examined the intricate relationship between religiosity and internal conflict in churches, with a specific focus on the Pentecostal experience in Nigeria. The paradox of piety in Pentecostalism in Rivers State, Nigeria, presents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. This study has explored the intricate relationships between religiosity, internal conflict, and the Pentecostal experience, revealing a nuanced and context-dependent dynamic. While religiosity is often touted as a source of comfort, solace, and community, this research has demonstrated that it can also be a catalyst for internal conflict, particularly when coupled with issues of power, resources, and identity. The findings of this study suggest that the Pentecostal experience in Rivers State, Nigeria, is characterized by a tension between the pursuit of spiritual growth and the navigation of internal conflicts. This tension is often exacerbated by factors such as poor leadership, corruption, and the manipulation of religious sentiment for personal gain. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the Pentecostal movement in Rivers State, Nigeria, remains a vibrant and dynamic force, with many adherents finding solace, meaning, and purpose in their faith. Ultimately, this study highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between religiosity, internal conflict, and the Pentecostal experience. By acknowledging the paradox of piety and engaging with the complexities and challenges of Pentecostalism in Rivers State, Nigeria, we may uncover new insights into the nature of faith, identity, and community in this context.

## **Recommendation**

1. Improved Leadership and Governance: Pentecostal churches in Rivers State, Nigeria, should prioritize transparent and accountable leadership, ensuring that resources are managed efficiently and effectively.
2. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Establishing robust conflict resolution mechanisms within Pentecostal churches can help mitigate internal conflicts and promote peaceful resolution.
3. Emphasis on Spiritual Growth: Pentecostal churches should focus on fostering spiritual growth and development among their adherents, rather than prioritizing material wealth and power.
4. Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration: Encouraging interfaith dialogue and collaboration between Pentecostal churches and other religious organizations can help promote understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence.
5. Community Development Initiatives: Pentecostal churches can play a vital role in community development by initiating projects that address poverty, education, and healthcare, thereby contributing to the overall well-being of their communities.
6. Policy Reforms: Government agencies and policymakers should consider reforms that address the root causes of internal conflicts in Pentecostal churches, such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice.
7. Counseling and Mentoring: Providing counseling and mentoring services can help Pentecostal adherents navigate internal conflicts and develop coping strategies for managing stress and trauma.



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