



Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and Social Responsibility: A Focus on Social Ministry of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria

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Abstract

Religion and social services in Nigeria has always been the subject of academic interest. Scholars have differing views about the Christian social ministry, giving special attention to the Pentecostal churches and on a narrower scale, the mega churches, as they are often accused of not sufficiently tackling the socio-economic and development challenges facing their members and the communities at large in this economically challenging times. These observations have created a lot of controversy in the school of thought, with various Pentecostal mega churches being accused of adopting economic-driven intentions, exploiting followers and commercializing the Christian faith. On the other hand, some of the mega churches in Nigeria can be described as progressive Pentecostal, whose adherence to community building development in terms of social services is germane. This paper explores the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Pentecostal mega church, hence, illustrating the crucial role of faith-based organisations in promoting the welfare and development of the community. To reinforce these results, the research utilized secondary sources of data and implemented the theory of the mission to explore the notion of mega churches and their social intervention in the spiritual and social aspects of their community at this critical time in Nigeria. As a result, the paper uncovered that the problems of Nigeria are too daunting, so that not even one or even a few Pentecostal churches can adequately handle them. Thus, the devotion of Nigerian Pentecostal churches should not be confined to building fancy structures or leading luxurious lives, but by making significant changes to their host communities in terms of social services, new religious practices, innovations and developments. It can be recommended that every church should learn what the Redeemed Christian Church did and come up with workable strategies that can help them reach more people in their communities thus changing the lives of more people in the face of the present difficult situations in the country.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Social Responsibility, Faith-Based Organisations, RCCG; Nigeria, Development.

Introduction

The emergence of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has changed the face of Christianity and mission work in the country. It is a remarkable religious phenomenon. Matthews Ojo (2010) opines that one of the major factors responsible for the phenomenal growth of the movement is that it has been presented in an acceptable manner that is so relevant to the situation in the country. The continuous growth of the movements suggests that they are acting and responding to certain



areas of need in communities in Nigeria. They are very articulate, progressive, and very westernized in outlook. Thus, their basic religious cosmology is rooted in the African worldviews of spirits, evil, and fear of the present and the future. Moreover, their social goal is congruent with the general aspirations of the African traditional quest for long life, money, power, success, and fame in a competitive but dislocated society (Adedibu, 2018: 3).

Ojo further suggests that one major factor that makes this movement achieve public recognition is the proliferation of numerous Pentecostal churches under apostles, prophets, general overseers, and self-styled bishops. They erect billboards at street corners and activities with electronic, print media, and social media amidst a very competitive religious landscape. In the trajectory, some of these Pentecostal churches are with the nomenclature "Mega". To explain what this nomenclature means, Ajani (2023) opines that mega means "huge" or "powerful". In Greek, *μεγαλη εκκλησια*- *megalē ekklēsia* denotes a colossal scale, large, excellent quality church. He further describes it as a fantastic, exceptional, flourishing church organization or group whose growth in recent years in Africa indicates the popularity of its goods among a sizeable segment of the continent's Christian population. Its practices and organizational structure are centered on a charismatic leader or leaders, who through their leadership continue to exert certain impacts or influences on global Christianity.

This development brings about some expectations from the Nigerian Pentecostal churches as Dena Freeman (2012:9) claims that the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria do not run development projects. She asserts that there are several Pentecostal NGOs, or faith-based organizations (FBOs), that carry out development work from a Pentecostal perspective. Furthermore, the Faith Based Organisations are often not linked to any particular church. Also, Daniel Jordan Smith (2021) points out the inadequacies of the Pentecostal churches towards social intervention and faults their contributions to the social development of their communities. Many people on social media also attack the Pentecostal churches arguing that they only seek to take from their church members without thinking of what to give back to society.

Therefore, the study examines the social responsibilities undertaken by the RCCG and their respective impacts. Among other things, the study discusses the history, structure, and social ministry intervention of this mega-church as a panacea to the socio-economic challenges posed in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the role of Nigerian Pentecostal churches in social responsibility, with particular focus on the social ministry of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. The study was situated within the Nigerian socio-religious context to allow for contextual interpretation. Data was drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with RCCG pastors, social ministry coordinators, and selected beneficiaries, as well as direct observation of social outreach activities.

Secondary data included RCCG official documents, church publications, academic books, and journal articles. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant knowledge of RCCG social initiatives. Data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on patterns related to motivation, forms, and impact of social ministry. Ethical principles guided the research process.



Brief History of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

Eleven former members of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) joined together to form what would later on become the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The most important of these pillars was Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi who was a prophet in the congregation of the C&S at Ebute-Metta in Lagos State, Nigeria. As a religious leader, Akindayomi was given prophetic qualifications that placed him above his peers as the unchallenged leader of this new religious group which he cemented with his spiritual leadership and administrative skills (Adekola, 1989). This faction was officially known as the RCCG, which was formed in 1952. The leadership changed in 1980, when Enoch Adejare Adebayo replaced Akindayomi as a leader; he was the interpreter to the deceased, who translated the sermons into English, before he was ordained to serve as a pastor in 1975. The promotion of Adebayo to General Overseer was substantiated by the revelation in the form of a sealed succession document of Akindayomi which was revealed only posthumously

During the tenure of Adebayo that officially started in 1981, the church experienced a major institutional growth spurt. In 1983, the denomination purchased the Redemption Camp located at Mowe (Adewale, 2014). The organization started the Redeemed Christian Fellowship (RCF) to reach the youth in tertiary institutions all over Nigeria five years later in 1988. The 1990s was associated with two major developments: the formation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God Bible School and the development of Christ the Redeemer Universal (CRFU) that was aimed at the mobilization of financial resources and educated people among the wealthy in the community. Higher education became a reality for the denomination when Redeemer's University was founded in 2005 (Omotoye, 2012). Researchers have found that the growth rate of the church-planting of RCCG was among the highest (Ojo, 2010), and many of these gains were achieved through the transformational leadership of Pastor Adebayo (Osamulu & Atuluku, 2016).

Theological Foundations for Poverty Alleviation

The poverty reduction efforts by the government of Nigeria that have been funded by the government have shown little success and this is an indicator that the state cannot single-handedly deal with the problem of mounting poverty. This fact implies that all societies including religious institutions must be involved. Churches have a special ability to counteract the poverty, and at the same time to understand the compassion of Christ toward the population who are in extreme poverty. Christians, having followed Jesus Christ, adopt the teachings of the scriptures that clearly focus on the need to take care of the poor masses. Therefore, churches are addressing the spiritual aspects and material good of the human being - a course of action that has prompted the leaders of churches and especially the early missionaries in Nigeria. Acknowledging that illiteracy is one of the drivers of poverty, missionary activities in the past focused their efforts on the development of education in order to increase literacy levels (Uche & Udogu, 2024).

Even though RCCG has Christian festivals just like other denominations do, they have unique religious and socioeconomic significance for the congregation. In its organizational policies RCCG clearly separates itself with some practices being practiced by the Nigerian Pentecostal churches especially Harvest Thanksgiving celebrations. The denomination has decided not to copy fundraising practices used by other churches around the world, in particular the ones that focus on harvest events (Nwadiakor, 2013). This position does not amount to wholesale dismissal of all the observances of Christianity. Holy Communion, Baptism, and New Year are among the sacred services that are still prominent in RCCG practices. Christian festivals have a significant impact on their believers, their families, and communities, and thus, they are important events for the pastor and his or her congregation. It has been shown that in RCCG the 164 Christian festivals



are the most important mechanisms of spiritual growth with both intangible and sacred implications in the Christian community including the specific influence on the pastoral leadership (Olusegun, 2025).

The spiritual aspect of festivals also deals with non-material human needs that are vital for the well-being of human beings. Humanity is made up of both physical and spiritual aspects and this is why failure to meet the spiritual needs does not allow total fulfillment. Festivals such as prayers, supplications and prophetic utterances have protective purposes of death and evil as well as creating a guaranteed divine communication, hence developing confidence towards the approaching year. The blessings, admonitions and teachings given during such events will enhance the belief in the existence of God and may facilitate spiritual growth among the attendees.

According to Odumuyiwa (2005), some of the contributions that Pentecostal churches make to the national development include quality education, humanitarianism, provision of jobs, social and ethical development, governance, economic development and moral and spiritual development. He argues that churches play an important role in nation building. RCCG has been conducting its operations in Nigeria based on these principles since its inception. The denomination has had to offer scholarship to many children who are not financed to pursue their education since their parents or guardians had died, or because of their financial status. As an example, at the Redeemer Private Secondary School in Lugbe, Abuja (RPSS), a girl in the Gbayi tribe of the Federal Capital Territory by the name Juliana Yunusa was given a full scholarship into Senior Secondary School One up to Three (Atuluku, 2017). This case is an example of the larger examples of scholarship programs by the denomination to underprivileged students (Omotoye, 2016).

Economic Empowerment Initiatives

The economic programs developed by the Church have given it a strong footing in the poverty alleviation initiatives across Nigeria under the title of the Tree of Life that references economic healing of the nation (Omotoye, 2012). Businesses operated by the group under the slogan of Zion Needs Management, which deals with the commercial activities of the church, RCCG has a goal to achieve the prosperity and productivity of those members who are involved in different businesses. The organization also provides education in business that includes Leading a Business for Christ, Entrepreneurial Skill Development, Turning Failure to Success and Building and Managing Resources for Christ. The Business Venture division also offers consultancy services and runs other business organizations (Omotoye, 2012).

Eradication on poverty issues is one of the topical problems of our times as it impacts both the society and individuals on the level of numerous aspects. These obstacles can go as far as total material deprivation, insufficient access to education, medical services, and the spiritual and physical growth of the individual (Lamrabat, 2013). To faith-based organizations especially the Church, the idea of poverty goes beyond economic classification as it is both a spiritual and relational issue. In this dual explanation, the Church serves as both an instant solution to immediate needs and a long-term sustainable solution (Collins, 2022). The Redeemed Christian Church of God has always been on the forefront of anti-poverty initiatives and has placed its work on theological foundations and the practical manifestations of mercy to the disadvantaged populations, which have been years long (Leonard, 2025). Since the early communities of the church, who used to collect resources to help the poor in the society, to the modern systematic way of handling poverty, the Church has always aimed at reconciling faith and action. Nonetheless, the contemporary poverty, unemployment, inadequate social services, and erosion



of communal values all require holistic measures that bring about structural solutions to the problems (Heinrich, 2008).

According to Uche and Udogu (2024), citing Jakonda (2011), Achunik (2004), and Engel (1988), missionaries took specific steps in order to minimize hunger and poverty. Jakonda records the introduction of economically advantageous crops that were introduced by missionaries such as cocoa, ginger, groundnut, tomatoes and cotton that boosted the economy as well as the income of people. On the same note, missionaries introduced cassava growing in Nigeria. The improved means of agriculture led to production and better standards of living. With the help of educational programs, medical activities, agricultural practices, and trade advancement, early missionaries shaped the economic conditions of the Nigerian local people positively (Jakonda, 2011).

Churches are still playing a significant role in society in contemporary times especially in matters related to poverty alleviation. The churches continue to strive to free mankind of the hunger, misery, oppression, and hatred conditions based on human selfishness (Achunike, 2004). The interest of the church to the disadvantaged people dates back to the interest of Jesus and is a part of the earthly mission of the church. The power of redemption in Christ will only make sense to the poor when it is addressed in a manner that is real. Engel (1988) mentions that one way of practical expression of the love of God is to take care of the simple needs of people and their many social and spiritual challenges.

In this regard, Folu Adeboye (Mrs) who is a missionary made a trip to mission fields in West Africa. On her return, she brought back accounts of burdens faced by many people due to the high number of them suffering from hunger and malnutrition and answered as best she could, the desperate needs of missions that were in dire need. The result was the formation of the so-called West Africa Missions Committee, the organization whose initial name was designed to serve the mission fields in the West African sub-region only (Adedibu, 2020a). After another missionary trip in 1997 in Central, Eastern and Southern African regions, the committee increased its geographic territory outreach, as well as its focus, to include the entire African continent and community development efforts that help host communities of mission fields. The Africa Missions Organisation is a faith-based entity currently functioning in full development to cope with the challenges affecting the disadvantaged groups in Africa and elsewhere in the world with the use of appropriate community development and empowerment schemes and gospel proclamation (Adedibu, 2020).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) shows its interest to not only consider spiritual issues, but also the general welfare concerns of the society. The church has the mission of serving the underprivileged members of the community with different social, medical, educational, and economic programs that are Christ-like in physical form. This support is meant for those who fill in a form requesting some assistance. This mission is overseen by the welfare unit and it must of course be done within the capacity of the church. Some of the items distributed are obtained through voluntary donations.

Though the community service was conducted by RCCG since its founding, it was formalized in 2011 when a special administrative office was created. These programs initially run by an Assistant Provincial Pastor, became the Christian Social Responsibility (CSR) division, headed by Pastor Idowu Iluyomade who is now the Special Assistant to the General Overseer. Adeboye says that congregants want more than the assurances of heavenly rewards, they want to feel divine blessings in their current lives. Iluyomade shares the same philosophy by defining CSR as the performance of religious duties with the aim of serving society via expressed manifestations of love that bring positive effects to society and individuals in general.



Investment in Education

The education system in Nigeria reflects the general problems faced by the society such as corruption, lack of proper infrastructure, and lack of skilled professionals (Odia & Omofonmwan, 2007). Schools act as the main drivers of development since true development cannot happen without more than just money or bridging gaps in resources. The knowledge acquisition and application are also required in development, and educational shortcomings are to be resolved (Osamulu, 2016). Nigerian education has also significantly promoted the development of indigenous knowledge by the growth of human capital.

Educational investments by the Nigerian Pentecostal denominations such as RCCG have been very high since the late 1980s stretching up to tertiary education. The philosophy of education of RCCG is an amalgamation of morality and academic excellence. The history of the church education process started in 1981 with the establishment of the Christ Redeemer School Movement (CRSM) by the wife of the General Overseer, Pastor Mrs. Folu Adeboye. This network is currently operating nationally and its headquarters are in Lagos. On October 1, 1996, the denomination moved into the secondary education sector by establishing the College of Christ Redeemer in Sagamu, Ogun State (Adedibu, 2016).

The greatest educational achievement by the RCCG occurred in the year 2005 when Redeemer University was founded in Ede. This institution has received national and international acknowledgement on the research excellence concerning genomics. It is worth noting that in 2014, the University of Redeemer was selected as the top option among fifteen highly ranked institutions that competed by going through a rigorous assessment to host the World Bank-funded African Centre of Excellence in Genomics of Infectious Diseases (ACEGID) in their institution (Adeyewa, 2015).

Other than ACEGID, Adeyemo (2022) mentions Redeemer's University among the pioneers of the private universities in Nigeria. The educational focus of the church on Science, Management, and Technology was the foundation of the Redeemer College of Technology and Management (RECTEM) created in 2018. Also, RCCG established its main theological schools in 1980 and 1995 with the Redeemed Christian Bible College (RCBC) and Redeemed College of Missions respectively. At present, these schools exist as subunits of the Department of Christian Religious Studies and Philosophy of Redeemer University (Adedibu, 2017:173). Such education projects play an important role in terms of building and capacity development of the country at large.

Nursing and Medical Institution Services and Facilities

RCCG has also contributed significantly to the Nigerian population's health through its universal healthcare development using various intervention measures. Health services are also provided by the denomination, the Redeemed AIDS Program Action Committee (RAPAC) which is focused on fighting HIV and AIDS both medically and spiritually (Akhazemea and Adedibu, 2011:146). Some of the activities of RAPAC include awareness campaigns, behavioural communication materials on HIV/AIDS, premarital abstinence advocacy, and community outreach. The committee has formed alliances with other international agencies such as the United States Agency of International Development (USAID) and Family Health International.

The health care related to RCCG includes Christ against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM) in Ikeja, Healing Stripes Hospital in Victoria Island in Lagos, Wellspring Rehabilitation Centre in Ojodu and RCCG Health Centre in Mowe in Ogun State as well as many others (Adebayo, 2023).



The earliest social service activity of the denomination was a Maternity Centre facility where pregnant women receive care before, during, and after childbirth. It provides services such as antenatal care, delivery assistance, postnatal care, and sometimes newborn care. It was established when the founder Rev. Josiah Akindayomi was in charge and it served both members of the church and also some the non-members (Adeboye, 2020:124). Over the years, RCCG has established maternity and health facilities in majority of the provincial divisions in Nigeria, which are run by well qualified medical practitioners in voluntary status as well as salaried status.

The study comparing the healthcare delivery of RCCG, specifically RAPAC and Redemption City Health Centre in Mowe, found that the church has done a great amount of work towards meeting Sustainable Development Goal 3, (to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages," especially on reducing mortality, combating diseases, ensuring access to healthcare, and improving overall health and mental well-being by 2030), with 48 percent of people surveyed rating such works as highly important. On access to healthcare, 84 percent of the respondents indicated that they have access to services, and 46 percent of them indicated that access to healthcare services is satisfactory and 36 percent have access that is highly available (Akhazemea and Adedibu, 2011:146).

To enhance the healthcare system in Nigeria, RCCG contributed eleven full equipped Intensive Care Unit beds with ventilators to Lagos, Ogun and Plateau states to address the COVID-19 outbreak (The Nation, 2020). In July 2021, his Love Foundation, a charitable organization of RCCG, donated sixteen Intensive Care units to Dialysis Centers, Cancer Screening Centers, and Primary Healthcare Centers in the country. RCCG has invested over eighteen trillion Nairas in six areas of CSRs through His Love Foundation, which has transformed lives of more than 130,000 people through 43,000 functioning centers that are spread across 36 states of Nigeria (His Love Foundation, 2021). RCCG healthcare services comprise Medical Mission Outreaches with 230,538 recipients of subsidised medical services; Healing Stripes Hospital with 100,000 affordable medical services in dental and eye care; renovating and equipping Kirikiri Maximum Prison Referral Hospital; and Healing Stripes Cancer Screening and Diagnostics Centre that has screened over 100, 761 patients at subsidised costs.

Even though RCCG has been successful in a number of areas including education, healthcare, and empowerment programs, the church has not been fully involved in social justice advocacy. This is a great deficiency considering the fact that Nigeria is full of social injustice problems and the church must speak prophecies. As social justice was one of the fundamental aspects of the ministry of Jesus and RCCG shares a vision of holistic human welfare, the denomination needs to spread into social justice advocacy issues (Osamolu and Atuluku, 2016). This is especially urgent due to the fact that spiritual and physical life aspects are united.

It is worth noting that such a social program is run on non-profit making ideas. However, critics have raised questions as to the large amount of resources needed to build and operate such facilities, occasionally accusing the church of accruing profits in this regard, even though the situation is often the opposite (Ukah, 2020:430-59).

Conclusion

The political climate in Nigeria has been challenging, which has led to a lot of poverty and destitution, and the implications of the same on the economy of the country on the whole, require a greater effort to be made by the Pentecostal churches so as to fill the gaps left by the political elites. The paper discussed the social ministry of one of the leading Pentecostal mega-churches in Nigeria and concluded that the Redeemed Christian Church of God has a Christian Social Responsibility program that can meet the needs of the society through love demonstrations that



have a positive effect on the communities and individuals. This social ministry has promoted Christ's gospel by addressing the needs of the poor and needy population, by tackling several programs in healthcare, education, food security, community projects, and others.

The problems of Nigeria are too many however, that can be solved by a single Pentecostal church. Thus, the devotion of Nigerian Pentecostal churches cannot be confined to either building fastidious structures or living luxurious lives; they need to create significant changes in their social development and religious innovations, creativity, and developments in their respective communities. The Redeemed Christian Church is an example that all churches should emulate and come up with practical strategies that will help them reach more individuals in their communities and transform more lives as the nation goes through this turbulent phase.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research relied exclusively on secondary sources of data, which limits the depth of analysis and prevents the capture of first-hand experiences of church members, leaders, and community recipients. In addition, the absence of primary data such as interviews, surveys, or field observations may restrict the richness and reliability of the findings. The study also focused exclusively on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). While RCCG is one of the largest Pentecostal mega churches in Nigeria, its structure, resources, and outreach capacity may not be representative of all Pentecostal or faith-based organisations in the country. This then, to an extent limits the generalizability of the findings to other churches or religious institutions.

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