

## Religion (Christianity) And Sustainable Development: The Ecclesiastical Basis For Church Proliferation

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### ABSTRACT

Contrary to the popular notion that proliferation of religion with a bias to Christianity being evidenced in the establishment of plethora of churches under different denominations, and thereby making the business of the church doable for both theologically or religiously licensed and unlicensed persons, genuine and counterfeit human beings, this paper intends to do a heartthrob examination about the concept from a positive angle as a basis for not just development but also for a sustainable one. Hence, the choice of the topic, "Religion [Christianity] sustainable and development: The Ecclesiastical basis for church proliferation. Without mush ado, a number of undeniable developments are largely traceable to Christianity especially in Africa with crystal evidences in the areas of health, education, technology, civilization just to mention a few. This can further be established via the names some churches being preferred to some of the Institutions such as the Anglican High School, St. Theresa Catholic School, St. John Nursery and Primary School, Baptist Teaching Hospital among others. However, the tempo of this kind of trend is not as high as it was some years back and this is a result of certain factors which is not the thrust of this work. The work will employ secondary source of information largely to elicit data for the work and eventually recommend that Christianity as a religion should rekindle its 'fire' of sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century more than it was known for in the early years of its introduction to Africa.

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**Keywords:** Christianity, Development, Ecclesiastics, Proliferation

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### INTRODUCTION

Religion in general and Christianity in particular has always been pivotal cause of developments but developments in Christianity, our focus in this work, can scarcely be understood without relating them to the Jewish background.<sup>1</sup> Besides, each world religion, Judaism and Christianity inclusive, had understood developmental stages and changes at differential stages and changes at different times in history.<sup>2</sup> Since its formal emergence in the New Testament [NT] on the day of Pentecost as revealed in Acts chapter 2, Christianity has ever witnessed phenomenal developments physically, spiritually and theologically. To drive home the onus of this study therefore, it will be pertinent to examine the features of the religion namely yahwism or Judaism, that paved way for it as a backdrop.

#### Religious Developments in the Old Testament (O.T)

The emergence of the worship of Yahweh as the national religion of the [OT] can be dated with the Sinaicovenant through the views that God *Elohim* had been in close association with Abraham and his

descendants throughout the ages up till the Sinai episode.<sup>3</sup> From existing record on the OT history and religion of the Jews, it appears that there was the indivisible unity of *Yahwism* as Moses and his lieutenants and subsequent leader strictly operated with the provisions of the Torah, ordinances, testimonies and statutes of Yahweh. Apart from apostasy introduced to *Yahwish* probably through different exilic experiences and sojourns of the people, the religion did not split sections of different bodies; it was either *Yahwism* or *Baalism*. This goes a long way to explain what is being experienced today in that, though, there are different religions with different denominations especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, they can all still be classified under Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion.

#### Prophetic Schools in the Old Testament [OT]

In the development of *Yahwism*, there were in existence different prophetic schools or institutions. These were variously designated as associations of prophetic, groups or guilds of prophets, sons of

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<sup>1</sup>Oxtoby F.B. *Israel's Religious Development*. (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Oxtoby F.B. *Israel's Religious Development*. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Awoniyi Sunday et al., *Christianity and Islam*, (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 2012), 20

prophets, prophetic orders and bands of prophets.<sup>4</sup> These associations of prophets existed in ancient Israel as from times of Saul and Samuel in the eleventh century B.C., until the fall of Jerusalem in the early sixth century B.C.<sup>5</sup> Among such guilds were those of Samuel, Elijah and Elisha [ISam. 10:5;19:20;II kings: 2:3; 3:11;4:1,38;6:1-2] These guilds are also variously indicated in I kings 18v4; 19; 22:6; II kings 23vs; Jeremiah 26:7-8. It is of note that the Rechabites and the Nazirites also had some prophetic qualities.

The afore-mentioned professional prophets were related to the cultus and regularly discharged certain cultic professional functions. Most of them were attached to the temple(s) in Jerusalem and it is believed that sometimes, at about the fourth or third century B.C, the temple prophets became temple singers and merged with the other Levitical orders.

The prophetic school culminated in the guild of John the Baptist in the New Testament (NT) dispensation. All these bands had a common purpose and that was to promote the worship of Yahweh and firmly establish monotheism. These religious agents and indeed all devoted Yahwists were conscious of this development feature of the national religion throughout the vicissitudes of the Israelites' history.

### Development of Early Judaism

During the exile, *Yahwism* was reformed and culminated in the founding of Judaism.<sup>6</sup> In exile, Judaism was practiced as a unifying indivisible region of the exile. The exilic prophets and the Jewish elder united to reinterpret and practice *Yahwism* unpolluted.

The development has greatly been associated with the socio-political changes of the people. The appearance of religious movement, the rise of sects and religious development could be explained as responses to fundamental changes in the socio-political situations. Obviously, the gradual transformation of Judaism from a tribal religious limitations insisted on into a monotheistic universalistic religion with God of Justice and love, is a process that cannot be wholly understood with the contest of the social framework of the Jewish people. Hence, recourse to New Testament views shortly.

Before the changes were accomplished by the prophets, the religion of Yahweh had contained the common belief such as the suffering was the result of sin and that sacrifice could win atonement. Furthermore, in the face of acute, recalcitrant, and

prolonged suffering however, this position become became unsatisfactory. Rather, it is patently false. Owing to this, a new conception of God began to emerge with a clear picture that sacrifices were strong for sin. Hence, the prophecy of Isaiah in 1:11-13 which says:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I have had enough of burnt offering of rams; I do not delight in the blood of bulls. Bring no more vain offering; I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. I hate and despise your feast. But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like ever-flowing streams, [cf: Amos 4:21, 24]

The Lord Jesus re-emphasized this issue of justice while scolding and correcting the scribes and the Pharisees for doing what is wrong and thinking they are right under the guise of religion. To this end, He says:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have omitted the weightier matter of the law, judgment, (Justice), mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matt 23:23)

God had been transformed from an anthropomorphic being delighting in gifts and homage into a Spirit who must be worshipped in spirit and truth (Jh 4:24). Judaism as the bedrock of Christianity underwent numerous developments throughout the OT vicissitudes. Growing social differentiations with Israel as well as external attacks influenced the development of Judaism. The clear out monotheism of Amos appeared in the context of sharp protest against the great contrast of wealth and poverty that he found in the cities.

### The Rabbinic School

The Rabbi or Rabboni was one learned in the Mosaic Law (Torah), hence, a teacher of the law. He was not a priest but a layman learned in the law and as well versed in sacred writings.<sup>7</sup> In modern Judaism, the rabbinate is an ordained office. In the Talmudic era, rabbi was used to designate those learned Jews who were committed to the study, learning and interpretation of the law. The Talmud itself contained a set of books of the 'Misha' i.e repeated study; the 'Gemara' i.e completion or supplementary. There was also another text called *Midrash*; it was an exposition, investigation or commentary on the bible.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Buttricks, C.A. *The Interpreters Dictionary of the bible III*. Nashville: Abingdon press 2010, p. 97

<sup>5</sup>Buttricks, C.A. *The Interpreters Dictionary of the bible III*. P. 97

<sup>6</sup>Abe, G.O. *The Religion of the Exile*, (Lagos: New dawn international press, 2005), 36ff

<sup>7</sup>Allen I. A. *Short Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford university press 2001, p.166

<sup>8</sup>The Encyclopedia Britanica. XCII. Chicago: 1981,100

Furthermore, there were two principal rabbinic schools, namely, the Palestinian Talmud and Babylonian Talmud but anti-Talmudic tradition gave birth to some sects in Judaism, namely, the *karaites* sect in Babylon that strongly opposed to oral tradition; the medieval Jewish Mystic which claimed that the Talmud polluted the Torah. The heretical messianic sect rejected all aspects of the Talmud and *Haskala* which is the Jewish Enlightenment Movement and Reformed Judaism scattered the Talmud authority. In like manner, the Christian of the Middle ages condemned the Talmud as an obstacle to the Jews to become Christians.<sup>9</sup>In the NT, rabbi is applied to teachers of the law in general such as John the Baptist (Jh3:26); Jesus Christ our Lord (Jh3:1). Thus it is evident that, in an attempt to develop Judaism, right from the OT to the NT dispensation, various rabbinic sects emerged. The primary and ultimate objectives of the proliferated groups were to modify the Torah and refine Judaism.

### Jewish Sects in the Inter-Testament Period

Tension between the Samaritans and the Jews arose during the pre-exilic periods which culminated in the break of the Samaritans (North) from the Judeans (South). From the Davidic era until the fall of the North in 722/1 B.C, kings and prophets were grouped in two ways.

The 200 years of the Persian rule came to a halt in 333 B.C when Alexander, the Great, conquered the Persian and during the Maccabean revolt of the Hasmonean epic struggle of the Jews, against Hellenistic culture and imperialism, a number of Jewish sects arose within the embracement of Judaism. This occurred during the last two centuries B.C.<sup>10</sup>

The Jews became independent during the revolt especially under John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC).<sup>11</sup>For religious-political reasons, John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on mount Gerizim (Macc.2:1-41; 4:36-60; 13:49-53) though the Samaritan schism lingered until the NT dispensation in the development of Judaism.<sup>12</sup> According to Allen,<sup>13</sup> the Hasidim, a prominent and pious Jewish sect of this period, revolted against the reign of John Hyrcanus. They were nicknamed Pharisees, i.e. separate ones. The Sadducees, an influential Levitical priestly party, was another formidable sect in Judaism. They supported John Hyrcanus; their objective was to glorify Jerusalem and the extension of Judean

boundaries. The conversion of the people was of paramount issue to them.<sup>14</sup> The Essenes, an ascetic sect, was another party in Judaism. They existed from the second century B.C and lasted throughout the ministry period of Jesus Christ until the Jewish war in AD 66-70.<sup>15</sup> There were also varieties of Essenes inspired by an ascetic ideal which sought separation from the ritual impurities of the world around them.<sup>16</sup> The zealots were another party movement with Judaism and their views on political action were virtually in agreement with the Maccabean revolutionaries. They resisted Roman government over the Holy Land.

### Religious Development in the New Testament (NT)

The inter-testament Judaic sects lingered up to the NT dispensation and during the ministry of Jesus Christ; other Jewish parties arose besides the existing ones. Among them were the Scribes, the Herodians and the circumcision party headed by James, the Lord's brother.<sup>17</sup>The Christians were regarded as a sect in Judaism *ab initio*. All of them defended Judaism from different perspectives with obvious disagreements on such issues as theological or doctrinal interpretation of the scripture and practical issues of Jewish/Christians life. However, during the doctrinal development, there were such heretical factions as the Gnostics, the Montanist, the Monarchians and arch-heretic Marcion.<sup>18</sup>Christ recognized cordially all the nobler elements of His ancestral faith and attended its feasts, festivals, synagogues, and studied its sacred book. He revered its great men such as Abraham, the prophets and kings. He discountenanced the literature and civilization of the Orient and West knowing that they had nothing to offer the Jews with bias to salvation.

When His attention was called to an existing sectionalism during His life ministry according to Mark 9:38-40, Jesus approved of it. The crux of the issue is whatever sects or parties that exist in Christendom for the purpose of promoting the gospel of Christ should be encouraged. The inference is drawn from Christ's response about the sects which further reveals Christ approval or nod to unity in diversity. In His response, He posits:

Do not forbid him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able to speak evil of Me soon after. For he that is not against us is for us

<sup>9</sup>The Encyclopedia Britanica. XCII. Chicago: 140

<sup>10</sup>Buttricks, C.A. *The Interpreters Dictionary of the bible III*.(Nashvile: Abingdon press 2010),3

<sup>11</sup>David F. Hinson. *History of Israel*. India: SPCK,1990, 23

<sup>12</sup>Abe G.O. "Religion and National Unity" *Africa Theological Journal*. Vol. 15, No 1, Tanzania 1986, 66ff.

<sup>13</sup>Allen I.A. *Short Introduction to the Old Testament 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*

<sup>14</sup>OgbaOkey. *Exploring Old Testament Vol.1*.(Ibadan: Jilod Nigerian company, 2001) , 125

<sup>15</sup>Richard S. Hess. *Israelites' Religion: and Archaeology and Biblical Survey*.( England: Borker Academy), 2015, 171

<sup>16</sup>Richard S. Hess. *Israelites' Religion: and Archaeology and Biblical Survey*. 194

<sup>17</sup>Heibr D. Edmond. *An Introduction to the New Testament vol. 2*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 19780), 31

<sup>18</sup>Buttrick, G.A. *The interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible III*, 262

In fact, it is claimed in the Luke 10:1 with cross references in Matthew 10:1-4, that there were some other disciples than the regular twelve designated as apostles.

Christ's mission was to fulfill all scriptures. Hence, he did not found any new religion but came to perfect the old. However, His followers generally were christened "those on the way" (Acts 24:14) by the Judaizers and they were later and maidenly called Christians in Antioch according to Acts 11:26.

The destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in AD 70 and the Jewish rebellion

under Bar-kochba in AD 132-135<sup>19</sup> broke the spell that externally bound the Jewish Christians to Judaism when the celebration to Judaism when the celebrated rabbi Akiba was acknowledged as Messiah.<sup>20</sup> The name of Jerusalem was changed to AelinCapitilina<sup>21</sup>; Judaism became again Hebrew and fully pharisaic because the Christians did not join in the Bar-kochba revolt.

It is obvious that by C.AD59 when Paul, the Apostle, was writing to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:11-13, there had been in existence in Corinth some factions among which four were popular namely, Paul, Apollo, Cephas and Christ's factions. From the Pauline theology of this passage it implies that, though, he condemned unhealthy division and dissension in the Church, he did allow sectionalism as long as it is to promote the gospel. In his eschatology, there is a view that in later times, some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirit and doctrines of demons (1Tim. 4:1; II Tim. 3:1ff; 6:3ff; II Tim. 3:8); people would hire for themselves teachers to teach what suits their own liking (II Tim 4:3). This phenomenon in the development of Christianity is no more proliferation of Churches but apostasy and heresy. Like in OT, Paul and other NT writers condemn all traces of idolatry, apostasy, heresy, anti-Christ and false doctrines (Col.2:4-8; 18-23; II Pt. 2:1ff; Jude 1:4-16).

#### **Development of Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The effort and activities of the early missionaries come to front burner in this section. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century after the death of Christ (Anno Domino) the European Christians had embarked upon the evangelization of Africa and as from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, orthodox Churches had been founded in Nigeria among which were the Roman Catholic Church, the Wesleyan Methodist church, the Baptist church, and

the Presbyterian Church. Later on, some Evangelicals and Pentecostals followed. Among them were the Apostolic Faith, the Sudan Interior Mission, United Missionary Society and the Apostolic Church.

Those missionaries were in most cases partners- in-progress with the colonizers of Africa who made Christianity an agent of domination and an enemy of the African people. Early Christian sects and subsequent proliferation of churches were in response to the colonial domination in Africa. These arose to free Africans from foreign culturally oriented Christianity. The various types of religious movements emanating from the missionary orthodox Churches can be classified as follows: the Separatist, the Reformative, the Nativist and the Messianic.<sup>22</sup> They were either to perpetuate or revive some selected African culture and give Christians symbolic values to them, such as songs, drama, dance and ceremonies. This phenomenon saved a lot from frustration, depression and anxieties. These movements were usually led by Charismatic leaders who were gifted with supernatural and visionary experiences akin to the Jewish and traditional religious leader

The Nativist movements were those religious sects that were traditionally oriented. These included that were traditionally oriented. These included the Apostolic and Aladura or praying Churches in Nigeria; the Zionist in South Africa and Zaire Holy Water Movement.<sup>23</sup> While the Nativist was in sharp dissatisfaction with the Orthodox tenets, the Messianic arose from intense hatred of the rejected and colonial domination. The sect rejected traditionally religious features. Among them were the Almighty God of Uganda and the Eglise Jesus Christ of Gabon. The separatists included the African Congregational Church, the Banto Methodist Church in South Africa, the Ethiopian Churches and the Church of the Lord, Aladura in West Africa. Some of those under this typology are orthodox in tenet and liturgy. The Reformative is in a different class altogether. It is to preserve traditional African Religious tenet with integrated Christian elements in its belief and rituals.<sup>24</sup> Movement of this sect eventually turned traditionally, socially, and politically oriented and thus labeled secret societies. Some of them were the Buriti in Gabon, the reformed Ogboni society in Nigerian. Obviously, apostasy, idolatry, syncretism and heresy became phenomenal feature of the reformative movements.

<sup>19</sup>Peel, D.Y. Aladura: *A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2008),85

<sup>20</sup>Peel, D.Y. Aladura: *A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*. London. 89

<sup>21</sup>Peel, D.Y. Aladura: *A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*. London. 141

<sup>22</sup>Faulkne, J.A. *African Religious Movements*. (Finland, Doughy Press, 2008),23

<sup>23</sup>Faulkne, J.A. *African Religious Movements*. Finland, 34

<sup>24</sup>Turner, H.W. African Prophet Movement" in *Herbert Journal XLI*, Oxford: 2007, 37ff

### **Growth of Indigenous Churches**

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of indigenous churches had sprung up all over the nooks and crannies of the country with names such as The Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Christ Jesus Apostolic Church among others. According to Omoyajowo, there were schisms in the C&S between 1932 and 1934<sup>25</sup> with numerous small groups or smaller denominations existing under C&S title or another.

Proliferation of churches was not peculiar to the local or parish congregation only as there were/ are features of it in higher institutions of learning with names such as GOFAMINT student fellowships (GSF), Foursquare student fellowship (FSF), The Federation of Roman catholic Students, just to mention a few. There are also numerous independent groups which include scripture union (S.U), Student Christian movement (SCM), and so on.

Without mincing word, indigenous churches have grown tall and straight in the length and breadth of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

### **Problems and Causes of Proliferation**

There is no institution without teething problems and religious institutions, with a reference to Christianity, is not an exception. An examination of Christianity and development has revealed that a lot of factors are attributed to the emergence of the ever increasing proliferation of churches. Among such factors are genuine thirst for spiritual nourishment and theological issues bothering on thorough biblical study, doctrinal issue, modalities for biblical recommended, efficacious and fervent prayer, propagation and evangelistic crusade. Worship is another major factor, in that; there has never been any consensus of uniformity on the church practices such as baptism, confirmation, laying of hands, marriage, Holy Eucharist and so on. Church administration which largely has to do with hierarchical tussle and position consciousness is another factor and this has grossly split a lot of churches. These inexhaustive lists of causes of church proliferation will not fail to mention monetary and material greediness, popularly referred to as corruption as one of the factors. The aforementioned causes and many others have constituted major barriers to Christian unity and strength.

### **Towards Religion (Christianity) and Sustainable Development: An Appraisal**

There has been some critical appraisal of the proliferation of churches in certain quarters. While some are in favour, others are against. This work,

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<sup>25</sup>Omoyajowo, J.A. *Cherubim and Seraphim*.(New York: NOX Publishers International, 1982), 65

however, considers a total condemnation of the phenomenon as being concomitantly tantamount to unfair assessment, hypocrisy and fallacy of hasty generalization. Hence, the examination of the summary of the Pauline doctrine on Church proliferation in Philippians 1:15-18 which reads thus:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely supposing to add affliction to my bonds. But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth Christ is preached and I therein also rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (NIV)

The content of faith continues to change indefinitely, though only in the "outer layer". The inner core remains unmodified. Every religious system certainly contains fundamental beliefs and rites that are highly resistant to modification. Christ is the foundation, center, head, author and finisher of the Christian faith. Whatever the causes of the Church proliferation are, one thing is obvious, the various denominations or sects are anchored by one and the same Christ as revealed by and in the scriptures (John 3:12, 16).

As to which Church is genuine, no individual is qualified to determine it with unquestionable finality. Hence, this paper suggests a halt to all features of fanaticism, unhealthy rivalry, condemnation of one another, self-justification in all denominations bearing in mind that, Jesus Christ warns against judging one another.

According to Paul, the apostle, the proliferation of churches is a phenomenon to reckon with in the development of Christianity and it will continue to be a belated effort to attempt its crush. Obviously, proliferation of churches has widely and really contributed immensely to sustainable development with clear cut evidences in the areas of health, education, technology, civilization, modernization, and welfarisation of lives.

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