

# International Journal of Culture and Religious Studies

(IJCRS)

Church and Society from Socio-Religious Perspective



## Church and Society from Socio-Religious Perspective



Otasowie, Matthew Omoruyi (PhD)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3300-2228>



Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City

*Accepted: 21<sup>st</sup> Aug, 2025, Received in Revised Form: 10<sup>th</sup> Sep, 2025, Published: 21<sup>st</sup> Sep, 2025*

### ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to discuss the roles Church play in society. A Church is a Christian institution. As a religious institution it installs patriotism and acceptance of current arrangement of power. The term social institution refers to concrete and highly relevant realities that affects our lives. The church with its sacred books, clergy, and worship constitute a social institution. Religion is an institution with a complex of practical, sociological and experimental dimensions, which is distinguished by characteristic objects; gods, salvation and giving meaning to life. Sociologists consider religious Institutions as church, denominations, sect and cult. The Church is an agent of socialization, it is the custodian of spiritual needs of the society. The method adopted in the study is critical analysis. Findings in this article is that Christianity began like a grain and seed planted upon the soil that grew mightily. The longing of the missionaries was fulfilled, as the grain grew into a tree of life (Prov.13:12). A church is a large organization with a hierarchy of officials. It ministers to all members of society. The method adopted in the study is sociological and critical analysis. The church performs some functions that are observed empirically such as marriage, solving youth problems, burial, educating the young through Sunday school and catechism. Man should love his fellow man, to keep the law of love make the soul sound, love is the bond of perfection. Among the Jews in the early church the social bond was always a bond of blood while among the Christians the social bond was bond of the spirit, discipleship. The Christians form community and association to replace the Jewish 'mishpaha' (clan or community).

**Keywords:** *Church, Society, Christian Relations*

## INTRODUCTION

A Church according to Oxford Dictionary is a building where Christians go to worship. It is the place where register or records of births, marriages and deaths in a parish are kept. The Church also refers to the body of Christians. The Christian authorities describe Church as the “mystical body of Christ” (Colossians 1:24, Pope Pius XII’ encyclical *mystici corporis Christi*, first published on July 1943). ‘That the Church is a body’ means three things, first, as a body, the church is a concrete and visible organization. It is not a hidden kingdom (Smith, 1944:6), a material institution of which sinners are an integral part. Secondly, within the church, all members help each other.

The individual members do not live only for themselves, they are co-operating with one another. Third, as a concrete and co-operative body, the church is visibly and organically structured. This shows the church has members not having the same function yet properly co-ordinated (Werner, 1972:67)

Another view is a Church is ‘a sort of trust foundation for supernatural ends, an institution, necessarily including both the just and the unjust’ (Michael, 1973:47). The message of salvation has been laid out in institutional terms, that is in terms of the Church and the sacraments. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) statement when the church was facing crisis was ‘outside the church there was no salvation’ (*‘extra ecclesiam nulla salus est’*). He made this statement when the church was facing persecution during emperor Decius in 249 AD.

During Decius reign, many bought libelous or permit to stay alive or beheaded. Large number of Christians lapsed from the faith. The tradition of the church sees salvation in terms of Church and Sacraments (Andrew W. 1998:82).

The term ‘church’ refers to a large, formal organization with a hierarchy of officials. In theory it ministers to all members of a society. It recruits from all social strata, but in practice, higher status groups are usually represented in its congregations. A church identifies economic structure of society. A church generally accepts the norms and values of society and frequently regards itself as the guardian of the established social order (p. 17-p. 22).

### **Culture in the early Church:**

Christianity borrowed from many quarters, the wealth and vigour of its contemporary religions. These religions fertilized the ground for it, and the new grain and seed which fell upon that soil sent down its roots and grew to be a mighty tree. It was a religion which embraces everything, with name, the name of Jesus Christ, sums up everything (Werner 1969). The church represents a synthesis of all earlier religious ideas and sentiments in so far as they are capable of being combined with the Gospel. The chief apostles, Peter and Paul, saw very clearly that the community which was forming under their hands would not be like a lake (Acts 10:9-16). Christianity cannot be divorced of culture, the Christian message takes its colouring from the medium through which

it was conveyed. This was seen in Matthew's Gospel which was directed to people with a Jewish background, and Luke's Gospel which was directed to people in the Greco-Roman world. For example, Matthew uses the phrase 'kingdom of Heaven' thirty-three times, and 'kingdom of God' only four times, because the name of Yahweh was ritually avoided amongst Jews, and used by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies; whereas Luke uses only 'Kingdom of God, as 'kingdom of Heaven' would not have been understood by the Greeks (Oosthuizen 1968: 238).

The sects in the Jewish society in the time of Jesus were the Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and the anawim. The Sadducees were a kind of aristocracy; they were the priestly nobility with which the officers and officials of the Hasmonaeen dynasty were closely allied. The Sadducees religion reduced itself to the cult. They were ceremonialists and Hellenizers. The Pharisees were a kind of bourgeoisie: St. Luke describes them as covetous and mammonistic (Luke 16: 14). The Pharisees religion reduced itself to the law. They were formalists and men of means. The Zealots were largely recruited from the lower classes and for this reason Jesus has often been connected with them. They hated the foreigners, especially the Romans. Jesus set little hope on the Sadducees, Pharisees but could only win odd individuals of their kind over to his side. Jesus message was first received by the anawim, a Hebrew word which means the poor. It was from them that Jesus expected a living response to his call of love, and it was from them that most of the early disciples were recruited. His most essential teaching was addressed to them: the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5: 1-6). It was of them that Jesus thought when he said: "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me" (John 10:14).

The anawim were not simply the poor, they were 'the poor in spirit', that is those who were innocent in mind, those who had built no barriers between the Gospel and their hearts. The poor in earthly goods and 'the poor in spirit' no doubt largely coincided (Werner, 1969:58). In the view of Werner (1969) Jesus was the founder of the Christian faith. The leaders or protagonists of the Christian faith after Jesus Christ were three: they are St James, St Peter and St. Paul. St James was the leader of the Christians in the city of Jerusalem around A.D. 48, he was second after Jesus. Sources of the patristic age evince a tendency to say that he occupied the see of Jerusalem. St James presided over the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). St. Paul was the agent of the apostles to foreign mission. He had to spread the Gospel through the Gentile world even before the council of Jerusalem; and he was to do so with even more vigour after it. He initiated the churches, invigorated and made them grow. He was a disciplinarian. In order to describe Paul of Tarsus correctly, one need a concept as minor founder. St. Paul has something of a founder about him. He was indeed the head of the world-wide community of Christians rapidly forming in his day (Col. 1:25, Gal. 2:11-12, I Cor. 14:40).

The early church conceptualized Peter, the second founder. Jesus' words to him, recorded in the last chapter of St. John's Gospel- 'Feed my Lambs, feed my sheep' (John 21:15-17) are a moving testimony of this sacred charge, this imposition of a duty, this entrustment with a role. In St. Peter's

case as founder, four administrative actions are recorded which prove that he was a technical administrator: (i) he arranged the election of an additional apostle to replace Judas Iscariot and presided over the proceedings; (ii) he acted as speaker of the group; (iii) he acted as defender of the group; and (iv) he exercised disciplinary authority, as in the trials of Ananias, Saphira and Simon Magus (Acts 1:15, 2:14'4:8, 5:1, 5:29, 8:18), Werner, 1969:86. Justine one of the early church fathers said, 'all cultures were inspired by God and should be used for his service. He holds that all cultures prefigure Christ; A Logos spermatikos (seed bearing word)'. An other church father Augustine thought that "as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith was not to be preoccupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither was it to reject or destroy any of these , but rather it should observe and conserve them" (Iyangbe, 2021).

Religious institutions are the visible and organized manifestations of practices and beliefs in particular social and historical contexts. Like human emotions and attitudes, religious beliefs and practices project outward onto the social and historical plan. They create identities and representations, and determine attitudes, emotions, and behaviour. These manifestations and outward projections originate from beliefs and practices, but are also limited by historical contexts. Geographical, social, and political considerations modify attitudes and practices. Religious institutions, then, take shape in relation to both religious and contextual configurations (Encyclopedia. Com). Jesus instituted the celebration of the Eucharist, the real and effective memorial or remembrance of the decisive Christian facts of redemption, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Aylward, 1975:114).

Sociologists of religion divide religious organizations into four main types: the ecclesia, the sect, the denomination, and the cult. Each varies from the other in organizational structure, scope of influence, and membership, as well as in the social relations and social system in which it is generally found. Sociologists also classify the vast majority of social relations and systems found among human beings in different parts of the world into two types: the community and the society, although both types are often called by other names (Wilson and Kolb, 652).

Some religious organizations emerge and thrive best in a Local or folk society; while others emerge and thrive best in the larger community or the associational society. For example; the ecclesia as a religious organization is found in the associational society because it is "large all-embracing religious association which includes all or most of the members of a particular society, and in some cases may extend beyond national boundaries (Wilson and Kolb).

The sect, on the other hand, is also a religious organization of the larger communal society but it may be described also as a religious protest group which seeks to isolate itself permanently from the larger society, especially from established churches. Denominations may simply be described as sects in advanced stage of development (Kalu 1978:391). The word denomination was adopted in England and America because it carried no implication of a negative value judgment. The one Church is composed of ecclesiastical groups or denominations.



Denominationalism is the opposite of sectarianism. By definition, a sect is exclusive- separate. The word “denomination” is an inclusive term- an ecumenical term. It implies that the group referred to is but one member, called or denominated by a particular name- the Church- which all denominations belong (Puckett, 2001).

Religious sociologists consider religious institutions in four ways; church, denomination, sect and cult. The word church and denomination are applied to mainline religious organizations, while sect and cult are applied to relatively small groups that are marginal (Saliba, 1995:8). Again, Saliba says, sects denote those religious communities which have splintered from one of the major churches while cults are composed of converts from different traditional backgrounds who gather around a charismatic leader. A charismatic leader is the person who has the energy (or moved by the ‘spirit’), zeal to command people and to speak to them and they are ready to listen or obey.

### **Jewish- Christian religion and Society**

Religion developed in a community, and a society is made of its members. The features of Israel's society as reflected in the Bible are polygamy and Levirate marriage. Polygamy was one of the ethical demands of old Israel. Levirate institution is when brethren dwell together, and one of them died without children (Deuteronomy XXV,5), ‘the wife of the deceased shall not marry to another; but his brother shall take her, and raise up seed for his brother’. The intention was, by engendering a son for his dead brother, the living will, in a manner, counter -mand his brother’s death (Pedersen, 1954, its life and culture. London and Copenhagen, p.70). Werner (1972) writes, just how deep this idea was rooted in Israel's culture and society, can be seen from the pathetic story of Tamar (Genesis xxxiii). Tamar was the wife of Her, but he died before she became pregnant.

The religious content of both old Testament and New Testament has a collectivistic mentality. God asks the patriarch Abraham to offer up to him, as a sacrifice Isaac, his ‘only begotten son’, and Abraham was ready to obey (Gen. XXII). But the slaughter of Isaac was happily avoided, this act is to the Christian theologians merely a figure, a prophetic fore-telling, of the execution of Jesus at Calvary. John 3:16 God so loved the world as to give his only begotten son is a pointer to old testament story. This presupposes a re-entry, at least in imagination into the cultural context of another age.

The spirit of a society in Jewish terms was classified by the words ‘mishpaha’, ‘bayya’ and ‘eleph’, the three describing the extended family, the kin or clan. Mishpaha means in the first place a common source of life, a community of being. Mishpaha also means a unity in the flesh (one body) and a unity of the mind (one soul). It is, in other words, a total unity (Werner 1972:27. In the Jewish thought, an individual can represent the people. In the Bible Joseph (or Jacob or Dan) may sometimes designate an individual and sometimes a tribe- so small was the difference in meaning to the Hebrew mind.

Mishpaha refers the patriarch age, the Jewish community in collective terms. The family began with Abraham, Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 48: 21-22). The old man (Jacob) suddenly grows into a tribe which has conquered an important part of the land of Canaan and leaves it to another tribe, Joseph including two more tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh (Pedersen, 1954). Mishpaha means clan and clans grow into tribes, by David's time (1000 BC). It has grown, that he addressed them as "you are my brethren; you are my bone and my flesh" (2 kings XIX, 12).

The widest circle to which the collectivistic, the clan-like, the familial, conception of unity is applied in the old Testament was the House of Israel'. Christianity continued the Israelite belief or conviction that all Jews are brothers, in feeling and thought. It continued the Israelite tradition by seeing societies as wholes, and went further to define all men as a community in guilt and in merit. All men are Adam's clan, his mishpaha, not only those who derived further from and through Noah and Abraham; it was the race that fell when the first man, father of all, set his will to his maker (Werner, 1972).

The fundamental teaching in the Jewish conception is contained in Leviticus XIX, 18 that man should love his fellow man. It is common to Christians and Jews. In love the soul acts in accordance with its nature, because it is created to live in connection with other souls. The commandment of love is a direct expression of the character of the soul and the organism of family and people. He who keeps the law of love, shows that the soul is sound (Pedersen 1954, 309, 310). Love is the bond of perfection as St. Paul calls it in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, is conceived in the old testament as it is in the New, and in both there shows, shines, through the ethical and religious commandment the reality of the God.

The revolutionary act by means of which the Christian religion freed itself from, and rose superior to the national and nationalistic limitations of the Jewish creed, was the expulsion of the physiological element from the definition of community. With the Jews, the social bond was always a bond of blood; descent meant filiation 'per ovum et sperma'. For Christianity, the social bond is a bond of the spirit, descent means filiation by discipleship (Werner 1972, 30). In the concept of mishpaha, the city community is where fellow-citizen becomes a brother ((Ruth 4:3), Judges 9:18)), there is collective responsibility. The townsmen must stand and fall together like one kin, and one man (1 kings xxii, 19).

### **The Functions of the Church**

The Church is the mystical body of Christ: The mystical body when compared to a moral body, there is a difference, for in a moral body the only principle of unity is a common end and a common aspiration of all. In a mystical body, there is in addition to this common aspiration another internal principle, the divine spirit, which fills and unifies the whole Church (Werner, 1972:68).

The Church is called ‘the bride of Christ’, the image of the bride, to which must be added that of a mother. The early Church fathers had two concepts of Church: the ‘suffering’ church and the incarnate church, and the triumphant church. The suffering church referred to souls in purgatory that need the help of the incarnate church, the incarnate church is in communion with the triumphant church in heaven.

The Jews and Christian community had concepts of Sainthood as a source of blessing for the not-so-saintly. The Jews has philosophy of life which says, “the blessed gives to the others because their strength pours from him and up around him”. The important thing is to ally oneself closely with the blessed and to get one’s share of his gifts. Both Jacob and Joseph, in strange countries, were possessed of the power to spread blessing among their surroundings. Wherever the man who has the blessing in him goes, happiness must spring up and others must get blessing, because he has the mysterious power of the strong soul to inspire them with his strength.

The Church function as a community and as an association. Arnold Rademacher (1931) claims that the church is both community and association: she is community according to her essence and association according to her appearance. Community is the inner core while association is the outer. For example, a particular church, St. John’s church has a population of two thousand, both men, women and children. This population forms a Christian community of the church. Among this community there will be different groups like women association, men association, youth wing, choristers and church walden. The community is the ‘noumenon’, the idea, whereas the ecclesiastical apparatus is the appearance, the phenomenon (Werner, 1972:73). Whenever there is association and co-operation purely on contractual basis there is also something like friendship, like a family, like an organism integrated in body and soul. The poor are not excluded from the association (4 kings 5:13). The association is an educator, like Jesus was a teacher, prophet and healer. The Church plays the role of educating, counselling, prophesying and healing.

The Church has the power of binding and loosing, it refers to praying for the dead that they may be loosed from sins. It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead (2 Macchabees 12:46). The Pentecostals use binding and loosing during healing services, binding satan.

A Church brings people together and helps some individual cope with daunting thought. She offer some comfort over uncertainty, offer a singular answer to life and allows for social cohesion of a society through its shared beliefs. She unite a society under a system of belief, which leads to the group’s ability to successfully interact within itself and allows for social control. A Church served as a model for how life should exist. She demonstrates how individual should conduct themselves in every day life basing their life on Jesus example (Matthew 19:16). Church gives society rules of conduct in which adherents should live by (<https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/cultural-Anthropology/Ritual-and-Religion>). Church help people



to adjust, some will complain of no hope, they have lost parents, jobs, due to violence, they want to fight but church counsellors will tell them to have hope, love and sow good seed.

Some who were previously practicing Christians, went through Christian schools but have wonder far from the faith still remember sometimes they were married and baptized in the old church. They sometimes slipped quietly into the usual rear pew. They see Sunday morning services as a soothing contrast, a little R. and R. for the spirit after the chaos of Saturday night. The serenity and beauty, the traditional words and music, the good and decent people, salved ones soul (Buchanna, 1990).

### **Doctrines and Forms of worship in the Early Church**

The theology of the first century's church was a synthesis. It was first a synthesis between the Jewish tradition of monotheism and the Greek tradition of polytheism. The church was driven to the conclusion that the proposition that 'God is one' contains the truth, but she was also driven to the conclusion that it is as true to say that 'God is more than one single and simple person'. In the Nicene creed, the struggle between unity and multiplicity was finally concluded. It was the concept synthesis, which give Christians the key to understanding of the thought- process which dominated the religious discussions up to the council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 and the council of Constantinople in 381. Synthesis, however, or unification, as it might also be called, was essentially the intellectual concomitant of the principle of community in real life. It was their effort to overcome disunity and dispersion, and to achieve unity and integration (Werner, 1972:78). Gnosticism was a powerful movement which the early church fought against. The wide spread philosophy which questioned the Christian belief in monotheism was also a problem. There were other doctrinal crises in the early church such as monarchianism, Arianism, Docetism and Marcionism. It is not impossible that the Gospel according to St John, (one of Christian most sacred sources), was written to refute the theology of such beliefs.

Forms of worship, prayer and sacrifice were both communal. Men must pray, not with Christ, but also, and much rather, in him, for only so can their prayer be truly collective. What applies to prayer applies also to sacrifice. Men cannot offer more, and they must not offer less, to God than themselves. As they offer themselves constantly, the supreme act of worship can therefore be nothing else but a cultic representation and repetition of Jesus' life. The believers in the early church accepted the gospel message, repented, got baptized and devoted themselves to teaching, sharing, breaking bread and prayer.

Repetition may lead to routine or what Max Weber called 'routinization'. The liturgy of the Eucharist is primarily an action. St. Luke's Gospel records the essential action on the part of Jesus (Luke22:19). Routinization of charisma which originally came from Weber refers to progressive abandonment of the original inspiration. Werner S. (1972) said this is the opposite as people are stubbornly clinging to the original way. In Saliba, J.A. (1975) view people who move

away from the churches that practice eucharistic celebration, who were nominal members of the churches of their upbringing. After joining sects or cults became enthusiastic, dedicated and committed members. The priest is not in possession of the power of the spirit of God in the form of 'nabi' all the time in worship. Prophecy is a charisma, that says nothing about the orthodoxy or moral character of the prophet (Ndiokwere 1981:6-7).

### **Sects and Cults among Christians**

The term 'cult' is often applied to new religions. Martin Walter in Saliba J.A. New in Saliba Religious movement, defines a cult as 'a group, religious in nature, which surrounds a leader or a group of teachings which either denies or misinterprets essential biblical doctrine'. While James Sire defines cult as, "any religious movement that is organizationally distinct and has doctrines or practices that contradict those of the scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity as represented by the major Catholic and Protestant denominations and as expressed in such statement as the Apostles' creed' (Saliba, 1995:2). Martin's and Sire's views are representative of many Christians who are concerned with the presence and activities of the new movements. Most of the features of the new religions that Martin lists are theological or religious in nature. Thus, for example, he points out that a cult possesses a new scripture which is either added to or replaces the Bible as sole revealed word of God. Cults believe in ongoing revelation and stress experience rather than theological reasoning. They imbue common theological parlance with connotations that are quite different from what most Christians accept.

The traditional meaning of 'cult' (Cultus in Latin) is a specific form of worship or ritual within a religious tradition. It referred to groups some judged to be deviant, dangerous, corrupt and pseudoreligious. Cults have been denounced as religious paths that falsely claim to preach the truth and lead human kind to salvation. Since they are perceived as spiritually corrupt, the response to them has been dominated by apologetic debates and by a crusading spirit reminiscent of the religious controversies and conflict of the post-Reformation era (Saliba, 1995).

The definition encourages Christians to engage in a stronger and more direct evangelization endeavour, to preach more effectively the true biblical message, to attempt to win back those who have abandoned their traditional faith and to condemn more emphatically the doctrine of the new religions. The problem in the definition of cult is that it leaves unsolved the question of Christian orthodoxy. The narrower definition proposed by Martin is that of evangelical Christianity, a criterion that excludes several well-established churches and sects which are judged to be unorthodox.

Second, the definition fails to acknowledge the variety of beliefs and practices that one encounters among the new religions themselves. Even if one approaches them from a specific and narrow theological perspective, it would be impossible to label them all 'unorthodox'.

Third, the definition did not address the question of religious pluralism. Why do some people brought up in one particular religious tradition abandon their faith? The definition fails to answer many of the fundamental issues related to the emergence of these new religious groups.

The presence of new religious movements could indefinitely urge believers of different traditions to foster a deeper understanding of their respective faiths and strive for a clearer exposition and defense of their beliefs and practices. The theological definition of a cult relied on normative principles that distinguished orthodox from unorthodox Christianity. The churches ritual or worship is usually conducted in the public, that is in a church with many people in attendance. Cult activities are mostly conducted in the night with lots of secrecy, and a common feature in cults is that they are every where but appeared anonymous (Otasowie, 2020).

Psychological definitions: this aspect focused on the way the new religious movements recruit and maintain their members and how they affect those who join them. Two distinct and opposed ideas of what a cult is has emerged in psychological and psychical literature. The first definition is that cults are dangerous institutions that cause severe mental and emotional harm to those who commit themselves to their creeds and lifestyles. A cult is considered a spurious, pseudoreligious group headed by a powerful leader who dominates the life of his or her followers and offers them false solutions to all their problems. It recruits members by deceitful means, then indoctrinates them and controls them by methods of mind control. Cults are therefore, destructive groups or organizations (Shapiro, 1977).

Philip Cushman defines a cult as a group that: “is controlled by a charismatic leader who is thought to be God or someone who carries an exclusive message from God that elevates him or her above others; fosters the idea that there is only one correct belief and only one correct practice of that belief; demands unquestionable loyalty and complete obedience to its restrictive ideas, rules, and totalistic methods; uses deception and deceit when recruiting and interacting with the outside world; systematically exploits a member’s labour and finances; attacks and or abandons members who disagree with or leave the group (Philip, 1984).

Those psychologists and psychiatrists who propound this view contend that they have arrived at this negative definition of a cult through their counseling of ex-cult members, whose behavioral patterns suggest that their intellectual and emotional lives have been literally impaired by the teachings and lifestyle of the new religions. They further imply that membership in a new religion cannot be looked upon as a result of a free act of commitment given careful consideration.

The appeal of this definition has been phenomenal. It has been adopted by many evangelical Christians and incorporated into their theological definition of a cult and employed as a weapon to denounce cults in general (Lebar, 1989). Part of the reason why so many people have accepted this approach is that it does offer very comforting news both to parents and ex-cult members. Parents can look at their offspring’s involvement in a new religious movement as a rash and hasty action

taken under duress or pressure, with little knowledge of the cult itself and even less awareness of what full commitment entailed. They can explain the changes in the behavior of their sons and daughters by having recourse to the theory that membership in a new religion has rendered them so sick that they are in need of traditional psychiatric help. Ex-members, on the other hand, may find this explanation comforting since it assumes that, when they adopted and clung to their new religious lifestyles, they were not acting as free, responsible persons. This means they felt called to the new religious movements.

New religious movements are judged to be helpful organizations that provide an alternative therapy to many young adults as they are faced with making momentous decisions at important junctures in their lives. Cult membership, it is claimed has led many people to give up their addictions to drug and alcohol and to introduce in their lives a measure of intellectual security, emotional stability, and organized behavioral patterns that contrast sharply with their previously confused and chaotic existences (Saliba, 1995).

In Akiwowo (1969) it was said, Nigerians use the word ‘cult’ when referring to Ogboni, owegbe, and ekpe secret societies, these societies are of Nigerian origin and are secular. The term ‘cult’ was also associated with organizations with secret codes, passwords and signs, as well as with sinister magical activities. And to most uninitiated Nigerian, the secret societies mentioned carry a sinister connotation. As far as a sociologist is concerned, however, the cult as a religious organization differs only slightly from sects. In the sect, the member seeks personal religious satisfaction in order to strengthen the organization of the sect; in the cult each member seeks the highest emotional satisfaction in and for himself and not with a view to reinforcing the group. The secular cult groups are: the black axe, daughters of jezebel, the amazon, the klansmen and few others common among students. The main thrust of psychology is to relate involvement in intense religious groups to specific forms of human psychopathology.

**Sociological Definition:** Max Weber (1864-1920) wrote on Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, in his work, he elaborated on prophecy, the idea of charisma (spiritual power), routinization, and other categories which became tools to deal with the comparative material. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) in an extensive literature on religious sects distinguished between church and sect. Bryan Wilson (1929) was one of the modern investigators on sectarianism. He attempted to use the insights of sociology in the work of evangelism and other church related activities (The New Encyclopedia Britannica 1973, Vol.15, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., London, p.621).

### **Sectarianism**

The different sects began after the Reformation of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Leaders of the sects were thought to possess extraordinary personal abilities, but decades of research have failed to produce convincing evidence of the so-called “natural leaders”. No particular individual traits

seem to qualify a person as a leader; rather, the needs of the group itself dictate the type of leaders who will be most effective (Maciouis, 1993:178).

The converts of the sects came from all the lowest classes, figures so low in status that nobody wanted to be associated with them. The type of workers who had no skills, with low standard of living, and with dreadful insecurity of their livelihood. These people were not attracted to the worship places of the established religion (Werner, 1967:27). The sects were religious groups that rejects the social environment in which they came to life. Man's social circumstances, make for a conservative attitude and would predispose one for membership in an established church, but where his personality structure is such that he will become estranged from respectable society, he may drift into alienation and revolt, and end up in some sect, even a sect of the poor. Sects are essentially manifestations of social dissatisfactions. Pressures drives some persons into the direction of a sect, the failure of a personality to integrate himself harmoniously in established society is always a social phenomenon as well as a psychological one, due as much to qualities of the common life as to qualities or lack of qualities, in a personal character (Werner, 1967:43-45).

An increase in size would normally be the goal of an evangelical sect. As the sect gains more adherents, this is a promise of success, it begins to reach out towards greater influence in society, whatever the roots of its ambition may be. Individual experiences count in Christian organization, purely personal ecstatic experience, comfort, mental and physical healing (Michael, 1973). A few members of any sect were likely to prosper, sometimes as a result of personal qualities and more often by chance, and as they become responsible. Pursuit of holiness was the ideal. One of the privileges of being leaders in ministries was, it emancipated the sinner from all distractions and freed him to save his soul by practicing the counsels of perfection (Brainton, 1960).

In the orthodox churches the sanctuary was the centre, the sacred was 'reserved', the spirit was remote. There was a charismatic leader or charisma was attached to the leader of an office (Michael, 1973:91). With the sects the centre shifted since the 'spirit blows where it wills'. Religious experience is the unifying force, facing the immediate presence of the spirit, the members form a compact, unified group. Having different sects has lead to proliferation of churches and pluralistic tendency. The different sects have their traditions, religious formulas and styles of praying. In fact, every month, around 20 new religious sects start up in Nigeria (Breuilly and Palmer, Sainsbury's Religions of the world).

A sect is a relatively small religious group. Its members are usually, though by no means always, drawn from the lower classes and the poor. Sects institute a strict pattern of behavior for members to follow and make strong claims on their loyalty. They often reject many of the norms and values of the wider society and replace them with beliefs and practices which sometimes appear strange to the non-members.

### **Leadership in the Church**



Leadership implies the existence of “followership”, and it also connotes leading others, presumably by example or taking the followers in a particular direction. A leader, leads by expressing the common aspirations of the people and leading them in a particular direction. A leader is supposed to possess certain qualities, of decision making, courage, will power, fitness, moderate living, tact and diplomacy, honesty (Ayodeji,O.). A leader must see himself as part of the body that made the decision and also, by his own personal ways of life, officially and privately, give effect to the decision and ensure that as many people as he can influence, directly or otherwise, do likewise. That is how the leadership role which the public servant has to play in the society can be manifested (Oyediran, O. 1981).

In the church vocation, Christian service and calling are terms used in recruitment of clergy, clergy are not employed: they have a living. They do not have a career: they are fulfilling a vocation. They are not pursuing a profession: they are exercising a ministry. In some churches, training for Christian service is an acceptable term: in at least one church, the term formation is normally used. Promotion is a worldly concept: in the church, there is preferment. In some situations in the church, death seems to be the only acceptable form of retirement. There is a permanent and indelible character of holy orders; vows are made for life; appointments to certain offices in the church are for life- and so there is a deeply held view that only death can release a person from obligations of office (Rudge, 1976).

Besides the ministerial offices there is an employment sector in the Christian world. Employment in Christian bookshop would be on a contractual basis with the employing body. Service in the headquarters of a missionary society is, in respect of personnel provisions, very similar to the staffing situation in many secular offices. The same applies to diocesan offices and denominational headquarters and to some local churches. Many of the members of staff of a Christian school or hospital or children’s home are paid employees with their respective conditions of service (Rudge, 1976:22).

The condition of service for non-clerical staff is sometimes not clearly set out. The provision for sick leave, often this is left to the generosity of the employer without having specific provisions laid down. On occasions, the question of pension provision may be over looked and attempts may be made rather late in a person’s service to establish some formula which will give security in the years beyond retirement. The solution is relatively simple: to take the principles of employment laid down in the secular world as a checklist and ensure that some suitable provision is made to cover each contingency (Rudge, 1976 :22). What is paid in secular society may be compared to church service.

## **Conclusion**

In the early church (1 A.D- 500 A.D.), the Christians witnessed persecution especially in the first 300 years, but with the conversion of emperor Constantine, they gain freedom. The church

held different councils beginning with the council of Jerusalem (48/49 A.D.), Nicaea (325 A.D.), Constantinople (381 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.) to settle doctrinal issues. The Roman emperors after Constantine viewed their empire as a Christian society.

In the period 500 to 1500 A.D., the church has reached the global world with monks playing unique role in the planting of Christianity. Many monasteries were established in different parts of the world. The monks contributed to establishing education and scholasticism. There was intermingling of church and state. Formal education began in the Middle Ages. Education in the Medieval period was gradually becoming formalized. The moral teacher took its morality from the sages (Charles, 1973). The English Universities in the Middle Ages were clerical institutions. They remained so in the sixteenth century. Desiderius Erasmus (C. 1466-1536 A.D.) was one of the famous teachers (Charles, 1973). In 1450 Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz invented movable type of printing. This made available to many the books which had been the property of the few-institutions (Walker, 1959).

With the advent of Protestantism and their doctrines, the Christian world divided into two. Luther and Calvin gained their followers in nations previously Catholics. Lutheranism spread through Germany and the Scandinavian countries, and from there to America. Calvin moved from Switzerland into the Rhine Valley, providing the theological impulse of the Huguenots in France, the Protestants in Holland, the Puritans of England, and the Presbyterians of Scotland and America (Hugh, 1990).

In the Medieval society church and state in Europe came to be a coterminous Christianity (Church) became woven into the essential fabric of west European Society. At the apex of this society were the monarchs who acted as major ecclesiastical patrons. They were drawn into constant 'demarcation disputes' with the papacy. Much medieval political controversy involved monarchical efforts to restrain the theocratic pretensions of successive pontiffs (Medhurst and Moyser, 1988). There was yet no separation between church and state. Through the spread of the British Empire, the church of England moved round the world. With the break, the 'Church of England' became a national monarchically governed 'church of England' (Breuilly and Palmar).

Unlike the Catholics that use monks and different religious orders in evangelism, the protestants mainly use lay men before pastors were sent or ordained. Education was the next means the different missions reach the people. They open schools to teach the young ones who became the seeds of the church.

Finally, Jesus was the prince of peace. His message was not that of violence but to bring change in the religious belief system. He was out to bring to the world the awareness of the almighty God. The Christians since the early church have been talking to people about the right way to worship this God, the message of salvation. The Church is a "community" and a "family" of God. The Church community transcends cultural ties, especially among city dwellers made up of different

tribes and cultures. The Christian family in the church enhance cooperation, but sometimes the cooperation is limited to those belonging to one's own culture or group. The leadership of the church need to pay attention to the cultural plurality of the society with the goal of uniting all. Christianity in this contemporary time was homogenous in the sense that some people belonged to more than one denomination. They are registered in one church but attending Pentecostal fellowships in other churches. The next problem is that people frequently relocate either as a result of transfer or acquiring new home. As they move the choice of "their church" often gives way to "the available church". When the desirable is not available, the available becomes desirable. Secondly, the African man does not want to be lost in the crowd. He wants to be known and given the opportunity to contribute his quota to the development of the society. This is based on the African concept of socialization as it helps him to be properly integrated.

## REFERENCES

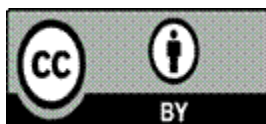
- Adam, K. (1937) *The Spirit of Catholicism*, transl., Mclann, J. New York. Pp.133-5, in Werner S. (1972). *The Sociology of Religion* Vol. 5.
- Adogame, and Omoyajowo, A. (1998) *Anglicanism and the Aladura churches in Nigeria: Anglicanism, A Global Communion*. A Wingate, k. Ward, C. Pemberton and W. Sitshebo (eds). Mowbray: British Library Cataloguing –in- publication data. P.95.
- Akiwowo, A. (1969) *Christian Denominations in Nigeria: The Nigerian Christian*. In O.U.Kalu (ed) *Christianity in West Africa. The Nigerian Story*. Ibadan: Daystar press, p. 391.
- Andrew, W. kevin W. et al (1998) *Anglicanism, A Global Communion*. Mowbray, British Library Cataloguing-in- publication data. Pp. 82-84.
- Arnold, R. (1931) *The Individual Represents the Divine Image*. Augsburg p. 51, in Werner Vol.4, p.16.
- Aylward, S. (1975). *Adaptation or Incarnation?* London: Geoffrey Chapman, Macmillan publishers, p.114.
- Ayodeji, O. *Positive Leadersip in Colonial and Post- Colonial Africa*. Centre for Social Science Research and Development. Positive leadersip Monograph Series, no.3.
- Brainton, R.H. (1960) *Here I Stand; A Life of Martin Luther*. New York: The New American Library of world Literature. Pp. 33, 49,60, 93.
- Breuilly, E. and P. Palmar. *Sainsbury's: Religions of the world*. Harper Collins. Pp.16-17.
- Buchanna, E. (1990). Kensington Books, p.63.

- Burns, C. Delisle (1937) 'A Ritual Dance, by Sacred Persons'. Art Ceremony. Historical. Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, edd. Seligman, E.R., and Johnson, A., Vol. 111 New York. P.315. in Werner, p.95.
- Butler, B.C. (1954) The Church and Infallibility. New York. P.124 in Werner S. Sociology of Religion. Vol. 4 , pp.14-15.
- Calvin, J. (1888) Corpus Reformatorum XXXVII, Deut. XVIII,15 and Malachias 11,7. In Werner, Vol.4 p. 29.
- Charles, M.G. (1973). Renaissance and Reformation, England 1509- 1714. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. pp. 5-6, 9-10, 14.
- Christopher D. (1967) The Formation of Christendom. New York . p. 287, in Werner Vol. 4, p.15.
- Church, I.F. (1949) The Early Methodist People. New York. Pp. 52-53 in Werner. S. (1967), p.8.
- Galanter, M. (1982) Charismatic Religious Sects and Psychiatry. An Overview. American Journal of Psychiatry. P.139. in Saliba (1995), p.7.
- Harold, C. (1985) Religious Pluralism: Challenge of the World Religions. Maryknoll, NY:Orbis Books in Saliba (1995:4).
- Hugh, T.K. (1990). Thought 2nd ed. Nashville: Abingdom press. Pp.139, 147, 158, 190-191..
- Insoll, T. (2004) Archaeology, Ritual, Religion. London: Routledge, pp.6-7.
- Iyangbe, D. (2021) Naming Ceremony and Infant Baptism: Attempts at Inculturation. A Nigerian Journal of Catholic Theology and Pastoral Ministry. Vol.1,no2, pp.126-7.
- Kalu, O.U. (1978) Christianity in West Africa: The Nigerian Story. Ibadan: Daystar press, p.391.
- Lebar, J.J. (1989). Huntington. Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor publishing Division.pp.14-16.
- Levine, S. (1984) Radical Departures: Dangerous Detours to Growing Up. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. In Saliba (1995),p.7.
- Lincoln, C.E. (1961) The Black Muslims in America. Boston. P.215 in Werner (1967) p.25.
- Lloyd, A. (1950) Quaker Social History. London. P.77, in Werner (1967), p.20.
- Luther, M. (1865) Luthers Books, Berlin 1865 in Werner, Vol.4, p.22.
- Macionis, J.J. (1993). Sociology 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey. Prentice Hall. P.178.
- Medhurst, K. and G. Moyser (1988) Church and Politics in a Secular Age. Oxford: Clarendon press. Pp.3-5.
- Michael, Hill. (1973) A Sociology of Religion. London: Heinemann Educational Books, pp. 47,48,49,62, 63, 64, 91,92,254,265.

- Ndiokwere, N. (1981). Prophecy and Revolution. London. SPCK, PP.6-7.
- Nicholas, A., Stephen, H. and S.T. Bryan (2000) The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Penguin Books. P.81.
- Okeke, E. (2021) In Search of An Efficient Missionary Model in present day Archdiocese of Benin City. Theologia Et Ministerium: A Nigerian Journal of Catholic Theology and Pastoral Ministry. Vol.1, no.2, pp.79-81.
- Oosthuizen, G.C. (1968) Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological Study. Michigan: William B. E erdmans publishing Company, p.238.
- Otasowie, M.O. (2020) The Socio- Religious Perspective of Cultic Practices in Nigeria. Journal of African Society for the Study of Sociology and Ethics of Religions. Vol. 7 and 8, June and Dec. pp.147-165..
- Oyediran, O. (ED) (1981). Indiscipline: The Jaji Address. Survey of Nigerian Affairs 1976-1977. Lagos: Macmillan publishers p. 147.
- Pedersen, J. (1954) Israel: Its life and Culture. London and Copenhagen (ed). P. 193, in Werner S. (1973). The Sociology of Religion .Vol.5.
- Philip, C. (1984) 'The Politics of Vulnerability: Youth in religious cults'. Psychohistory Review 12, p.6., in Saliba,1995.
- Puckett, R.M. (2001) Interdenominational. The Inclusive Pulpit. Journal of Resources for Community Church Worship. R.M. Puckett and S.K. Nash (ed.). Community Church press. P.163.
- Rudge, P.F. (1976) Management in the Church. England. McGraw- Hill Ltd, p.21.
- Russell, P.S. (1977) Cults and Isms: Twenty Aiterations to Evangelical Christianity (Grand Rapids, M.I. Baker Book House), In Saliba, J.A. 1995:2).
- Saliba, J.A. (1995) The New Religious Movements in Contemporary Western Culture: An Overview. Perspectives on New Religious Movements. London. Geoffrey Chapman . pp.1-2.
- Shapiro, E. (1977) Destructive Cultism. American Family Physician, pp. 80-3, in Saliba, 1995, p.5.
- Smith, W.R. (1885) Kingship and Marriage in Early Arabia. Cambridge. Pp.22,23,53,54, in Werner , S. (1972)P.5.
- Sparrow, S. (1929) A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, ed. London. P.394, in Werner, Vol. 4, p.16.
- Taeger, F. (1957) Charisma. Stuttgart. Vol. 1, p.31 in Werner, S. 1966, P.17.



- Walker, W. (1959). A History of the Christian Church. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark., in Pivotal Teacher Training Programme for Universal Basic Education. Kaduna: Teacher's Institute. P.4.
- Werner, S (1966). The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Vol.1, pp. 7-30.
- Werner, S. (1967). The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom. Vol.2, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.5.
- Werner, S. (1972). The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom. London: Routledge and Kenga Paul, Vol.5, pp. 66,67, 68,70, 71,73, 78, 95,
- Wilson and Kolb. (1978). Sociological Analysis, p.654, in O.U. Kalu Christianity in West Africa: The Nigerian Story. P.391.
- Wilson, B.R. (1961). Sects and Society. London and Berkeley. Pp.15, 42,105,in Werner, p.28.



©2025 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)