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COMMERCIALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS OBJECTS AMONGST PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN NIGERIA: A CRITIQUE

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| ABSTRACT

This study examined the commercialization of religious objects among Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, focusing on its theological, ethical, and socio-economic implications.

| KEYWORDS

Commercialization, Religious, Pentecostal, Churches, Nigeria, Critique

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the commercialization of religious objects among Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, focusing on its theological, ethical, and socio-economic implications. Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria emphasizes vibrant spirituality, faith expression, healing, and deliverance. However, in recent times, these spiritual practices have increasingly been accompanied by the sale and promotion of religious objects such as anointing oil, holy water, prayer garments, handkerchiefs, wristbands, and other symbolic items. The problem addressed in this study is the growing tension between genuine spiritual practices and the commercialization of faith, raising concerns about exploitation, doctrinal distortion, and the prioritization of material gain over spiritual authenticity. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires administered to selected church members and leaders. Secondary data were derived from mainline books, academic journals, edited volumes, and other relevant scholarly publications. Findings revealed that although religious objects are often presented as instruments of faith, their commercialization has contributed to the commodification of religion, financial pressure on congregants, and the manipulation of vulnerable individuals seeking spiritual solutions. It also exposed a deviation from core biblical teachings and an increasing trend toward profit-oriented religious practices. The study recommends the establishment of ethical standards to guide the use and distribution of religious objects, improved theological education and accountability among church leaders, and increased awareness among congregants to encourage critical discernment. Furthermore, Pentecostal churches should prioritize spiritual integrity over material gain to preserve the authenticity and credibility of the Christian faith.

Introduction:-

Commercialization of religious objects is a phenomenon in the Nigerian Pentecostal Ministry. It has caused the institution to deviate from its original tenets, sacredness, purity, holiness and promotion of truth, but rooted itself in the pursuit of materialism and mundane pleasures. A friend narrated what he passed through in hands of pastors and prophets when the mother was sick. According to Okoye (2024) in my struggle to give better life to my mother and younger siblings, she got sick. Considering my low income status as a petty trader, the woman could not afford the high fee charged with the well-equipped hospital to diagnose the actual cause of the sickness and its cure. We turned to alternative sources for healing, which include Africa traditional herbs and prayers. We were then informed about numerous prophets, Pastors and great men of God who have supernatural powers to heal incurable disease and break evil curses. In our predicament, we encountered persistent demands to purchase items such as holy water, holy oil, holy bath, and holy towels. We were also encouraged to sow a “faithful seed.” These were presented by the ministers as necessary spiritual tools. In particular, the “faithful seed” was described as a point of contact between my mother and God, believed to facilitate her healing. However, despite the financial contributions made and the purchase of these religious items, there was no observable improvement in the mother’s health condition, which ultimately resulted in her death.

Another dimension of this Pentecostal ministry is the practice of making allegations against their clients during prayer sessions. In trying to understand the beliefs and ideal about this Pentecostal Ministry, Okoye (2024), states that prosperity gospel in Nigeria have a tendency of incorporating Christian values, African custom or traditions to sensitize its audiences. It is a tradition that links every phenomenon in Nigeria to spirituality. It is from this backdrop that the work is inspired to conduct a research that investigates the threat this theology may pose on the Christian faith in Nigeria. There are many Christians in Nigeria who are made to believe that their offerings can earn them healing or God’s blessing. I found nothing more inspirational in our time than to study the beliefs and culture of these Pentecostal Ministry that claimed to have solutions for all human problems.

The problem that prompted this research work is the act of pastors turning the gospel of Christ that was offered freely to mankind as a means of making money. Pentecostal Pastors tends to take advantage of the ignorance of her congregations in order make unnecessary profit. According to Nwadiakor (2024), this is similar to what existed during the middle ages when the early Church engages in the sale of indulgence and relics in order to construct edifice at the expense of their poor members. These pastors do not account to anybody but the sole aim of their ministry and their pocket (pot-belly ministers). This research will critically examine some of the preaching and attitudes of Pentecostal Ministries and its effects in Nigerian society. This research also seeks to raise awareness within Christendom about the need to discourage modern-day Pentecostal practices that prioritize material gain at the expense of spiritual integrity and long-term religious values.

It raises alarm on the indifferent attitudes of some Nigerians to their Personal Christian life who in turn place their faith on these objects rather than God himself. The study serves as an eye opener that over emphasizes on materialism as a recent development in the Nigeria Pentecostalism. It therefore sounds the alarm that most of the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria probably exist to hypnotize, defraud and swindle unsuspecting worshippers of their hard earned resources in the name of seed of faith and other named offertory for prosperity. The study focuses on the history, origin, development, religious objects, effects and solutions of Commercialization of religions objects in Nigeria. The work will additionally study every aspect of prosperity within the Nigeria religious environment that could illuminate and broaden more comprehension on the subject matter. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is considered most appropriate given the nature of the subject. The issue of commercialization of religious practices in Pentecostal ministries involves human beliefs, experiences, and social interactions, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth exploration of participants’ views, experiences, and perceptions, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. The study is both descriptive and analytical, as it not only describes the forms and patterns of commercialization but also examines their implications and underlying causes.

In carrying out the research, both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. Primary data were obtained through oral interviews and personal observations. Interviews were conducted with selected individuals who have direct or indirect experience with Pentecostal ministries, including church members and other stakeholders. These interviews provided first-hand insights into the practices surrounding the use and promotion of religious items such as holy water, oil, and other materials. Personal observation further enabled the researcher to understand how these practices are carried out within the church setting and how they influence the behavior and beliefs of adherents. Documentary sources were also extensively used. These included printed and electronic materials. Primary documentary sources consisted of church-related documents such as newsletters, bulletins, and financial records like tithe cards and ledgers. These materials were relevant because they offered direct evidence of internal practices and financial structures within the ministries. Secondary sources included academic books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, and credible online publications. These sources provided background information, supported the analysis, and helped to situate the study within existing scholarly discussions. The data collected from both oral and

documentary sources were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring ideas and patterns related to the commercialization of religious practices and organizing them into themes for proper interpretation. This method ensured a systematic and coherent analysis of the data, allowing the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions based on the evidence gathered.

Origin of Commercialization of Religious Objects:-

The origin of commercialization of religious objects could be traced back to the middle ages. K. Nwadior (personal communication April 17th, 2024) submitted that the Church developed several concept practices to pay for this extravagant lifestyle. Christian tradition taught that pilgrimages to site of relics (objects used by important religious figure) and holy place were acceptable ways of repenting from one's sin. During the late middle Ages, some clergy took advantages of this tradition and charged people who want to see holy relics. History proves that Fredrick I, a prince in northern Germany, kept a collection of over 17,000 relics that allegedly included a piece of Moses' burning bush, 33 fragments of Jesus cross and some straw from Jesus manger. The money collected from pilgrimages to these relies paid for the building of a Cathedral, a castle and a University in Fredrick's kingdom. Simony which is the practice of selling church positions to the highest bidder; regardless of the buyer's religious background or training was another practice that earned money for the Church. The most profitable and controversial of the concept practices used to raise money for the Church was the selling of indulgence. At first, an indulgence consisted of a certificate issued by the pope to a person whose sins had been forgiven. The certificate was designed to cancel some or all of the punishment a person would suffer for his/her sins. In time, however, a person seeking indulgences could buy what amounted to form letter from any member of Church officials. Other corrupt Churchmen introduced the idea that indulgences could be purchase for family members who had already died and whose salvation might be in doubt. Though it was never officially stated by the Church, many members of the clergy taught that salvation was attainable simple through the purchase of enough indulgences (Arnold, 1999).

Arnold (1999) stated that indulgences were a system of exchange whereby the priests employed their special rapport with God to perform certain religious acts for laymen. For a price, clergy would pray, fast and read scripture for a person. In other worlds, pastoral services were bought. This was later developed into buying up time one might have to spend in purgatory. Trueman (2018) observed that most of the abuse identified by Henry's advisors involved money. The church was a very wealthy organization and owned vast amounts of land throughout England and Wales. Despite this wealth, the church still charged the general public for its services; be it baptism, wedding or burial, all Christian ceremonies that took place on a very regular basis. Though the individual amount for each 'service' was small, to the poor it was money they could ill afford to pay.

Identifying Religious Objects in Pentecostal Churches:-

There are various religious objects identifiable within Pentecostal ministries; however, this research focuses on the following that are discussed below:

Anointing Oil:-

The holy anointing oil formed an integral part of the ordination of the priesthood and the High Priest as well as the consecration of the articles of the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:26) and subsequent temple in Jerusalem. The primary purpose of anointing with the holy anointing oil was to set the anointed person or object apart or mostholy (Exodus 30:29). Anointed oil is used in Christianity and also among Pentecostal Ministries. A passage in the New Testament says: Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, (James 5:13-14 RSV.) Some Pentecostal Ministry makes use of anointing oil like the living faith. Omotoye and Opoola(2012) states that the application of the anointing oil blessed by Pastor Oyedepo has the power of healing poverty. Any member of the Church who is looking for a job is expected to apply anointing oil before the interview in order to receive employment.

Salt:-

Biblically, salt is often symbolically associated with preservation, purity, and covenant faithfulness, particularly in passages where it is used to prevent decay or corruption (Leviticus 2:13; Mark 9:50). In some Christian theological interpretations, salt is also linked to healing and restoration, although this is generally understood in a symbolic rather than literal sense. According to Brown (2015), the Greek term *sōtēria* is commonly translated as "salvation" in the New Testament and refers to deliverance, wholeness, or being made right with God within its scriptural context. However, the idea that salt directly corresponds to salvation or healing as a fixed doctrinal equivalence is not consistently supported in mainstream biblical scholarship. Brown (2015) states the description of salt as having a crystalline structure and the claim that it can carry spiritual imprints reflects modern metaphysical interpretations rather than established biblical theology. Such views are typically found in popular religious discourse rather than in academic biblical studies.

Water:-

Water is associated with baptism, washing evil away, rebirth and Spiritual Warfare. Also water is the symbol of satisfying thirst (Mark 9:41) and also used in cleansing. It is even used as a metaphor of Jesus Himself when referring to the living water in His conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:9-14. Water satisfies refreshes and can symbolize the release of new life. Bro. Joshua Iginla of Champions Royal Assembly healed a soldier of his HIV-Positive status after drinking water given to him by the wife that she collected after one of the services.

Handkerchief:-

Simpson (2010) opines that there is a new phenomenon especially among some island Churches where handkerchiefs are being handed around a congregation claiming that they have an anointing that can cause people to be healed and other miraculous things happen to them. The researcher witnessed the general overseer of the living Church distributing handkerchief to his members after one of his services as a symbol of the perfection of their prayer request. This idea of passing handkerchiefs around seems to be taken from the following verses in Acts: Acts 19:11-12.

Seed Sowing:-

Nigerian Pentecostal theology of prosperity has always been built around seed sowing. Many Pentecostal Pastors encourage their members to engage in these seed sowing with the aid of Luke 8:1-11 (The Parable of the sower). They usually conclude that the only place (best land) to sow is in their Ministry or Church and they neglect the Widow and Orphan etc. In as much there are tremendous blessings in giving and especially giving to the almighty God, but there are other ways to attract divine blessing and equally give to God which these commercial pastors fail to expound to their members.

African World View on Religious Objects:-

Ezenweke and Ogada (2012) submitted that religious objects and symbols are therefore, a way of saying or expressing abstract ideas, values or notions which would be difficult or even impossible to say or express directly. The traditional African meaning of religious objects transcends the physical intrinsic properties of the objects and can only be understood in terms of the meaning which the people of that culture invest in them. The 'ofò' and 'òjì' symbols would qualify as a dominant Igbo ritual symbol (Ezenweke and Ogada, 2012). The importance of these religious objects to an African man is that, is the only way through which communication and interaction are possible. Also these objects enable man to have interaction with the supernatural beings in effort to find answers to his numerous problems. Man is a composite of material (body) and spiritual (Soul). The Spiritual aspect of man links him with other spiritual forces, often times, through rituals. Thus rituals are the vehicles through which man can enter into intimate relationship with the spiritual forces. The communication with these immortals cannot be possible without the use and application of religious objects or symbol. Therefore, one could see clearly that Pentecostal Ministries which make use of religious objects share the same belief with African Traditional Religion. As these objects connect and aid communication between man and divinities so do the religious objects used by the Pentecostal Ministry contribute to facilities and enhance their relationship with their God that they claim attract blessing and elevation to them.

Reasons for Commercializing Religious Objects:-

There are several factors that may explain why some Pentecostal ministries engage in the commercialization of religious objects, which are traditionally expected to remain freely accessible as part of spiritual practice. For the purpose of this study, the discussion focuses on motivating factors such as financial gain, institutional competition, the pursuit of fame or influence, and the desire to increase congregation size. These factors are considered in order to better understand the underlying socio-economic and organizational dynamics influencing such practices.

Finance:-

Appiah, Dwomoh, and Kyire (2013) argue that some contemporary church growth perspectives present salvation in ways that emphasize cost and commitment, sometimes linking it to the use of communication and promotional tools. From this viewpoint, advertising and other forms of media communication are seen as strategies churches use to project their capacity to meet spiritual needs and attract wider audiences. However, this position is often debated in theological discourse, as many scholars maintain that salvation in Christian doctrine is understood as a divine gift rather than a commodity that can be purchased or financially obtained. The level of economic hardship in Nigeria had led unemployed youth to engage in opening Pentecostal ministry with the aim of maximizing profit. Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:19 "their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things". These so called ministers take advantage of the predicament of their congregation for merchandize. It is in our contemporary world that the pastor will drive latest model of jeep to church while the congregations either trek or enter motorcycles. Many pastors like Bishop David Onyedepo, Apostle Johnson Suleman, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, own private jet to the detriment of their ignorant and poor faithful members.

Competition:-

Hornby (2015) averred that, competition is the act of seeking what another is seeking to gain at the same time; common strife for the same thing, strife for superiority, emulous contest, rivalry as where two or more persons are engaged in the same

business and each seeking patronage. The above definition clearly explains the level of competition that exist among Pentecostal pastors. It seems as if they imitate each other, engaging in what the other is doing that commands followership. Opening almost all the channels of the television will reveal multitude of people waiting to be told the cause of their problem and these pastors tends to emulate from their colleagues the best way to command crowd. It is obvious in our generation today that most of the Pentecostal pastors engage in material and wealth competition as a result of proceed being acquired from the seed and tithe collected from their members. The level of anointing upon the life of a pastor is now calculated based on his economic affluence. Kitause (2012) opines that it is clear that there is a great deal of competition going on among Pentecostal pastors within the Nigeria religious space

Drive for Members:-

Being a founder of a Pentecostal church remains the surest and fastest way of making it in life. The founding of churches is usually followed by the expansion of same into very big cathedral in order to accommodate larger followers (Adewale, 1985). The next step is to familiarize and link up with the government officials and those that mattered in the society to be able to raise money to enrich oneself. So whether it is through printed posters, bill-boards, radio or television stations, the target is the same; to arouse or stir up the appetite of people to attend their program where perhaps they can use psychological words diplomatically on people to part with their money. In this regards, a lot of propaganda is put in place to attract people to Pentecostal revival programs and crusades for divine healing (Omotoye, 2010).

Means of Commercializing Religious Objects Today:-

Selling of Recorded Miracle or Healing Cassette:-

Kitause (2015) stated that combining the advantages of media preaching and big title, some of the Pentecostal Ministers start producing mass recording of prosperity and Miracles into tapes, VCDs, CD and DVD_s plates. No sooner had they finished preaching, teaching and praying than they also turn them into prayer bulletins and books in order to sell to their members. These members are after sensitized to buy in big quantity and share to their friends as gift. These materials often replace the value of the Bible in their life. As one will not attend Church service but depend in the cassette he will buy for Spiritual enrichment. This is against the biblical standard at Heb. 10:25. Pastors engage in production of Stickers that will be sold to their congregation in order they will place them in their vehicles, gates and doors. According to Kitause (2012) Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy produce over 500,000 copies of Rhapsody of Realities every month in 92 languages, Enoch Adeboye of RCCG publishes more than 500,000 copies of open Heaven. These no doubt yield no small amount of proceeds to these pastors in Nigeria.

Sowing Seed to have Miracle:-

According to Gbile (2011) in Kituase (2015):

In many Churches today, since pastor are used to raising offering every Sunday, the congregation has also come to understand that offering are raised, not necessarily because God has asked for them but because it has become a custom. So, the people have also become very 'wise' now. They know that in every service, the pastor would raise two or more offering. Therefore, they would determine that no matter what he says, they would not give beyond a certain amount. They change their high denomination currencies to smaller ones. When the pastor calls them to dance forward and drop their offerings, the people would dance forward and drop a small amount of money. All the young men and ladies who desire to go for disco dance but have not been able now grab that opportunity and dance to their hearts content. As they dance forward and drop their little money, they go back, sit down, waiting for next round. (p. 81).

Kituase (2015) agrees that this lengthy quotation seems to clarify that not the numerous offerings raised by Pastors during every service are voluntary. The Pastor brainwash their members into sowing seed in order to contact miracle but the members recently find out that those collections are going into the Pastor personal pocket.

Selling of the Pastors Handkerchief:-

Pentecostal Pastors engage in blessing and marketing handkerchief as a contact point and transmitter of the healing power of the Lord. The price of the religious symbol is not negotiable but will be stated by the Pastor and the congregation will rush and purchase. The General overseer of RCCG engages in this Merchandize after his 2017 Holy Ghost congress. Although he ordered the people to come with three handkerchiefs but it was alleged that he indirectly sold the object (handkerchief) to the people before the commencement of the congress.

This research work finds out that these Pastors are emulating the action of St. Paul in Acts 19:11-12 but could not notice things:

- i. Paul never carefully arrange the act rather it was the people who thought it wise to touch Paul with their apron and handkerchief in faith in order that their people that is sick could be revived.
- ii. Also there was no commercial involvement in the one found in the scripture. But Pentecostal Pastor today engages in commercializing these handkerchiefs not to extend healing but to make profit.

Kituase (2015) opined that handkerchief too are usually prayed over by “anointed men of God” in Nigeria and are sold as mantle to teeming Miracle seekers. This practice is premised on the incident that occurred in Acts 19:11-12 where Handkerchiefs or aprons were taken away from Paul to heal sick people.

Effects of Commercializing Religious Objects:-

Belief in Ministers than God:-

One of the effects of commercializing religious objects is that the congregation of these Pastors will trust and believe in him or her. The congregations see any instruction coming from the pastor or General Overseer as the ultimate and will do everything to adhere to such instruction. They trust in them to the extent of doing all they said. The research heard story from an Anglican Priest that explain this trust. According to N. Obiejemba (personal communication December 8, 2022) a Pastor (Church name withheld) instructed a married woman to bring as an offering her husband’s newly bought Prado Jeep. This vehicle is parked in the car park and don’t come out except if the husband is attending a big occasion with the wife. This Pentecostal Pastor demanded the Vehicle from the woman; she rushed home and carried the vehicle to the pastor. When the husband came back and realized what the Wife have done, hurried to see the Pastor and could not find him anymore both in the Church and the house. The news he heard was that they have relocated. That is how the woman was deceived into handing over her husbands’ vehicle and that fetch her packing from her husband house. Trust that some congregations have in their Pastors has led them into doing foolish thing. The researcher witnessed where a pregnant woman because of fear and quest for safe delivery agreed to drink a full bottle of Goya Olive oil given to her by the Pastor. People these days do nasty things that ordinarily they will not engage themselves in it.

Idolization:-

According to Hornby (2015), a demigod refers to a being that is part human and part divine, or a lesser deity in mythological contexts. However, this definition is not directly applicable to contemporary Christian theology and therefore has limited relevance to the discussion of Pentecostal pastoral influence. A more relevant issue in this context is the way certain Pentecostal leaders are highly respected and accorded strong spiritual authority by their followers. In some cases, adherents may place exceptional emphasis on the person of the pastor, sometimes treating their instructions or pronouncements as having near-spiritual authority. This has been discussed in studies on charismatic Christianity, where the influence of religious leaders can become very pronounced due to their perceived spiritual gifting and authority.

Distortion of Christian Doctrine and Spiritual Understanding:-

One of the most significant effects of commercializing religious objects is the distortion of core Christian doctrines. Christianity teaches salvation by grace through faith, emphasizing repentance, obedience, and a personal relationship with God. However, when religious objects are marketed as sources of divine power in exchange for money, faith is gradually transformed into a transactional process. Believers may begin to assume that spiritual breakthroughs are determined by the ability to purchase certain items rather than by sincere faith and righteous living. This distortion undermines biblical teachings that stress God’s sovereignty and the free nature of His grace. The danger lies in the subtle replacement of Christ-centered faith with object-centered spirituality. As a result, prayer, scripture reading, moral discipline, and spiritual maturity may receive less emphasis, while material items are elevated to positions they were never meant to occupy. Over time, this creates a shallow form of Christianity that prioritizes outward rituals over inward transformation. Furthermore, commercialization encourages selective interpretation of biblical texts. Scriptures are sometimes used out of context to justify the sale of religious objects, leading to doctrinal confusion among congregants.

Exploitation of Vulnerable Worshippers:-

Another major effect of the commercialization of religious objects is the vulnerability of some members of society. Many worshippers turn to religion during difficult periods such as illness, unemployment, infertility, or family crises. At such times, they may be emotionally and psychologically distressed, which can make them more open to persuasive religious messages. In some cases, the promise that purchasing specific religious items can guarantee healing, success, or deliverance may place additional pressure on these individuals. In a context like Nigeria, where poverty levels are high and social support systems are limited, such expectations can further strain already struggling households. Some worshippers may feel compelled to give beyond their financial capacity, sometimes borrowing money or neglecting essential family needs in the hope of receiving divine intervention. When expected outcomes do not occur, individuals may experience disappointment, guilt, or spiritual discouragement, which can affect their faith and emotional well-being. This practice can also contribute to inequality within church communities. Members who can afford religious items may be perceived as more faithful or spiritually privileged, while poorer members may feel excluded or less valued. Such divisions raise concerns because they conflict with the Christian teaching of equality before God and may weaken unity and mutual support within the church.

Erosion of Church Credibility and Moral Authority:-

The commercialization of religious objects can significantly undermine the credibility and moral authority of the church. When religious institutions begin to appear more business-oriented, public perception of their spiritual mission may be weakened,

creating skepticism about their authenticity and purpose. This concern aligns with Nwokedi's broader critique of how religious institutions risk losing moral influence when they become entangled with socio-economic and political interests rather than focusing on ethical leadership and spiritual responsibility (Nwokedi, 2023). As a result, the church may be seen as prioritizing financial gain over pastoral care, which can weaken its authority in addressing pressing social issues such as corruption, injustice, and moral decline. Nwokedi (2023) emphasizes that when religious credibility is compromised, the prophetic and moral voice of the church in society is also weakened. Furthermore, younger members of society, who tend to be more critical of institutional authority, may disengage when religious practice appears commercialized. This reflects concerns raised in Nwokedi (2025), where weakening trust in institutions contributes to youth dissatisfaction and migration tendencies. Consequently, commercialization not only affects perception but also long-term participation in organized religious life.

Psychological and Spiritual Dependency:-

Commercialization of religion can also foster unhealthy psychological and spiritual dependency among worshippers. When believers are taught to rely on religious objects for protection, success, or healing, they may develop fear and anxiety about functioning without such items. This reliance can hinder spiritual maturity and personal responsibility. Nwokedi (2021) explains that vulnerability within socio-religious systems can weaken individual agency and increase susceptibility to manipulation and dependency structures. In a similar way, the commercialization of religious objects may create dependency cycles where individuals feel incomplete or unsafe without constant access to purchased spiritual materials. Instead of fostering inner faith, moral discipline, and resilience, such practices discourage believers from developing personal spiritual strength. This aligns with Nwokedi's (2020) broader concern about moral formation and how external influences can weaken internal ethical development in individuals. Ultimately, this reduces the believer's capacity to face life's challenges independently and mature spiritually.

Transformation of Worship into Consumer Culture:-

Another significant effect is the transformation of worship into a consumer-oriented experience. Religious services may increasingly emphasize the sale or promotion of objects, transactional testimonies, and financial contributions rather than genuine worship, teaching, and spiritual formation. Nwokedi (2025) notes that modern socio-economic pressures increasingly shape human behavior toward material acquisition and consumer-driven identity. This tendency can extend into religious environments where spiritual experiences become commodified and evaluated based on material outcomes. As a result, worshippers may begin to approach church activities with a consumer mindset, judging services based on personal gain rather than spiritual growth or communal responsibility. This also reflects Nwokedi's (2023) analysis of how institutional priorities can shift when economic and social pressures influence religious practice. Consequently, worship risks being redefined as a marketplace of spiritual products rather than a sacred space of devotion, discipline, and communal faith expression.

Conclusion:-

The commercialization of religious objects within some Pentecostal churches represents a deviation from the ethical and spiritual principles of the Christian faith. Such practices, which may involve the use of religious symbols or teachings for financial gain, can distort the original message of the Church and raise concerns about integrity and accountability (Princewill, 2017). The image and reputation of the Church refer to how the public perceives its identity, credibility, and moral standing. As noted by Egwu (2007), reputation reflects qualities such as respectability, honour, and integrity. When religious practices are perceived as being driven by economic interests, these qualities may be undermined, thereby affecting public trust in the institution. From a theological perspective, commercialization contradicts core Christian teachings that emphasize sincerity, humility, and free spiritual service, as reflected in the biblical principle that spiritual gifts should be freely given. In this regard, such practices may be viewed as inconsistent with the foundational values of the Church and can negatively affect its moral authority (Nwosu, 1996). Therefore, there is a need for church leaders and stakeholders to critically reflect on emerging practices within religious institutions and ensure that they remain aligned with ethical and doctrinal standards. Strengthening accountability and reaffirming the spiritual purpose of the Church will help preserve its credibility and sustain public confidence.

Recommendations:-

Based on the research and findings made so far, the following recommendations are made;

- i. Church leaders represent the Church to the public, so their actions have moral, ethical, and reputational consequences.
- ii. To reduce the commercialization of religious objects, there should be continuous moral and ethical re-orientation for both new and existing ministers of God. This should be supported through regular training, doctrinal education, and clear codes of conduct. Ministers are expected to uphold professionalism based on honesty, integrity, fairness, and accountability, ensuring that their actions remain consistent with established moral, legal, and spiritual standards.
- iii. There should be public relations training on image and reputation management for Church leaders, Church workers and other stakeholders in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

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- iv. Church authorities should establish and enforce clear financial accountability systems, including transparent record-keeping and periodic auditing of church funds, to reduce abuse and build public trust.
 - v. The Church should strengthen preaching and teaching that emphasize the spiritual purpose of worship, discouraging any practice that promotes material exchange as a condition for receiving spiritual blessings.

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