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## **Christian Ethics and Sustainable Church Growth in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed remarkable proliferation of different strands of Christianity in the last two decades particularly in Nigeria, which has been described as church growth. The changing faces of Christian demographics and diversity are evident in the myriad of various traditions that are proliferating characterised by various doctrinal persuasions and cultural nuances. Church growth might not be unconnected with social deprivation theory and the change in the center of gravity of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South. Despite the dynamic numerical growth of Pentecostal movement in the Global South, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, there is no corresponding growth in the moral quotients or value of its membership. There has been little of no significant scholarly attention paid to this disconnect till now. It is discovered that churches and their leadership conceptualise church growth in terms of physical membership and denominational spread, infrastructural development minus spiritual and moral development of the membership. It is thus suggested that there is the urgent need for holistic understanding and pursuit of church growth that embodies both quality and quantity of membership through the incarnational praxis. This can be accessed via sanctification.

**Key words:** Morals, Values, Christianity, Church Growth, Nigeria, Ethics

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### 1. Introduction

Church growth has become a catchword and almost synonymous with the Great Commission. A great number of Christian churches, particularly the Pentecostal denominations have emphasized evangelisation or soul-winning to such an extent that one begins to feel that the gathering of huge crowd of worshippers translates to making Christians. One can also feel that the pecuniary aspect of the numbers of worshipper represents the concept of church growth, as some church leaders count branches of their denominations and cathedrals they have erected as progress. While these nuances have their relevance in church growth discourse, it is also critically important to draw attention to the moral quotients of the leadership and membership in the overall assessment of church growth. This gap becomes pertinent because of the increasing disappointment by the public and number of misdemeanors perpetrated by some Christians. Since all of these borders on ethics and morality, we shall clarify these concepts and subsequently relate them to church growth discourse. We will thereafter make some recommendations on how to achieve a holistic programme of church growth and then, conclude.

### 2. Engaging Ethics and Morality

More often than not, ethics and morality are used interchangeably. Both terms are so intertwined that an authority has defined ethics as a “system of moral principles” that regulates the conduct of individuals or groups within a community (Kunyahop, 2008, p.1). This definition embeds morality in ethics and thus projects morality as the manifest expression of ethics. In the same vein, Clarendon explains:

Morals and morality come from the Latin word, *mos*, meaning custom or usage, while ethics comes from the Greek word, *ethos*, whose meaning is roughly the same. So, it is hardly surprising that today, as earlier, these two words are often used interchangeably. When a distinction is made, ‘morals’ nowadays refers to actual human conduct viewed with regard to right and wrong, good and evil, ‘ethics’ refers to a theoretical overview of morality, a theory or system or code. In this sense, our morality is the concrete human reality that we live out from day to day, while ethics is an academic view gained by taking a step back and analyzing or theorizing about (any) morality (Kunyahop, 2008; p.4).

In philosophical studies, ethics has been distinguished from morality in that the former is conceived as theoretical and intellectual study of rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness of actions, the latter is thought as concerned with actual behavior exhibited by individuals. Even though it is also generally held that ethics pertains to theoretical study of rightness and wrongness of actions, ethicists have maintained different ethical persuasions depending on their orientations. For instance, some ethicists promote individuals above the society while some others elevate society above individuals. Some others are concerned about the source of ethical predicates and principles. For instance, Feinberg and Feinberg define ethics as “the branch of philosophy that reflects on such issues as the source of moral norms and how to justify one’s rules for governing action in moral matters.”(Feinberg and Feinberg,1998,p.18). Their emphasis on ‘norms’ indicates that ethics should

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be understood from the perspective of duty and principle rather than consequence. Since norms are what guide human actions, Feinberg and Feinberg are thus arguing that we should concentrate more effort on studying and understanding them, that is, the principles rather than what will result from them. But Wiredu defines ethics as “simply the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of the individual to those of others in society.” (Wiredu in Wiredu and Gyekye, 1992, p.191). Wiredu’s emphasis is on observance, that is, performance rather than principles or norms. According to Quampah, Wiredu is subjecting the interests of the individual to those of the society; he also stresses the importance of obligation as a cardinal thrust of ethical consideration.

Quampah (2014, p.50) defines ethics as “a discipline that focuses on the rectitude of human behavior by examining the motives, principles, and consequences of a particular act or general conduct.” What this definition has achieved is to avoid the complexities associated with the place of individual over society and vice versa. This, it does, not underestimating the principle, duty and consequence that are some of the contents of ethical study.

For Maxey (1987, pp.21-22), ethics is “the science of moral duty;” it deals with human character and the consequences of moral choices made. Ethics concerns itself with the nature of the highest good, the origin and validity of the sense of duty, the authority of moral obligation. He further elucidates that ethics helps human beings to direct their lives towards the ideal order of life. But what constitutes the ideal order of life is controversial in ethical debate because of the sources and focuses of ethics such as divine and autonomous ethics or religious and secular ethics. While religious ethics is traced to the supernatural being or forces as its origin and authority, secular ethics tends towards reason or rationality as its source and authority. This unsettled controversy calls to question what constitutes an ideal order of life for both believers and non-believers in religion (Nielsen 1990).

For the purpose of this study, it will be necessary to narrow down to Christian ethics. This is not to assume that Christian ethics is less problematic. For instance, McGrath (2007) recognizes the diversities in Christianity and how they have affected theological and ethical debates within it. Interestingly, such diverse opinions have been maintained within a denomination as well. He argues that though the Reformation of the sixteenth century has brought a kind of freedom to Christians and Christianity on the one hand, it also opened the floodgates of interpretations of the Bible that now become an albatross on the faith, on the other.

The liberty offered by the Reformation also expressed what he calls a “powerful affirmation of spiritual democracy,” (McGrath, 2007; p.2) which makes theological and ethical issues in Christianity problematic. In essence, the Catholic theology and ethics are different from Protestant theology and ethics because of the liberality of the interpretations of the Bible. The same “dangerous new idea,” according to him, was exhibited in global Anglican Communion in 1998 at Lambeth Conference in reference to the sexuality debate which rests on how best to interpret and apply the text to the gay context (McGrath, 2007, p.1). This resulted in him saying that “everyone meant well – but they certainly did not mean the same thing,” (McGrath,2007:p.1) a catch phrase that exacerbated the debate that has now made the Anglican Communion to be biblically, spiritually, doctrinally, ethically, morally and sacramentally estranged.

In discussing Christian ethics, Karl Barth among other theologians argues for deontological ethical principles for Christians, that is, obedience to rules, observance of duty. (Barth cit in Quampah, 2014: p.50) Immanuel Kant places emphasis on the moral perfection of Jesus as a goal of Christian ethics. In arguing for the existence of God, Kant says that God is the highest degree of morality: “Even the Holy One of the gospels must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such” (Kant cit in Quampah, 2014, p.50). In other words, if a woman says that she is perfect morally, God is more perfect morally than she is. God is the ideal of moral perfection that she struggles to reach. Thus, while Barth focuses on what Christians ought to

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do, Kant presents a picture of what they should become. This is the ideal order of life a Christian ethic should concern itself.

In pursuit of Kant's ideal for a Christian, duty or principles are no less important. Thus, Arthur Springer defines Christian ethics as a special kind of ethics whose focus is "the study and practice of moral conduct, positively and negatively, as set forth in the Bible and in nature and reason." (Springer cit in Maxey, 1987, p.22) Understood from this prism, Christian ethics is not just concerned about the rightness and wrongness of human conduct, it must be grounded on the Bible, nature and reason. The quest for ethical understanding as thought by Springer is comprehensive and all-embracing, detailing in some sense, the appropriation of natural ethics and using reason as a tool for critical thinking about it. But the biblical concept of ethics is the basic requirement for ethical consideration and judgment. This is corroborated by Stassen and Gushee who see Christian ethics as a discipline

...which recognizes and affirms reasoning – with and through holistic character, which includes the virtues. Virtues are character traits that are stable, consistent and reliable. Virtues aim toward discerning and doing what is good for our purpose in life as humans. They are developed by training and practice. They need a community where they are engendered, fostered and refined (Stassen and Gushee, 2003, p. xl)

Stassen and Gushee predicate their ethical argument on the personality of Jesus, and point out that though reasoning is helpful in Christian ethics, virtues must guide such reasoning. In other words, it is not enough to be intellectually sound and equipped; it is more pertinent that such a person involved in Christian ethics must have Christian character traits.

The Christian ethics is adaptive and constant, deep and appealing, demands and guides one towards the ultimate goal. "The enduring markings of biblical ethics are its foundation, in relationship with God; its objective, imposed obligation to obedience; its appeal to the deepest in man; its down-to-earth social relevance; and its capacity for continual adaptation and import development" (Milro, 1997, p.15). Christian ethics is not just socially relevant in human context; it has the capacity to adapt to pluralist context as well as develop new ethical principles in response to new ethical challenges, of course, without compromising its foundation and goal. Its demand for obedience to God is a constant decimal in its entire adaptive and developing milieu.

### **3. Christian Moral Values**

Kunhiyop (2008, p.5) has defined values as "underlying, fundamental beliefs and assumptions that determine behaviour". Such beliefs are elaborately contained in stories and parables, which are penetrative and fierce in their ethical teachings and demands, and assessment. The moral import, judgment and response that stories create make Hays to argue that "stories form our values and moral sensibilities in moral direct and complex ways" (cit in Kunhiyop, 2008, p.5). The Bible stories as value-oriented narratives offer a compass to view the world, what to fear, anticipate, hope for; they also create nuances and models of moral conduct, and virtues such as justice, courage, righteousness, faith, and so on.

Christian moral values are grounded in Christian theology. Christian ethics, it has been argued, will be spineless if it is not based on doctrine. As Tillich articulates it, a theology upon which ethical theories can be built must be able to satisfy two critical needs. The first is that it must be a statement of truth of the Christian faith, and second, the interpretation of that truth must be able to countenance the reality of every new generation. Such a theology must be able to deal with

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the past and emplace the eternal truth in the present. The eternal truth is its foundation upon which temporal challenges must be received and addressed (Quampah, 2014: p.70).

Desmond Tutu of South Africa also expressed a similar view that theology must be able to respond to the emerging challenges of the time. He argues that the theology of Apartheid era could not address the social and ethical problems that post-Apartheid South Africa faces. Thus, there is the need for constant theological reflection on how best to deal with contemporary issues, without distorting the eternal truth of the gospel (Igboin in Chimbanda and Mothoagae, 2015, pp.307-309). As a result, it can be argued that knowing the doctrines of the Bible, studying and understanding Christian theology cannot be dissociated from sound Christian moral values. The importance of Christians studying the Bible cannot be overemphasized. It is not just the basis for doctrine and theology, but also moral prescription, and a source of confirmation or disambiguation of Christian claims, especially by Christian leaders (see Acts 17).

Heward-Mills (2002, p.7) says that Christian moral values help Christians know how they should conduct themselves before God and man. According to him, First Timothy 3:15 says: “that thou mayest know how thou ought to behave thyself in the house of God.” He explains that as Christians, there is a certain way they are expected to behave in the church. This means that there is a moral demand placed on Christians to behave in an orderly and reverential manner wherever they are gathered, and also to show some form of decorous and courteous behavior to others outside the church. This becomes necessary because if Christians give in to pressure of work, finance, family, and so on, there is the tendency for them to misbehave, which may bring disrepute to the church. According to him, “an oversight can lead to improper conduct and create an unfortunate misrepresentation of what we stand for”. In order to avoid this, he suggests that there is the need to adhere to a Christian manner of life as Paul exemplified and called Christians to emulate (see 2 Tim. 3:10), with a goal in mind as expressed in 2 Timothy 3: 17: “That the man of God may *be perfect*, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” As we indicated earlier, Kant’s ideal for Christian ethics is for Christians to become perfect, and become a reflection of God’s perfection through deliberate moral actions based on gratuitousness as emphasized by Barth.

Morals do not automatically lead to perfection in Christianity. There are consciously determined actions of faith in Jesus that Christian theology has expressly taught people to take in order to become Christians, a reflection of Christlikeness. In Antioch, for instance, where the followers of Jesus were for the first time called Christians, people were able to identify some character traits that distinguished them from other people. Those traits were reflective of Jesus they preached; hence they were called Christians. Of course, part of the consistent behavior exhibited by those Christians was that they separated themselves morally from the people. According to Dzurgba, those Christians were called ‘born again.’

Being born again means that someone has consciously made a decision to believe in Jesus as their savior and justifier. This decision has some moral demands, which include confessing, and renouncing one’s former sins, and turning in faith to Jesus for the forgiveness of those forsaken sins. It also demands that henceforth, a new life that abhors sin is assumed, lived by grace. Being born again must necessarily be seen in the moral choices and actions that are made thereafter (Dzurgba, 2002, p.51). Igboin adds that being born again is not a mere expression of public identification with a church, but a radical rupture with the past that smeared the image of God in one. The nature of man defiled by sin has to be done away with by recourse to faith in Jesus, and also conscious, determined, consistent and prayerful effort to live a transformed life in accordance with the dictates of the scripture (Igboin, 2013, pp. 166-182). This is what is commonly called conversion.

However, Orji has conceptualized conversion beyond its common nuance of changing from one religion to another. Relying on Lonergan, Orji argues that conversion means self-

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transcendence, a movement towards self-realization that is a basis for seeking and bringing about the good of others rather than one's self-interest. In other words, one's conversion to God reflects in one's attitude toward one's personal, social, moral, and intellectual life. Conversion then becomes a radical clarification of thought and elimination of misleading information, at the cognitive level. At the religious level, conversion means experiencing God in an unrestricted way; a state of complete self-surrender to God, and acceptance of what is good, true and noble. The moral conversion eliminates the biases and seeks the good of others; advances toward authenticity and, vertical freedom and horizontal justice. Finally, affective conversion means the expression of agape; love toward others that overcome the moral impotence that prevents commitment toward others and the good of the community (Orji, 2007, pp.52-56).

The foregoing points to sanctification experience. Theologians and ethicists like Quampah and Kunhiyop have given some intellectual thought to sanctification as an experience and work of grace by faith in Jesus, which enables the sanctified to live a truly Christian life. According to Quampah, sanctification is the thrust and sum of Christian ethics and morality; that is, "a process of moral transformation that is geared towards ethical maturity" (Quampah, 2014, p.81). It is a deliberate "separation or setting apart. Sanctification expresses the dynamics of divine-human interaction in terms of character growth and ethical maturity" (Quampah, 2014, p.81). He argues that sanctification is not an option for a Christian; it is a divine demand that must cost a Christian to 'consecrate' all to God. Even though some Christian bodies in contemporary church do not understand or teach it, it does not mean that it can be done away with if one is to be morally responsible and also desire spiritual growth at both personal and church level. Quampah adds:

Sanctification implies a conscious effort to avoid unwholesome and sinful behavior in endeavoring to lead a morally upright life that conforms to the standard of righteousness revealed in scripture. Holiness is an attribute of God that expresses itself in purity, transparency, and immaculate nature and is not tinted by any kind of evil. God demands that human beings who want to have a relationship with him should be sanctified – that is, they must be people who are focused on rising to the same standard of holiness: The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy' (Lev. 19:1-2) (Quampah, 2014, p.82).

Not all churches place emphasis on sanctification. Although classical Pentecostal Christianity that resulted in the revival of the Azusa Street had recourse to Wesleyan Holiness traditions. It teaches that salvation is the first Christian experience, but it does not deal with the root of sin in a converted person. Therefore, the second experience called sanctification becomes imperative, not only because it is at this point that the Adamic nature is removed and sin becomes repugnant to the Christian, but also a precursor to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Wesleyan tradition teaches that sanctification like salvation is an instantaneous event effected by the Holy Spirit, a work of grace through faith in Jesus. "Sanctification is regarded as an event rather than a process – a sudden act of heart purification that occurs after conversion, but is necessary before Spirit baptism" (Quampah, 2014, p.85).

However, process sanctification emerged from the teachings of William H. Durham, who in 1910 objected to the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification as an event. Durham argues that sanctification is a process that starts at regeneration and continues as a process of growth. Those who follow Durham's teaching such as the Assemblies of God hold the belief that sanctification is both given in salvation and progressive in the entire life of a Christian (Quampah, 2014, pp. 86-87). Myer Pearlman also teaches that sanctification cannot be instantaneous but progressive. According

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to him, “Sanctification is absolute and progressive – absolute in the sense that it is a work done once for all (Heb. 10:14), progressive in the sense that the Christian must follow after holiness (Heb. 12:14) and perfect his consecration by cleansing himself from all defilement (2 Cor. 7:1)” (cit in Quampah, 2014, p. 87).

Kunhiyop also supports the processual sanctification experience. He argues that after salvation, a believer still struggles with sin and imperfection of his old self; he or she seeks and needs the Holy Spirit in order to live a life that pleases God. Thus, sanctification is a life time experience as a believer continues to trust God. But he agrees that sanctification is “a separation to God, an imputation of Christ as our holiness, purification from moral evil, and conformation to the image of Christ. It can thus be said that we have been sanctified, we are being sanctified, and we will be sanctified” (Kunhiyop, 2008, p.94).

The processual pattern of sanctification has implications for a Christian. For instance, Kunhiyop maintains two contradictory positions: a process and an act. In the former, sanctification is a continuous expectation, but in the latter, it is definite instantaneous experience. If God says that Christians should be holy or perfect as Himself, it will be plausible to argue that sanctification is an event that takes place in the believer instantaneously. God’s holiness cannot be thought of as being processual, growing and developing. Holiness is the nature of God; He is not acquiring it as He grows. This can be better appreciated from Rene Descartes’ ontological argument for God’s existence. Descartes argues that existence is a property of God. We cannot think of God without his existence just as the three sides of a triangle are its necessary properties. In the same vein, we cannot think of a mountain without its valley (Onimahawo, Izibili and Igboin, 2006; Igboin, 2016, pp.93-107). Correspondingly, we cannot think about God without holiness. After all, God describes himself as a holy God. If God demands holiness, it will be reasonable to believe that He is demanding for a property as His. In other words, sanctification is an instantaneous event.

In addition, the danger of processual sanctification is that a believer if he or she dies in a state of immorality and impurity, he or she cannot enter into heaven. Since sanctification is a demand rather than an option, it is a criterion for other Christian experiences such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spiritual maturity. We can also support our position with the fact that salvation experience is instantaneous rather than processual. At the Pentecost, about three thousand people were converted immediately as Peter preached (Acts 2). We therefore submit that sanctification is an event as Wesleyan tradition holds and as currently being taught by the Deeper Life Bible Church, Nigeria. We must however posit that just as salvation can be lost, so also can sanctification be lost. They are no experiences that can be retained when one relapses into sin without repentance. The case of Demas, a disciple of Paul, is quintessential (2 Tim. 4:10).

Quampah observes that it appears that no church in contemporary Ghana still sticks to the procedural growth from salvation to sanctification and then Spirit baptism, even though there are pockets of moral codes still being held by the Apostolic Church (Quampah, 2014, p.87). Onyinah confirms that The Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which grew out of The Apostolic Church has some form of teaching in sanctification. He avers that in Apostolic Church “a rigorous ethical stance was upheld with the prohibition of things such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Members who were found of making a practice of going to questionable places of falling to open sin were to be disciplined” (Oyinah, 2016, p.16). But in the Church of Pentecost, those who subscribe to sanctification are regarded as “fundamentalists” (Oyinah, 2016, p.21).

We can glean from the foregoing that sanctification is important to Christian ethics and Christian maturity. Whether in its processual or instantaneous form, it is an indispensable experience that engenders maturity and deeper relationship and fellowship with God. It can be supposed that the less thought given to sanctification has negatively affected church growth in ways other than the numbers.

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#### **4. Conceptualization of Church Growth**

The phrase, church growth, cannot be understood uni-dimensionally; it has to be given nuanced interpretations and levels. Falk understands church growth as a historical process that the church has passed through and continues to pass through in an attempt to spread the gospel. He traces it from the early church formation of Christianity and how in the process of time, Christianity has grown so widely that it has reached every continent of the world (Falk, 1997). Church growth has also been understood as evangelism and renewal or revival. It is also described as a movement committed to global evangelization. A formal approach to church growth was started by the seminal effort of Donald McGavran (Editorial Staff, 2014, pp.61-72) who avers that church growth is God's will for all humanity to be disciples of Jesus and for Christians to disciple the whole nations (McGavran, 2004). Peter Wagner amplifies it thus:

Church growth is that science which investigates the nature, function and health of the Christian church as it relates specifically to the effective implementation of God's commission to 'make disciples of all nations.' Church growth is simultaneously a theological conviction, and an applied science which strives to combine the eternal principles of God's Word with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioural sciences, employing, as its initial frame of reference, the foundational work done by Donald McGavran (McGavran, 2020).

Clearly, McGavran is more concerned in his thought on church growth about numbers; this is also the concern of the Church Growth Movement. He argues that "All thinking of the Church should be done against the graph of growth." (McGavran, 2004, p.15). This is exactly the most popular conception of church growth in contemporary Nigeria. This understanding has strong recourse to Acts in which it is recorded in progressive order the number of people converted to Christianity (Acts 2: 41; 4:4; 5:14). Church growth has been conceived as a science that studies the nature, function, planting, multiplication, health of churches as they seek to enforce the Great Commission globally. This science is both spiritual and practical; it combines the eternal principles of God's word with practical insights garnered from social and behavioral sciences to accomplish its task (Culbertson, n.d.)

As integral as numbers are in church growth discourse, its being considered as the prime focus has elicited huge criticisms. Phil Newton observes that what has been called church growth is nothing more than pragmatism, which, in all intent and purposes, is less concerned with biblical Christianity. According to him, since the result focused on is great number or crowd, pragmatism cannot reach the dark recesses of human heart to cause conversion. In his words, "pragmatism can provide increased numbers, but it cannot regenerate unbelieving men." (Culbertson, n.d.).. Rowland Croucher, also a vehement critic of church growth science argues that what is called church growth is indeed obsession with numbers. This, he posits, results in 'worshiping' numbers of people thronged together, who indeed, are not 'Christian'. Church growth, he says, is "numerolatry:... the idea that numerical growth is the only really valid criterion of church growth" (Culbertson, n.d.). In its resultant reflection, Troy Benitone observes that "problems in our Church are spiritual problems that must be addressed with spiritual solutions, not by ... church growth gimmicks" (Culbertson, n.d.)

When pragmatic methodologies are employed as a means, church growth is no more than "bigness as a sign of greatness of a church," but also "prophetic tunnel vision." In other words, as we observe in some contemporary Nigerian churches, churches are measured by their numbers and spread, that is, branches they have nationwide or beyond. Thus, in order to keep the crowd, biblical fidelity is compromised as the truth is presented in "palatable," hedonistic messages, that come in



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form of theatre. Nowadays, all sorts of mundane and sensual entertainment are performed in many churches so that the congregation will not feel bored or contemplate leaving for clubs. Popular actors and actresses, musicians, comedians and so on are invited and paid to entertain church audience. These occasions are dotted with shouts of ‘halleluyah’ and ‘amen,’ ‘glory be to God,’ ‘let’s celebrate Jesus,’ and some vulgar expressions that can be regarded as reprehensive to biblical fidelity. In the process of this pragmatic approach, “Moral and ethical demands, so evident in Scripture, become muted or ignored altogether, sometimes on the assumption that people will not respond evangelistically if preaching and teaching are in any way controversial and challenge the *status quo*” (Engel, 1979, p.100) . The long-time effect is that, both the preacher and members become accustomed to pragmatism; ignoring the truth.

### **5. Morality and Church Growth in Nigeria**

Nigeria has been ranked severally as one of the most religious countries of the world. Christianity is also observed as a one of the most growing and penetrating religions in the country. This is measured partly by the gamut of proliferation of churches, which have come to dot almost every nook and cranny of Nigeria, especially in the south. In fact, our check at the website of the Corporate Affairs Commission reveals there are about 2,995 registered churches in Nigeria (Public Search 2020). This number excludes their various branches and unregistered ones.

There are normative issues that the church as an organization has been facing in Nigeria. Among them are: immorality of different kinds such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, rape; human rituals and sacrifices, financial improprieties, diabolical struggle for leadership positions, arson, murder, political manipulation and skewed electioneering; McDonaldization of churches (The thrust of the McDonaldization is that rationalization as a methodology which defines how things are done in modern society has dehumanized the person because of its mechanical bureaucratization and unbending frames. As a consequence of high demand for fastness, efficiency and result-orientation, quantity, rather than quality has been promoted beyond measure, and humans have been forced to key into it thereby estranging them from themselves. It says that people leave the church not because of deep spiritual disagreement but mere mundane, cosmetic, and cultural interest (Drane, 2000, pp. 4-6); outright blasphemy; unconscionable secular political interference; crass corruption: lack of probity and accountability; personalization of churches and their ministries, dictatorship and wicked suppression of junior pastoral personnel, ethnicization, favoritism, cronyism, nepotism, and so on.

These moral issues can be related to church growth in Nigeria because the concept of church growth has to do with increased numbers and proliferation of churches rather than the quality of Christians that the numerous churches have produced. While ‘palatable’ messages, that is, feel-at-home messages have resulted in recruiting large church clienteles and retain them, they have not been able to deal effectively with the moral scrawls that have suffused and exacerbated in many churches.

Of course, it must be reiterated that since the truth had been hoarded ab initio from these people, they are bound to believe that the essence of Christianity is liberty without moral restraints. This ‘easy-believism,’ that is, ‘cross-less’ faith is a content of abusive prosperity gospel, which has diverted the spiritual interest of truth-seekers to living eternally on earth (Igboin, 2005, pp.160-181). This is what is referred to as eschato-praxis, which is, rehearsing the blissful life of heaven on earth ahead of time (Peters, 2000; Adedibu and Igboin, 2019, pp1-14). This belief informs the excessive and weird celebrations, concerts, dramas, festivals and carnivals that contemporary churches, especially the Pentecostal brand, are regularly organizing. Added to that is the content of prayers being said nowadays in many churches. A study of the avalanche of prayer books and requests and crusade themes will reveal that they are focused on earth- rather than heaven-affection.

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One implication of these amongst others is that, even when serious moral issues are raised, they are treated with levity and accommodation.

Another feature of church growth is commercialization of religious wares and showcasing of prosperity, some of which have been said to be of questionable sources. Within this scope God and mammon are argued to be in constant competition in the hearts of many Christians today. Akhilomen traced the history of this competition between God and mammon in the church to pre-Reformation era, like the fraudulent sale of indulgences, bribery and corruption, sale of church position, criminal acquisition of wealth by religious leaders and deliberate suppression of the Bible truth from the people with the purpose of exploiting them. He argues that though the church seemed to be growing numerically, it was devoid of morality and spirituality (Akhilomen, 2018; Adedibu, 2018, pp.32-48).

McGrath cited an example of how Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy secured the position of bishop of Geneva for his son in 1451; the son was eight years old only who had never been ordained (McGrath 1993, pp.2-3). It was this vexed situation that ultimately led to the Reformation. Unfortunately, the reformers or protestant churches today appear to be worse in the worship of mammon than the Roman Catholic Church. Obasanjo's scratchy indictment of the church of corruption among others reveals much about the morals of contemporary church in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 2017).

Incessant proliferation of churches can also be attributed to leadership, financial and ethnic issues. Here, instead of the disputes being addressed maturely and spiritually, there is always recourse to pulling and pushing out, with the excuse that 'God has called me into a new ministry.' The refrain of this slogan of God calling someone into a new ministry has become commonplace that it raises doubt as to its authenticity. But what is observed is that the leader of the new breakaway soon become a General Overseer, and assumes that he/she has reached a spiritual zenith. Of course, since the issue of lack of accountability and probity which resulted in the breakaway was unresolved, it has the tendency to rear its head both in the old and new formations.

Gula observes that lack of probity and accountability in churches has affected spiritual church growth, unity, affection, and morality both within and outside the church. According to him, the church as an organic community requires accountability. "Accountability is a way of doing justice to the community. It recognizes the ties that bind us to one another and that we are responsible to others for what we have been given to assume our professional role and community" (Gula, 2010, p.37). This makes accountability a moral dimension to church growth, and a moral obligation to the entire community. It should be borne in mind that no church is "lacking in structures and requirements for admission and performance" (Gula, 2010, p.39).

The other side of accountability is the absence of a shared code of conduct/ethics, structures for peer review, disciplinary mechanism to control deviant and unruly behavior, and so forth. Although it may be argued that these can be achieved by a person, a code of ethics is indeed required to bring about standard, accountability, probity, and justice to the entire church. As Gula further articulates, a code of ethics for the church that is "properly developed, personally appropriated, structurally supported, responsibly implemented, and justly enforced can strengthen a just ministry. It may also contribute in a modest way in restoring trust in the church by setting standards for high quality and accountable ministerial service" (Gula,2010, p.39). This has the advantage of screening recruits into the ministry, building trust, checks and balances, define, interpret, measure responsible ministerial practices, establish model for good character and right conduct, and so on.

Another critical ethical issue of church growth in Nigeria borders on the fact that church leadership and membership do hardly bother about public perception of the church, and their relationship with outsiders. This is critical because one of the criteria used by the early church to

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appoint leaders is that they must have honest report among the people (Acts 6:3). Paul also elaborates the criteria and expectations (Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-13), emphasizing good report even from people outside the church. Little attention has actually been given to this very important criterion in church growth discourse. The consequence of this has been well articulated by Kinnaman, who concludes that it is unchristian. “Our relationship shows that many of those outside of Christianity, especially younger adults, have little trust in the Christian faith, and esteem for the lifestyle of Christ followers is quickly fading among outsiders. They admit their emotional and intellectual barriers go up when they are around Christians, and they reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians” (Kinnaman, 2012, p.9). Although this is not exactly the Nigerian scenario, the fact is that the lifestyle of many people in churches has become a barrier for many outsiders who would have loved to be converted thereby disrupting church growth

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

From the foregoing, it has been established that there is a positive correlation between morality and healthy church growth. A healthy church growth that is needed is one that should be anchored on the visible transformational work of Christ, and as exemplified by Christ. It is contrary to *laissez faire*, feel-at-ease and ‘cross-less’ faith and church attendance that has characterized the Nigerian church terrain. Sydney Elton makes this remark that “Christianity was never designed to be comfortable but revolutionary. It had to be completely revolutionary if it had to succeed in changing men, saving them, meeting their needs and thus changing conditions and nations.... Jesus used no violence but He was the true revolutionary” (Elton in Abodunde, 2016, online). McDowell (1999, p.375) corroborates this by saying: “Jesus Christ the greatest revolutionary who has ever lived.”

A revolutionary is one who is generally thought of violently, suddenly, and completely changing a vexing situation or structure. In calling Jesus a revolutionary without physical violence, we are implying that He works in a flash to turn things around in a completely new way for the best they can ever be. It is this revolutionary idea that the church needs today if it must grow spiritually rather than superficial, numerical growth. Although over-emphasis has been placed on numerical strength of the church as a kernel of growth, we argued that this is only an aspect because a kind of growth that is worth sustaining is the one built on eternal principles in the heart of faithful men and women rather than the cathedral of mundane, theatrical concerts that thrill and trigger emotions, and quickly frizzle away awaiting another spree. The disorder this brings to the church services and gatherings in terms of social media coverage, where almost everyone ‘videos’ the scenery is an ominous sign of the absence of sanctification, virtues and reverence. Thus, the Bible that has been estranged needs urgently to be brought back to the pulpit, and church growth would indeed be as it ought to be.

The experience of God’s grace that manifests in salvation is the basis for a new encounter with Christian ethics; this sets the church apart and above other institutions only to the extent that she is able to hold on to the virtues as taught in the Bible. There must indeed be a reawakening of the teaching of sanctification. At this level of spiritual experience, the Adamic nature is dealt with. It is a demand for holiness and perfection. At salvation, Christians claim to accept Jesus as Saviour, but at sanctification, they are expected to surrender all, and call Him Lord as well. As Radstock explains, it is not enough to receive salvation by grace. The person who goes no further “will be saved as a log is from fire.” (Puzynin, 2013, p.117). “A believer can reach a state of perfection already in this life by an act of faith” (Poznan 2013, p.117). “The life of Christ mediated by the Spirit should take hold of believers to such a degree that they stop sinning and live lives of service in total dedication to the Lord” (Onayinka, 2018, pp.77-88). The sanctification experience as an

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event is critical and foundational to both personal growth and maturity as a Christian as well as sustainable church growth.

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