



THE CHURCH, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article is on the church, migration and social advancement in Africa. Migration though, is seen to be a normal human activity, in which humans have always moved from one country, locality or place of residence to settle in another, which has also affected the church in its mode of propagation through mission and evangelism. However, in recent times, it has been observed that irregular migration from Sub-Saharan Africa has been under the spotlight. Western media and politicians often use doomsday scenario to describe the supposedly millions of desperate people knocking at the gates of European Eldorado to escape poverty and warfare at home. Such a stereotypical conception of sub-Saharan African migration is not only overlooking its root causes, but it is also far from its real dynamics. This paper investigates how migration has affected both the church and social advancement in Africa, as well as how the church has handled the present trend of migration and its effects on social advancement in Africa, with Nigeria as the focal point. Historical and sociological methodologies are utilized in this research to assess the influence of migration on the church and social advancement in Africa. It was found that migration generally is often associated with better human capital development at both individual and household levels. On the inter-relationship between the church, Africa and social advancement, it was found that though the church in Africa have experienced an astronomical growth since its inception, the same could not be said about the rate of growth in social advancement in African societies, which in most cases have rather deteriorated. It was recommended that the church should step up its advisory role to the government, while the African governments themselves should show responsibility and integrity in their duties to ensure overall improvement in the social advancement of their land and people to discourage the current rate of migration and emigration.

Key words: *Church, migration, social advancement, Africa.*

Introduction

From the onset, the command of Jesus Christ to believers and the Church in general was to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk. 16:15). So, the church could be said to be God’s people on the ‘go’, and the church is also propagated by movement and migrations. It could also be said that the movement or migration which keep the church on the move may not have favourable origins. For instance, the first major spread of the church in the New Testament times resulted from the persecution which was unleashed on the nascent Christian community following the martyrdom of Stephen who was one of the seven Deacons in the Jerusalem Church. (Acts 8:1). The believers who were scattered as a result of the persecution took the gospel out of Jerusalem to such other places as the regions of Judea and Samaria, and also to



Phoenicia and Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch (Acts 11: 19-22). Along this line of thought John Hargreaves points out that:

The Christians' missionary activity, in fact resulted from the persecution. When the persecution took place, the Christians surely saw it as a disaster. But those who had escaped from Jerusalem and moved to new areas shared the gospel with the people of those areas. As Paul wrote from his prison (Phil. 1:12), 'what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.' It was like a seed-pod being opened by the heat of the sun and the seeds scattering and taking root far from the parent tree.¹

Sequel to this, the biblical report of the Pentecost event shows that on the day of Pentecost which marked the descent of the Holy Spirit on the believers and the formal birth and launch of the church, "there were dwelling at Jerusalem (at that time) Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven... Parthians, Medes, and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians..." (Acts 2:5, 9-11). All these were migrants both Jews and proselytes who have come from all parts of the known world to celebrate the Jewish harvest festival of weeks or the Pentecost. Many of them would also have been among the converts following the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And many of them would have taken the Christian message back to their various destinations and also planted the church in many of those destinations as enumerated above. As we proceed in this paper, we will endeavour to observe and demonstrate how migration has affected and continues to affect the church and social advancement in African and African societies and also how the variables mutually impact one another.

Definition of Terms

The Church

From Scriptural perspectives, the church is presented as the people of God, the community and body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The biblical word 'church' (Gk *ekklesia*, Heb. *qahal*) means 'assembly.' It is thus the assembly of the 'Messianic' people of God as realized through the coming of Jesus Christ.² And as pertaining to this paper, the Church of interest here is particularly the Church in Africa. And in this regard, Ferguson et al (1988) point out that:

The rapid spread of Christianity in Africa in the 20th century has been one of the notable features of modern Christian history. For some time now it has been acceptable even to speak of a shift in Christianity's geographical and cultural centre of gravity. The heartlands of the faith are no longer in the old Christendom of Western Europe and its extension in North America, but rather are to be found in the 'Southern' continents: Latin America, parts of Asia and the Pacific, and particularly tropical Africa. This phenomenal rate of expansion of Christianity in Africa has led to an awareness that the Christian faith as professed by Africans ought to find expression in terms that arise out of African cultural values and life experience.³

Migration

Migration is defined as the movement of a person or people from one country, locality, place of residence, etc to settle in another. Migration is, first and foremost, a normal human activity. Human beings have always moved from one country, locality, place of residence to settle in another.⁴ Migration is also defined as the general process of people or animals moving from one place to another. There are many different types of migration including internal and external migration, gross or net migration, and immigration and emigration.⁵

Wikipedia.org from its perspective defines 'Human migration' as the movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily at a new location



(geographic region). The movement often occurs over long distances and from one country to another (external migration), but internal migration (within a single country) is the dominant form of human migration globally.⁶ Furthermore, it is noted that migration is often associated with better human capital at both individual and household level, and with better access to migration network, facilitating a possible second move. It has a high potential to improve human development, and some studies confirm that migration is the most direct route out of poverty. People may migrate as individuals, in family units or in large groups. There are four major forms of migration: invasion, conquest, colonization and emigration/immigration.⁷ The source further expatiates that 'Invasion' is the entry of a group into a territory belonging to another group, usually with force, while 'Conquest' is the taking control of a place or people by military force. 'Colonization' on the other hand is the action of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area, while 'Emigration/Immigration' is the act of leaving one's country to settle permanently in another (emigration) and moving into a new country (immigration), the source concludes.

Wikipedia further points out the reasons and/or causes of such movements, noting that people moving from their home due to forced displacement (such as a natural disaster or civil disturbance may be described as displaced persons or, if remaining in the home country, internally-displaced persons. People who flee to a different country due to political, religious, or other types of persecution in their home country can formally request shelter in the host country. These people are commonly referred to as asylum seekers. If the application is approved, their legal classification changes to that of refugees.⁸

Social Advancement

ScienceDirect.com defines social advancement as the progress and improvement of society through the utilization of technology and the establishment of policies that promote economic growth, cultural development, and overall welfare on a national and global scale.⁹ An overview from this source expatiates that social advancement is the process of improving a person's social status or position in society. It can also refer to the progress of society as a whole. On how social advancement happens, the following were listed:

- Economic growth
Through policies that promote economic growth, such as job creation and tax payment
- Cultural development
Through policies that promote cultural development, such as education and skill development.
- Welfare
Through policies that promote welfare, such as improving access to healthcare and education.

Benefits of social advancement

- Greater recognition: Through increased influences and resources
- Improved well-being: Through access to better education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- Improved organizational culture: Through increased social benefits and positive economic education.¹⁰



The Church, Africa and Social advancement

It is obvious that the Church in Africa could be said to have grown astronomically from the 20th to the 21st centuries. Ogbu Kalu describes the astronomical growth of Christianity in Africa citing David Barrett's annual statistics in his *World Encyclopaedia* (1982, 2000), in which he showed that the number of Christians in Africa grew from 8.75 million in 1900 to 117 million in 1970, to 335.1 million by mid-2000, and projects a figure of 360 million for mid-2003 and 600.5 million for 2005. Thus, by 1999 most Christians in the world lived in Latin America, Africa and Asia in that order; that out of 1.87 billion Christians in the world, 1.11 billion are non-white. Africa looms large again. Out of 210.6 million Evangelicals, Africa tops the list with 69.5 million, out of 423.7 million Pentecostals/Charismatic Christians in the world, 126 million live in Africa.¹¹

However, considering this astronomical growth of Christianity and the church in Africa, the same could not be said about the rate of the growth in social advancement in African societies. In fact, regarding social advancement in Africa, the growth rate could be said to be on the negative index. A report from the University of Pennsylvania – African Studies Center, on the social situation in Africa x-rays the situation in many countries and communities in Africa. It points out that the overall social situation in Africa has continued to deteriorate. This is evidenced by the rapid rate of population growth and the pressure of urbanization and rural emigration, the decay in educational and health infrastructure, growing malnutrition and poverty, the worsening plight of refugees and displaced persons, and widespread unemployment and underemployment. Severe cutbacks of expenditure on education and emphasis on cost recovery and cost sharing continue to affect adversely the education sector, evidenced in falling gross enrolment ratios, haphazard attendance, high attrition and repetition rates, low morals and exodus of teachers from the profession. In some cases, pay disputes between governments and teachers associations, as well as political tension or strife have contributed to the closure of many educational institutions.¹²

The report further points out that, as with the educational sector, so with the health sector. Women, children and youth bear a disproportionate burden of the social crisis in Africa, who constitute 70 to 80 percent of refugees, and a preponderant share of the unemployed and participants in the informal economy. African women experience the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, while the level of illiteracy among them is almost unsurpassed anywhere else, the report said.¹³

This is a vivid picture of the poor social situation in many African communities especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and the situation seem to be getting worse by the day instead of improving. An overview of reports from the International Monetary Fund and the African Union Agenda 2063 noted that while Africa faces significant challenges, there are some glimpses of hope, noting that the continent is experiencing social advancement through initiatives focused on improving education, healthcare, women's empowerment, and technological access, particularly with the increasing use of mobile technology, aiming to bridge the gap in social mobility and create a more equitable society across the society. However, issues like poverty, inequality and limited access to basic services remain key obstacles to widespread social progress.¹⁴

Some key points about social advancement in Africa from the above reports were listed as follows:

Challenges:

Poverty, malnutrition, lack of access to quality education and health care, high unemployment, gender inequality, and political instability, considered as major hurdles to social advancement in many African countries.

Positive trends:



- Education initiatives: Programs focusing on increasing girls' education and access to quality education at all levels are gaining traction
 - Mobile technology: Widespread mobile phone usage is facilitating access to information and services, including financial transactions and education platforms.
 - Government policies: African governments are trying to implement policies aimed at social protection, promoting entrepreneurship, and addressing youth unemployment.
 - Agenda 2063: The African Union's "Agenda 2063" outlines a vision for inclusive and sustainable development across the continent.
- Focus Areas for Social Advancement:
- Healthcare access: Improving healthcare infrastructure and access to essential medical services, particularly in rural areas.
 - Economic empowerment: Promoting women's participation in the workforce and entrepreneurship.
 - Quality education: Investing in teacher training and infrastructure to improve learning outcomes.
 - Governance and stability: Strengthening democratic institutions and promoting peace and security.¹⁵

On the role of the church on the social advancement of African societies, some schools of thought are actually laying blames on the church, Christianity and religion in general for making Africans to remain docile and depending more on prayers and expectation of miracles rather than using their brains to think, innovate and initiate pragmatic means through the use of science, technology and engineering to advance their societies. They thus reiterate the position of Karl Marx and his cronies of religion being the opium of the masses.¹⁶ But a question could be raised as to whether the Church or Christianity or even religion generally is responsible for the inability of Africans to use their brains to innovate and make breakthroughs in the areas of science, technology and engineering, in order to improve and advance their society. Has the church taken any actions to deter or prevent the numerous universities of science and technology, polytechnics, research centres or even the other numerous conventional universities from conducting their researches and presenting cutting-edge technological breakthroughs in the various areas of human endeavours like their Western or even their Eastern counterparts? It could be seen that the church has not constituted such obstacles or hindrances.

The major sources of problems for many African societies, nations and countries in social advancement as has earlier been highlighted in this paper have stemmed from inept, corrupt and clueless political leadership and bad governance that formulate very poor and visionless policies. This has been the bane of many African societies since the period of their independence from their colonial masters.

Migration and Social Advancement in Africa

Migration has been defined as the movement of people from one country, locality, place of residence, etc to settle in another. Within Africa and even Nigeria, various forms of migration have occurred in the past for various reasons and purposes. One major migration was the one resulting from the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade which involved the transportation by slave traders, of enslaved African people to the Americas. European slave ships used the triangular trade route and its Middle Passage. Europeans established a coastal slave trade in the 15th century and trade to the Americas began in the 16th century, lasting through the 19th century. Current estimates are that about 12 million to 12.8 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic over a span of 400 years.¹⁷ The



number purchased by the traders was considerably higher, as the passage had a high death rate, with between 1.2 and 2.4 million dying during the voyage, and millions more in seasoning camps in the Caribbean after arrival in the new world.¹⁸

There is no doubt that this migration brought about by the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade did not bring about social advancement to Africa, rather it brought about retrogression and much harm on the African society. Then came the period of the abolition of the slave trade and its replacement with legitimate trade and the subsequent rise of evangelical revival and awakening in Europe and North America. The formation of missionary societies and the subsequent engagement in Christian missionary activities to Africa and elsewhere with the assistance of liberated slaves in some of the African regions which brought about another form of migration back to Africa. This also had some positive impacts on the African people and continent. However, the rise of colonialism almost at the same period which brought about the colonization of many African lands, regions and peoples was another development in migration which brought much negative effects and retardation on Africa and her people.

Main Causes of Migration in contemporary African Societies

Achille Dargaud Forfact and Joel Nkeng Akendung in their online article note that in recent years, irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa has been under the spotlight. Western media and politicians often use doomsday scenarios to describe the supposedly millions of desperate people knocking at the gates of European Eldorado to escape poverty and warfare at home. Such a stereotypical conception of sub-Saharan African migration is not only overlooking its root causes but it is also far from its real dynamics.¹⁹ The article went on to point out that, inspired by the extensive literature on international migration and based on data availability, 27 potential root causes of migration were selected to cover 30 sub-Saharan countries for the period between 2002 and 2016. The causes of net migration and resultant refugee population in Africa were thus traced to factors which include – gross domestic product per capita, domestic credit, trade, foreign direct investment inflows, external debts, youth unemployment, natural resources, rents, international tourism, military expenditure, health expenditure, undernourishment, food production, life expectancy, HIV prevalence population, corruption,²⁰ among others.

It was also further observed from the piece that in this case of sub-Saharan Africa, colonization and neoliberal capitalism have brought about financial liberalization, free trade, privatization of state-owned companies, atrophy of welfare policies, adoption of Western religions and educational systems, and the ineluctable tyranny of foreign aid, debt, and investments. Combined with the unfair subsidies, non-tariff barriers, and dumping prices, implemented by core capitalist countries, those artifacts have altered the core identity of Africans and created masses prone to migrate.²¹

Migration in Nigeria

With regards to migration as it relates to Nigeria, Odeyemi I. Oluwabukunmi articulating on the issue, observed that migration is integral to the history of the country. He further notes that in recent times, data confirms the heightened rate of migration from the country abroad. Societal factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, poor standard of living, insecurity, inflation amidst preference for greener pasture, are principal reasons for migration from Nigeria.²²

Thus, in an overview of migration in Nigeria, Odeyemi shows that Nigeria has experienced migration of people across and within its borders. During the colonial period of the 20th century, the country recorded massive internal migration as people moved from villages and towns into the cities. From the post-colonial period until the 1970s, movement in Nigeria remained mainly within



the scope. Although Nigerians also ventured outside the country to West African countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, the majority had an ultimate goal of returning.²³

The write-up went on to observe that, in the 1970s, although demands for labour grew in developed countries due to economic expansion, Nigeria also experienced an oil boom that raised the standard of living and improved the economy. As a result of this, Nigerians had minute reasons to permanently migrate from the country; therefore, most migrants travelled on temporary visas. Thus, Nigerian students and some other citizens sometimes go on vacation with temporary visas, with few exceptions. Also, the value of the Nigerian currency was very strong and stable at that time. And so, as a result, only few Nigerians valued emigration over living within the country as domestic working conditions were attractive, internally competitive, and the environment was relatively safe.²⁴

However, as time went on, conditions started to depreciate rapidly. By the 1980's, the heavy dependence on petroleum among other factors like the Structural Adjustment Programme, plunged the Nigerian economy into recession. This coupled with political instability adversely effected livelihoods. With various job opportunity and living conditions outside of the Nigerian border, many Nigerians saw this offer as a life changing opportunity. From this point onwards, international migration of Nigerian citizens increased and people already outside the country changed their status from temporary to permanent residents.²⁵

The migration trend continued to increase and even skyrocket in Nigeria up to the contemporary times. Presently, factors such as the state of the Nigerian socio-economic and political sphere, have heightened migration of Nigerians to other countries. Coupled with this also the prospect of better opportunities abroad. Nigeria, being a developing country that is faced with mounting systemic issues like unemployment, corruption, poor leadership, infrastructural decay, non-functional industries, insecurity, inflation, and a high poverty rate, among other issues, these gravely impact the educational system, work, businesses, and overall quality of life. Despite availability of resources such as a growing labour force and young population, yet poor and inadequate management has reduced the productivity of the Nigerian economy. These trends have exacerbated the outward flow of Nigerians, especially professionals, entrepreneurs and students, to other countries.²⁶

Rationale for Migration and Its Impacts

It has been observed that from the late 20th century, and most especially, in this 21st century, that socio-economic and political instability has hampered development in Nigeria. This is a major factor that has fostered migration from Nigeria, along with the pursuit of societal relevance and affluence. Many view migration out of the country as an achievement and a thing of pride. Every year, the country produces large numbers of graduates from tertiary institutions; however, the labour market is unable to absorb this surplus labour force, contributing to a high rate of unemployment in the country. And so in Nigeria, poverty, unemployment, population growth, inflation, the low value of currency, lack of basic health and education facilities, public debt, insecurity, human rights abuses, corruption, conflict and discrimination are observed as the push factors for international migration. On the other hand, the prospect of a better wage, improved living standards, safety, political freedom, reunification with family and friends, and personal development are the pull factors that attract Nigerians to other countries.²⁷

Consequently, the large number of migrants out of the country, especially among the highly skilled, has resulted in a massive brain drain. The skills needed to contribute to Nigeria's development go instead to the new country of residence. In the health sector for instance, with many medical practitioners leaving the country due to the push factor like inadequate medical facilities and poor working conditions; the development of the health sector in Nigeria is faced with serious



challenges. It is also observed that, although the inflow of remittances contributes to economic development, especially the livelihood of direct recipients, this in no way can mitigate the negative impact of brain drain as an effect of migration in Nigeria, nor does it alleviate the socio-economic and political challenges being combated in Nigeria.²⁸

Findings:

- From its inception, the Church has been impacted both positively and also negatively from the effects and consequences of migration and social change.
- Migration is defined as the movement of a person or people from one country, locality, place of residence to settle in another. Thus, migration is seen first and foremost, as a normal human activity as human beings have always moved from one country, locality, or place of residence to settle in another. Types of migration include internal and external migration, gross or net migration, and immigration and emigration.
- Human migration from one place to another may be with intentions to settle permanently or temporarily at a new location. Migration is often associated with better human capital at both individual and household levels. It is said to have a high potential to improve human development, and some studies have also confirmed that migration is the most direct route out of poverty.
- Four major forms of migration were noted which included: invasion, conquest, colonization and emigration/immigration.
- Social advancement is seen as the progress and improvement of society through the utilization of technology and the establishment of policies that promote economic growth, cultural development, and overall welfare on a national and global scale.
- Furthermore, social advancement is the process of improving a person's social status or position in society and can also refer to the progress of society as a whole. It can be achieved through economic growth, cultural development and welfare. Its benefits include greater recognition, improved well-being and improved organizational culture.
- On the inter-relationship between the Church, Africa and social advancement, it was observed that though the church in Africa could be said to have experienced astronomical growth since its inception, the same could not be said about the rate of growth in social advancement in African societies. It was rather found that, regarding social advancement, Africa has rather been on the negative growth index. Studies show that the overall social situation in Africa has continued to deteriorate. This is evidenced by the rapid rate of population growth, the pressure of urbanization and rural emigration, the decay in educational and health infrastructure, growing malnutrition and poverty, the worsening plight of refugees and displaced persons, and widespread unemployment and underemployment, among other social malaise.
- While Africa continues to face significant challenges in the areas enumerated, some glimpses of hope from an IMF report and also that of the African Union Agenda 2063, point out that the continent is experiencing social advancement through initiatives focused on improving education, healthcare, women's empowerment, and technological access, particularly with the increasing use of mobile technology, aiming to bridge the gaps in social mobility and create a more equitable society.
- On the causes of the increasing present trend of migration out of both Africa generally and Nigeria in particular, many factors were identified, which included bad governance and official governmental corruption, leading to youth unemployment, undernourishment, debt.



Also, unfair subsidies, dumping prices, non-tariff barriers implemented by core capitalist countries, have altered the core identity of Africans and created masses prone to migrate.

- Furthermore, societal factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, poor standard of living, insecurity, inflation amidst preferences for greener pasture, are principal reasons for migration from Nigeria.
- All these factors, coupled with the low value of the Nigerian currency, lack of basic health and educational facilities, human rights abuses, corruption, conflict and discrimination are observed as the push factors for international migration. On the other hand, the prospects of a better wage, improved living standards, safety, political freedom and personal development are the pull factors that attract Nigerians to other countries. Consequently, the large number of migrants out of the country, especially among the highly skilled, has resulted in a massive brain drain.

Recommendations:

- The Church should step up its advisory role on the various levels of government, urging them to be alive to their responsibilities, eschewing corruption and bad governance and addressing social and developmental issues so as to improve the people's standard of living and give them confidence to stay in their jobs and not abandon them in favour of the outward movement of migration.
- African governments on their own part should show responsibility and integrity in the discharge of their official duties and have the interest of their people and nations foremost in their hearts so as to serve for the good of the people and the development of their nations.
- When the welfare and wellbeing of the people are served and protected, the tendency to migrate in search of better means of livelihood will diminish.
- African people themselves should learn to take their destinies in their own hands by holding their leaders to account and taking democratic measures to replace unaccountable and rogue leadership.
- Factors that militate against the growth, development and social advancement of African states, nations and societies should be sorted and strictly addressed.
- Issues of corruption, bad governance, lack of transparency and accountability in government, theft of public funds and diversion of public funds for private use, and other financial crimes by those in authority should be strictly checked and severely punished to serve as deterrents.
- Key social infrastructure should be put in place – industrial centres established to provide employment to the teeming youth graduates, and the security of the skilled workers and various key sectors – health, education, energy and power should be guaranteed through favourable policies and welfare packages.
- Experts and technocrats should be appointed to man strategic sectors of the economy to provide proper management and direction so as to achieve desirable results.
- The draining of the national resources and wealth by corrupt politicians and government appointees should be discouraged through proper legislation and laws.

Conclusion:

It could be rightly said that everything flows from good leadership, patriotism, good followership, transparency, accountability and the fear of God. It is obvious that things have already gone out of hands in many sub-Saharan African nations – impoverishment of the citizenry,



unemployment, poor wages, poor infrastructure and poor social welfare for most citizenry, resulting to the present trend of rush for migration to find greener pastures elsewhere. However, if the leadership of the African nations should do a turn-around and implement favourable policies for the wellbeing of their people and nations, the trend could be gradually reversed and people will start settling down to work for their own welfare and the development of their nations.

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