

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### AN EVALUATION OF INDIGENOUS CREATIVITIES AMONG THE LEADERSHIP OF NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

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#### Introduction

This study which is situated within the context of African Pentecostalism is an investigation into the indigenous creativities of Pentecostal Pastors in Church leadership in Nigeria. Arguably, Nigeria has an established Pentecostal landscape which is the most dynamic in the whole of Africa.<sup>1</sup> This writer believes that it is the indigenous creativities of the Pentecostal leadership in Nigeria which have largely contributed to this dynamism. A question that comes to mind is 'Why is good and visionary leadership in Christian organizations of importance?' The answer is obvious; on a general level, good leadership is essential for the wellbeing of such organizations. And in particular, good leadership and creativity are notable indexes in the growth of urban Pentecostal and charismatic groups. More often than not, the solitary or visionary leadership of a prominent individual in religious circles has often created an organization that has

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<sup>1</sup> Matthews Ojo. "The Dynamics of Indigenous Charismatic Missionary Enterprise in West Africa," *Missionalia* 22:4 (December 1997), 538.

tended at a later stage to become a denomination. In this type of organization, the life of the group centers on the interpretations of the visions of the leader.<sup>2</sup> Good examples of this scenario in Nigeria include, the Deeper Life Christian Ministry led by William F. Kumuyi, the Living Faith Winners' Bible Church, led by David Oyedepo, the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, led by Daniel Olukoya, the Sword of the Spirit Ministries, led by Francis Wale Oke, and so on.

Three research questions are of particular interest to this study. The first is 'How can Nigerian Pentecostal groups be classified?' Second, 'What are the major indigenous leadership creativities amongst Pentecostal leadership in Nigeria?' And third, 'How can the whole phenomenon be evaluated in terms of the prospects and pitfalls of such creativities?' The study shall make allusions to different indigenous Pentecostal groups in Nigeria. The reason for this is obvious; many Pentecostal groups in Nigeria share these leadership creativities; this shall soon be shown in subsequent discussions. Amongst others; the areas of indigenous creativity which this chapter is focused include administration and organization, doctrinal dissemination, worship dynamics, meeting needs of members, and addressing cultural issues.

Through the research questions and scope of the study enumerated above, this study argues that, the

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<sup>2</sup> Ojo. *The End Time Army: Charismatic movements in modern Nigeria* (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc. 2006), 93.

indigenous creativities in church leadership by many Nigerian Pentecostal pastors have in many respects aided the continuous significance and expansion of such Pentecostal churches; however, there is the need to constantly evaluate such ingenuity in order to maximize their prospects and curb their excesses.

### **Taxonomy of the Nigerian Pentecostal Organizations**

In Nigeria today, there are hundreds of different Pentecostal groups. Some of these groups belong together; having a headquarters with many daughter branches or churches bearing the same name. On the other hand, some are just lone rangers; functioning as single bodies without any other branch. These Pentecostal churches go by all forms of names which the founders often claim came to them by revelation or divine inspiration. Some of these include; 'Jesus is Alive World Outreach Ministries'; 'Rhema Pentecostal Assembly'; Holy-Ghost Miracle Center'; 'Fire for Fire International Ministries'; 'End-Time Apostolic Assembly', 'Pure Fire Ministry' and so on. An interesting development amongst some of these Pentecostal groups is the fact that some conspicuously allude to themselves as 'international' groups despite not having any link with the international world. How does one describe such allusions by such churches and leaders? Is it an attempt to lie or an attempt to give a bogus public image based on deceit?

Regardless of the proliferation of these Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and the perception of some that these churches defy any attempt at classification; some scholars

in African Pentecostalism have attempted taxonomy of such churches in Nigeria. Of particular note in this development are the works by Deji Ayegboyin and Asonzeh Ukah and Matthews Ojo. Essentially, when related to their function, Ayegboyin and Asonzeh give three major classifications of the Pentecostals in Nigeria, namely; the Holiness Movements, the Prosperity Organizations and the Deliverance Ministries.<sup>3</sup> The holiness churches lay emphasis on the need for individual sanctification, consecration and holy living before God. The Deeper Life Christian Bible Church (DLCBC) is a good example of this first category. The Prosperity group on the other hand believes and largely teaches that it is an aberration for the believer in Christ to be poor, hence, the believer must live a victorious Christian life of victory, material and financial wellbeing. A good example of the churches in this category is the Living Faith Winners' Chapel (LFWC). The third group lays emphasis on the issue of deliverance. The group believes that an individual can only attain victorious Christian living as he or she experiences self deliverance through rigorous prayers of confessional statements of deliverance. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) is a good example of

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<sup>3</sup> Deji Ayegboyin and Asonzeh Ukah. Taxonomy of Churches In Nigeria: A Historical perspective. Orita Ibadan Journal of religious Studies XXXIV/1-2 June and December 2002, .78.

the third category. The MFM has been described as a deliverance ministry *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Matthews Ojo gives six classifications of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches. The first group is made up of the faith seekers. He describes the faith seekers as ascetic conversionists; the Deeper Life Bible Church is a good example of this group which involves in vigorous evangelism. The second group is the faith builders. This group lays emphasis on the potentials of the individual to overcome life's challenges; the Living Faith Winners' Chapel is a good example of this group in which the media plays a dominant role in the life of the organization.<sup>5</sup>

The third group is the faith transformers. This group seeks the conversion of isolated ethnic groups; the Calvary Ministries (CAPRO) is a good example of this category. The fourth group, according to Ojo, is the Reformists; those who have been influenced by Pentecostal spirituality, but still remain within the mainline protestant denomination. Although such persons chose to remain as members; however, they seek the renewal of their denominations. A good example is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement. The fifth

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<sup>4</sup> Deji Ayegboyin. "...But deliver us from evil..." The riposte of the MFM and its Implication for the 'Reverse in Mission'. *ORITA* XXXVII.1&2(2005), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Matthews, Ojo. "Of Saints and Sinners: Pentecostalism and the Paradox of Social Transformation in Modern Nigeria" *An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2010.* (Ile-Ife: OAU Press Limited, 2010), 25-31.

category is made up of the deliverance churches. This group lays emphasis on freedom from demonic possessions or activities. These Churches see themselves largely as spiritual clinics. More often than not the group sees the African cultural roots of the members as being responsible for their contemporary disasters and challenges, and hence, the need for 'spiritual medicine' of deliverance from such evil ancestral roots. A good example of this category is the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. The sixth group identified by Ojo is the modernists. This group seeks to present faith to its contemporary targeted audience in a modernized form by adopting the religious styles of the Charismatics and Pentecostals. A good example of this sixth category is the T.B Joshua's Synagogue Church of All Nations.<sup>6</sup>

In the two major taxonomies discussed above, it is obvious that Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and organizations have been classified primarily along two variables. First, Ayegboyin and Ukah have classified them according to functions; roles of the groups. On the other hand, it is obvious that Ojo classified them according to their dispositions towards the faith; convictions or beliefs. A question that comes to mind is 'what is the significance of the above taxonomy to the study?' Basically, the taxonomy shows that Nigerian Pentecostalism has a rich variety of typologies, depending on the angle from which they are viewed by the one doing the classification. However, it is significant to note that in spite of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

varieties of the Pentecostal group; the indigenous variables identified in this chapter are to a great extent common to all of them.

### **Indigenous Leadership Creativities**

A study of the activities of many Nigerian Pentecostal Churches reveals the fact that the leadership, particularly pastors, have over the years innovated certain patterns of operation within their various Churches or organizations. Such creativities cannot in any way be exhausted in a few pages of writing such as this. Therefore, the areas of creativity which concern this chapter are those which relate to administration, doctrine, worship, meeting felt needs and culture. It is believed that these selected areas fairly represent the scope of operation of many Nigerian Pentecostal groups and organizations.

### **Creativity in Church Administration and Organization**

The constraints of time and space would not allow a discussion on every aspect of creativity of Pentecostals in church administration, however, of interest at this point is the issue of line of authority in the church. Amongst many Nigerian Pentecostal groups, the line of authority is hierarchical and centralized. While it is true that the renewal affirms the idea of the priesthood of all believers, however, in practice, power and authority are concentrated in the hands of the leader. Often, such leaders even boast of their ministerial capabilities. The centralized power makes the charismatic leader to declare himself or herself as 'President', 'Founder' or 'General

Overseer' and so on. In many Nigerian Pentecostal Churches (NPCs) when the leader shares power, it is usually at his own discretion and usually with Pastors under him, whom he had appointed and can also be removed at any time. In the cases where there are branches of the same Church, the founder who is usually based at the headquarters, is usually the chairman over the meetings of the executive board of trustees; where there is one.<sup>7</sup>

Usually, these Pentecostal organizations do not have operational constitutions. In the registration of such groups for legal status, they present drafted constitutions, but afterwards, such constitutions are not usually used for day to day administrations. Rather, these leaders rely on visions, scriptural authority and miraculous manifestations to maintain their authority within the organization. There are often certain organizational issues in which only the leader has the right to act; for instance, he or she alone has the right to write tracts for publication also, he or she alone writes the editorials of the magazine or such publications of the organization, and so on. In all of these, his or her sermons form the main contents of the publication. In addition to these, are the testimonies of the miracles members or others claiming to have received under his ministrations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ojo, *The end Time Army: Charismatic movements in modern Nigeria*, 186.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



The administrative trend discussed above by Ojo is true of many Nigerian Pentecostal Churches and groups. It is particularly applicable to Pentecostal groups like the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, the Deeper Life Bible Church, Pure Fire Ministry, the New Generation Bible Church and a whole lot of others. The question may then be asked, 'where exactly is the issue of leadership creativity in the matter of their administration?' Many Pentecostal leaders do not rely on documented directives in the form of organizational policies or constitution for the steering of their churches; rather, they rely on charismatic gifts, the Bible and the miraculous. The merits and demerits of this would be discussed later in the evaluation. But it suffices to say here, that the absolute reliance on 'the supernatural' alone is not sufficient for Christian leadership in modern times.

### **Creativity in Doctrinal Dissemination**

Doctrine is a codification of beliefs or a body of teachings or instructions. Much of what constitutes the Pentecostal doctrine, concerns practical aspects of Christian beliefs which relate to daily living. Their beliefs are very important to them, because they are essentially a core of their reflections on religious and socio-economic situations of the society. Ojo informs that many Nigerian Charismatics and Pentecostals generally, have not systematized their teachings, this is because; they view theology with suspicion, and sometimes see it as Satan's tool to mislead Christians. For many Pentecostals,

doctrinal emphases are rooted in the literal interpretation of Bible verses; hence, they are intensely biblical.<sup>9</sup>

One of the 'doctrinal' teachings of the Pentecostals in Nigeria is the issue of divine healing. In Many Pentecostal gatherings in Nigeria, claims are made on the experiences of miraculous healing by some of the attendees. Indeed, their stress on miraculous healings has been a subject of contention among their critiques. For instance in an article titled "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses", J.O Magbabelo argues that more often than not, Pentecostal leaders cajole or deceive their innocent devotees with the claim of miracles.<sup>10</sup> In a similar perspective, a renowned Nigerian magazine, *News Watch*, in one of her editions, had the caption, 'Lies, Miracle Lies'. The article claims that some Pentecostal ministers arranged fake miracles with some of their members. Such fake miracles are intended to attract large followership, which ultimately results into more resources.<sup>11</sup>

A lot of such accusations and criticisms are made against Pentecostals. An objective way to respond to this at this point is to observe that, not all allegations can be dismissed as untrue, and at the same time, not all of such accusations against Pentecostals are true. However, it remains a reality that, in seeking to stimulate faith in their

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<sup>10</sup> J.O Magbabelo, "Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses?" *CODESRIA Bulletin* 1&2, 2005), 48.

<sup>11</sup> *NEWS WATCH Magazine* (cover page caption) 19 April, 2004.

members, Pentecostal leaders assure the worshippers of the fact that what God did before, He can do again. In stressing their doctrinal beliefs on Spirit baptism, exorcism, healings, spiritual warfare, prosperity, and so on; they can be commended for the ingenuity of stimulating faith in their members; they sustain in their members perpetual hope for the possibility of the fulfillment of an expectation.

### **Creativity in Worship**

Many Nigerian Pentecostal Churches have what can be described as a 'free liturgy.'<sup>12</sup> A liturgy is a set of ceremony or pattern of worship. John Bolt defines worship as the meeting between God and His people.<sup>13</sup> Worship is one of the aspects of the life of a community of believers, through which they are said to express essential uniqueness as a distinct people.<sup>14</sup> In the regular worship in an average Nigerian Pentecostal Church, the order of service is usually flexible; events can be added to it or removed at the 'prompting of the Holy Spirit'. In other words, for the Pentecostals, there is no fixed pattern or order of worship. Amongst the Pentecostals, worship is viewed as a jubilant Christian celebration. Whether it is

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<sup>12</sup> Deji Ayegboyin 'Dressed in borrowed robes....' *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1.1 (July 2006), 15.

<sup>13</sup> John Bolt, "Some Reflections on Church and World, Worship and Evangelism", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27.1 (1992), 97.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Van Gelder, "Some Further reflections on the Church and World, Worship and Evangelism", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 27.2 (1992), 373.

the regular Sunday worship, the mid-week worship or special worship programmes; the services are always very lively. The resounding shouts of 'Praise the Lord!' to which the congregation responds 'Halleluyah!', is both an expression of praise and sometimes a way of calling the attention of the congregation to a particular emphasis. However, the later is seldom the norm.

In the worship services of many Nigerian Pentecostals, preaching is viewed as the climax of all. At this point in the service, the participation of the congregation does not wane as they hear the word of God. One must agree that the way Pentecostals interpret scriptures has experienced improvements over the years, however, much is still being desired along this line. For instance, a Pentecostal preacher used Isaiah 45:11- "Ask of me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me" (King James's Version) - as authority to teach that believers could use faith to command God into action. According to Ogbu Kalu, this forms an example of the Pentecostals' incautious exegesis.<sup>15</sup>

What then is the leadership creativity in Pentecostal worship? Arguably, Pentecostal pastors bring into worship a depth of dynamism. With them, there are no dull moments. The leaders often ensure that their services are 'celebrational'; expressive, energetic, vibrant, noisy, and jubilant. Whether rightly interpreted or not; they

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<sup>15</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford Press; 2008), 267.

ensure that their interpretation of scriptures is pragmatic and largely applicable to life's experiences. In addition, for many Pentecostal pastors, technology is considered very pertinent in worship and hence, they fully explore its use. In the article by Roseland Hackett, titled "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana", she argued that, within the last three decades, the Pentecostal movement has increasingly made use of the electronic media for the transmission of her teachings. She further argued that this development continues to transform religious landscape in two ways. First by facilitating transnational and homogenizing cultural flows and second, through the media, they take the movement to new global levels.<sup>16</sup> Hackett is correct in her observation, however, it should be added, that, the use of media technology by the Pentecostals in contemporary times starts first and foremost in their local weekly worship programmes. Many of such groups make use of the computer power point software, with the aid of a projector to project on the screen features of the worship; such as, the ongoing preaching of the day, the songs being sung in the worship, announcements, etc. In a way, it has its own role in enriching the worship atmosphere and content assimilation by the worshippers. It should be noted that, it is not only the Pentecostal Pastors who make use of

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<sup>16</sup> Roseland I.J Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana", in *Journal of Religion in Africa* xxxviii.3 (1998), 258.

technology in worship; however, it can be argued that the use of diverse technological features in worship was championed by the Pentecostals in Nigeria.

Of a truth, in these dynamic worship features, the leadership has the ingenuity of creating an eclectic worship environment through which members freely express themselves and also experience the supernatural. For example, the Christ Embassy Church founded by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome has the slogan, 'creating an atmosphere for miracles.' Fundamentally in worship, Nigerian Pentecostals bring in African vigour and passion. Such vigour continues to be a source of great attraction to the youths who constitute a greater percentage of the membership.

### **Creativity in Meeting members' needs**

Another ingenuity of Pentecostal leaders is the variable of identifying with and meeting members' needs. Human beings are naturally 'dependent'. No man can exist in isolation; not needing anything or anyone for survival. As individuals differ, so also do their needs differ. Richard Shaull gives the picture of human needs in most of the developing worlds:

...vast majority of masses of women, men and children around the world are caught up in desperate daily struggle for survival. They live in total insecurity...exposed daily to illness, poverty, violence and early death...they can only assume their personal lives are in the hands of supernatural demonic powers...and if they have any hope, it can only rest

in supernatural power, thus their search today becomes more religious than political.<sup>17</sup>

In many respects, the scenario described above is largely applicable to Nigeria. Many people struggle in the country to make ends meet. It is at this point that the Pentecostal churches attain relevance amidst such multifarious human needs; giving hope to the hopeless, deliverance to the oppressed and empowering the down trodden with physical, material and spiritual strength for survival.<sup>18</sup> For Nigerian Pentecostals, God's salvation encompasses all aspects of life. It includes the social, economic and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

The ingenuity of the leadership here is that of providing a way of coping with the difficult economic situation in the country. Many Pentecostal groups like the Living Faith Winners' chapel usually organize economic empowerment summits to economically reposition the members. In a related sense, the Deeper Life Bible Church ensures that all attendees at their retreats and camp meetings are provided with food during the programmes. Through such avenues, these Pentecostal groups identify with the needs of their members. Largely, Nigerian Pentecostal leadership continues to identify with the spiritual, economic and health needs of her members. 'The

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Shaull, 'God in the Margins: Reflections on the Wounded healer' *Fruitful in This Land*, 146.

<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest that it is only the Pentecostals that meet human needs, rather, this suggests that they are greatly involved in such activities.

Holy Ghost Night' monthly programme of the Redeemed Christian Church of God; the 'Power Must Change Hands' programme of the MFM, the 'Shiloh Convention' of the Living Faith and others, are some of the major creativities of the leadership to meet the spiritual needs of the members and those of other participants.

### **Creativity in Addressing Cultural Issues**

Another area of creativity by NPCs is in the issue of culture. Culture is commonly described as a way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.<sup>19</sup> Hendrick Vroom and Mercy Oduyoye both inform that contextual understanding of the Gospel is always culturally conditioned. Cultures are said to be patterns of meaning, values and normativity: ways in which social life is structured, both in respect to freedom and lack of freedom, communion and hierarchy. They further inform that culture covers such things as lifestyle, music, the appreciation of economic success and methods of rearing children. Such values are said to lie at the basis of practical life.<sup>20</sup>

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<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=18888&dict=CALD>  
(Accessed on June 7, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Mercy A. Oduyoye and Hendrick M. Vroom, 'Introduction', *One Gospel-Many Cultures: Case studies and reflections on Cross-cultural Theology* in by Mercy Oduyoye and Hendrick Vroom (eds.) (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi B.V, 2003), 4.



A major issue in culture is contextualization. A very vivid dimension of this among Nigerian Pentecostals is the use of the vernacular. There are Nigerian Pentecostal Churches in which English as Nigeria's official language is usually translated into the common vernacular language of the area in the programmes of the Church. A good example of this is the monthly Mega prayer meetings of the Redeemed Christian Church. The messages and teachings of Pastor Enoch Adeboye are usually translated from English to Yoruba. Another cultural issue of significance is that of cultural values. Many Nigerian Pentecostals hold in high esteem the cultural values of respect for elders and leaders, a sense of community belonging, and honour for women. Amongst many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, such as the Living Faith Winners Church, the Redeemed Christian Church, and others, women are given prominence. In a sense, this trend contests with the traditional African ways of relegating women to the background. In very unique ways, Nigerian Pentecostals continue to promote African cultures which do not contradict scriptures and also re-shape some African cultures to align with the norms of the Bible. For example many Pentecostal groups in Nigeria preach against polygamy, idolatry, and so on.

### **An Evaluation**

The first area of Pentecostal leadership creativity identified in the chapter is in the area of reliance on charismatic gifts such as discernment, words of knowledge, and so on for the course of actions in

administrative decisions. In addition to this, many Pentecostal leaders also rely on the Bible and the miraculous in their organizational decisions. While it is arguable that the Bible should be the sole authority for Christian conduct; however, the issue of church administration requires in addition to the Bible, other administrative knowledge and dexterity. With the contemporary trends of globalization, modernization, technological developments and other societal dynamics, church administration has gone beyond colloquial handling of administrative issues. Church administration is an area which requires a combination of divine inspiration with scholarship, training and a variety of experiences. In many Nigerian Pentecostal groups, the leaders are often autocratic; issuing directives, commands and instructions to others. There is the need for a re-think. Organizational leadership should be more participatory, accountable and transparent. It is glaring that the idea of servant leadership is absent in many Pentecostal circles in Nigeria and often this leads to crises. A path of wisdom therefore is to imbibe Jesus attitude of humility.<sup>21</sup> Access to many General Overseers of Pentecostal Churches is often difficult; perhaps 'it is easier for a camel to pass through the eyes of a needle' than for an individual to see some General Overseers.

Next is the issue of creativity in doctrinal dissemination. The passion with which Nigerian Pentecostal leaders present their doctrinal beliefs in

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<sup>21</sup> See Phillipians 2:9-11 (NIV).

teaching and preaching is worth commendation. This enthusiasm often stimulates faith in the members to expect great things from God. However, as much as the Pentecostals stress the ability of God to do the miraculous, there is the apt need to also strike a balance with the teachings on the need for right Christian living by the members. Furthermore, there is the need for Nigerian Pentecostal leaders to stop viewing theology with suspicion or as an evil thing. A common statement by many amongst the group when preaching is 'I have not come here to theologize or do theology.' This statement is utterly shrouded in ignorance; since theology is simply thinking about God or an attempt to think critically about God and the faith reposed in Him by individuals. Many Pentecostal preachers are unaware of the fact that as they teach the Bible or preach about God, they are already doing theology or involved in theology. While it is true that many Pentecostal pastors now undertake training in Bible schools, however, many are still skeptical about the idea. Many of such individuals, who disdain the idea of training more often than not, misrepresent the truth of the Bible.

A third area of creativity identified by the study is in the issue of worship. Many Nigerian Pentecostal churches colour their worship services with African vigour and passion. In an average worship service in a Pentecostal church, worshippers are engaged in a high level of participation in corporate extemporaneous prayers, jubilant praise accompanied with dancing, positive confessional statements, a series of 'praise the

of indigenous creativities amongst Nigerian Pentecostal Church leaders. These areas include church administration, doctrinal dissemination, worship, meeting needs of members and addressing cultural issues.

From the study it is obvious that the various creativities of the Pentecostal leadership have in one way or the other positively impacted the growth and popularity of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. However, on a closer look, the evaluation shows that as much as these creativities have their strengths, yet, they have their weaknesses. It is believed that if these excesses are curbed and the creativities improved upon, the dividends would be higher both for the Pentecostals and Nigerian Christianity.