



Anglicanism and Pentecostalism in Rivers State: Examining Identity, Continuity and Change

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Abstract. The growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria has reshaped the country's ecclesiastical and sociocultural landscape, particularly in the Niger Delta, where Anglicanism once wielded significant historical and institutional influence. This article examines how Anglican identity in Rivers State negotiates continuity and change amid a religious environment increasingly defined by charismatic spirituality, media-driven worship, prosperity theology, and youth mobility. Drawing on socio-historical and descriptive methods, the study traces Anglican heritage from its missionary foundations to its contemporary encounter with Pentecostalism. It argues that while Pentecostal expansion has challenged Anglican numerical strength and youth retention, it has also spurred liturgical flexibility, charismatic renewal, and new approaches to ministry and media engagement. The article further grills the tensions between episcopal order and entrepreneurial leadership, sacramental spirituality and experiential religiosity, and institutional stability and religious consumerism. Rather than interpreting the Anglican experience as decline, the study presents it as a process of adaptive continuity in which tradition is renegotiated in response to changing religious expectations. The paper contributes to broader discussions on denominational resilience, identity formation, and the transformation of historic churches in contemporary African Christianity.

Keywords: Anglicanism, Pentecostalism, Identity, Continuity, Change

1. Introduction

The Nigerian religious landscape has undergone a significant transformation since the late twentieth century, largely driven by the rapid expansion of Pentecostal and charismatic movements. These

movements have reshaped patterns of Christian worship, leadership, theological emphasis, and denominational affiliation nationwide (Marshall, 2009). In Rivers State, where Anglicanism once held a central place in ecclesiastical life, Pentecostal churches now wield considerable influence, particularly in urban centers such as Port Harcourt. Historically, Anglicanism provided the structural and theological foundation for Christian expansion in the Niger Delta through the activities of the Church Missionary Society. Its legacy includes the establishment of mission schools, the translation of liturgical texts into local languages, and the formation of an indigenous clergy (Ajayi, 1965). These institutions helped create an educated Christian elite and shaped the region's sociopolitical development.

However, the rise of contemporary Pentecostal churches, such as Salvation Ministries, Redeemed Christian Church of God, and Omega Power Ministries, among others, has introduced new forms of spirituality that emphasize prosperity, healing, deliverance, and expressive worship. These developments have created both tension and interaction between historic and newer Christian traditions. The concept of identity is central to this analysis. Religious identity involves doctrinal continuity, liturgical practice, institutional structure, and collective memory. In contexts of rapid change, these elements are often reinterpreted to remain relevant (Hastings, 1994). On the other hand, Continuity and change are therefore not mutually exclusive but interconnected processes. Anglicanism in Rivers State demonstrates this interaction through its engagement with charismatic spirituality, youth ministry, and digital media. This paper, therefore, examines how Anglicanism in Rivers State responds to these changes while preserving its historical identity. It explores whether the Anglican tradition is

in decline or undergoing transformation and how continuity is maintained in a Pentecostal age. The article adopts a multidisciplinary approach that integrates church history, sociology of religion, and liturgical studies. This approach makes it possible to understand Anglican heritage not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a living tradition undergoing negotiation in a dynamic religious environment. The position of this contribution is that Anglican heritage in Rivers State is not disappearing but is being reconfigured through adaptive strategies that allow it to retain its theological core while responding to contemporary religious expectations.

1.1 Pentecostalism

In discussing Pentecostalism various views are held by scholars on its meaning, origin and theology (Mpigi, 2014) Pentecostalism and Charismatism is generally concerned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and the actual practice of such gifts by the Christian and the church in general. These two concepts are therefore interwoven and could be used synonymously and interchangeably. The concept of Pentecostalism and Charismatism as a distinct and exclusive ecclesiastical tradition of its own is what one may refer to "Modern Pentecostalism". This phenomenon has its origin in various aspects of the 19th century fundamentalism in the American Christian Community. Pentecostalism is therefore, a movement that centers around the belief in the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit with all the giftings within the Church as was present in the Apostolic period beginning with the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The distinguishing belief is that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience following salvation and is evidenced by the gift of Speaking in Tongues. The two main groups related to Pentecostals are the Charismatics and the Third Wave. While the Pentecostals emphasize on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues as evidence, the newer Third Wave movement "stresses "signs and wonders" and gifts such as prophecy and healing, primarily through independent churches and organizations that emerged in the 1980s.

1.2 Anglicanism

Anglicanism is a global tradition within Christianity, originating from the 16th-century Church of England, that represents a "middle way" (via media) between Catholicism and Protestantism. It values Scripture, tradition, and reason, emphasizing liturgical worship, the Book of Common Prayer, and the episcopal structure of bishops. The Anglican Communion is in this sense, a fellowship of Churches, which grew out

of the Church of England, with linked histories and theology, and worship based on the Book of Common Prayer. It has 85 million members in 39 Provinces across 165 countries. There are Anglican communities in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies, India, Japan, South Korea, South America, Africa, and Nigeria, where this paper is situated. There is a presence in Jerusalem, the Middle East, and the Far East. There are also Anglican chaplaincies in Europe. The Queen is Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Other Anglican provinces have different relationships with their political authorities, and each province is a fully autonomous regional Church. Members of the Anglican Church are united by a common legacy which has at its heart the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a faith expressed in the three main ecumenical creeds: Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian, Wotogbe-Weneka (1997).

1.3 Historical Roots of Anglican Heritage in Rivers State

The Anglican Church is a Christian denomination comprising churches with a historical connection to the Church of England, which share its doctrines, liturgical worship, ecclesiastical orders, and administrative structures. Ezeakunne (2016) states that the Anglican Church, also called the Anglican Communion, is an international association of national and regional Anglican churches that are in full communion with the Church of England and specifically with its main leader, the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is no single Anglican Church with universal authority over others; instead, each nation or regional church has full independence. The bonds that link these churches mean that, ideally, they agree on essential doctrines and that full participation in the sacramental life of each church is accessible to all communicant Anglicans across the Anglican Communion. At the same time, each church functions independently within the traditions it has inherited. The Anglican Church arrived in Nigeria in 1841 at Aboh in present-day Delta State and was firmly established in 1842 at Badagry in Lagos State. The Anglicans in Nigeria gained the status of an autonomous Province in 1979. The official name of the Anglican denomination in Nigeria is "The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)." Its headquarters are in Abuja, where the Archbishop, Metropolitan, and Primate of All Nigeria, who also serves as the Bishop of Abuja and the archbishop of the ecclesiastical Province of Abuja, leads the church. The church's official website estimates its membership in Nigeria at about eighteen million people, while the total number of Anglicans worldwide is around 80 million.

Therefore, the Anglican Communion is the third-largest Christian communion in the world, after the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The Origin of the Anglican Church in Nigeria, according to Wotogbe-Weneka (1997) could be divided into three stages, namely; the arrival of the freed slaves of Nigerian descent at Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1782; the movement of Yoruba ex-slaves to Yoruba-Land and their subsequent request for European missionaries and priests in 1842, and thirdly, the request made by the Igbo returnee slaves who had followed the example of the Yoruba ex-slaves for missionaries for the Niger area in 1857. Though we agree with Weneka's origin of Anglicanism in Nigeria, we also have to point out that any scholar of Church history who ignores the contribution of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), an evangelical arm of the Anglican Church in the introduction of Anglicanism in Nigeria will be making a mistake as the Anglican Church history in Nigeria cannot be complete without the mention of the activities of the CMS. This is corroborative with the assertion made by Akinyele (ed) (1994) that Anglicanism was introduced into Nigeria through the evangelistic and charismatic Anglican evangelicals known as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), whose contacts with Nigeria was very early linked with their campaign against slave trade. Summing up the views of Wotogbe-Weneka and Akinyele, Anglicanism became rooted in Nigeria through both local initiatives and the activities of the CMS, both with evangelical zeal. The discussion above, implies that Anglicanism in the Niger Delta is inseparable from nineteenth-century missionary expansion and African agency in the spread of Christianity. Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society worked alongside indigenous converts who translated Christianity into local cultural forms (Ajayi, 1965). Early mission stations in Bonny and Okrika served as centres of evangelization, education, and medical work. These institutions laid the foundation for the growth of Anglican dioceses in what is now Rivers State.

2. Identity, Continuity, and Change in the Anglican Church

The relationship between identity, continuity, and change is central to understanding the development of Christian traditions across history. Religious institutions are rarely static; rather, they evolve as they respond to social, cultural, theological, and political transformations. The Anglican tradition provides an important case study for examining this dynamic relationship because it has historically attempted to balance faithfulness to tradition with openness to

reform and contextual adaptation. In contemporary Christianity, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism has introduced new forms of spirituality and worship that challenge older ecclesiastical traditions, including Anglicanism. Understanding how Anglicanism negotiates these developments reveals broader processes of religious change in modern societies (Jenkins, 2011).

The Anglican Church as earlier stated, emerged within the context of the sixteenth-century Reformation and developed a distinctive identity that combines elements of Catholic heritage and Protestant reform. This identity is often described as a *via media*, meaning a "middle way" between Roman Catholic sacramentalism and Protestant emphasis on scriptural authority. This theological balance has historically allowed Anglicanism to accommodate a wide range of theological perspectives while maintaining institutional unity. However, the rise of Pentecostal spirituality has introduced new dynamics that are reshaping Anglican identity in many regions of the world, particularly in Africa (Avis, 2008). In the African context, Christianity has undergone a remarkable revolution over the past century. The rapid expansion of Pentecostal and charismatic movements has significantly influenced the structure, theology, and worship patterns of older denominations. In countries such as Nigeria, Pentecostalism has become one of the most influential expressions of Christianity, attracting millions of adherents through its emphasis on spiritual empowerment, healing, and prosperity teachings. This expansion has inevitably affected Anglican congregations, many of which have adopted charismatic practices while attempting to retain their historic liturgical identity (Anderson, 2013).

Another important dimension of this transformation is the role of globalization and urbanization. Rapid urban growth in African cities has created new social environments where traditional denominational boundaries are increasingly fluid. Many Anglican believers attend Pentecostal revival services, watch Pentecostal televangelists, and participate in interdenominational prayer meetings. These interactions contribute to the gradual integration of Pentecostal spirituality into Anglican worship and theology (Jenkins, 2011). Scholars of global Christianity have therefore argued that the future of historic denominations will depend on their ability to balance continuity with innovation. Churches that resist change entirely risk losing relevance in rapidly evolving societies, while those that abandon their traditions may lose their distinctive identity. The Anglican experience in Nigeria illustrates the delicate

process of negotiating these competing pressures (Sanneh, 2003).

3. The Rise and Flourish of Modern Pentecostalism

The global rise of Pentecostalism represents one of the most significant developments in modern Christian history. Scholars often trace the origins of modern Pentecostalism to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in Los Angeles. This revival emphasized the experience of the Holy Spirit, particularly through speaking in tongues, healing, and prophetic ministry (Anderson, 2013). Pentecostalism spread rapidly across the world during the twentieth century, particularly in the Global South. Its emphasis on personal spiritual experience, divine healing, and deliverance from spiritual oppression resonated strongly with many communities facing social and economic challenges. These features made Pentecostal churches highly attractive in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia (Jenkins, 2011). In Rivers State, Pentecostalism developed distinctive characteristics that reflect local cultural contexts. African Pentecostal churches often emphasize spiritual warfare, prophetic revelations, and miraculous interventions in everyday life. These themes resonate with indigenous worldviews that recognize the reality of spiritual forces and supernatural influence (Ukaegbu, 2003). Nigeria has become one of the most significant centers of global Pentecostalism. Churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith Church Worldwide attract millions of worshippers and operate large international networks. These churches emphasize prosperity teachings, deliverance ministries, and large-scale revival gatherings (Ukah, 2018). The rapid expansion of Pentecostal churches has transformed the religious landscape of Nigeria. Many mainline denominations, including Anglicanism, have experienced membership migration as believers seek more dynamic spiritual experiences. This development has encouraged some Anglican congregations to adopt Pentecostal-style worship practices (Anderson, 2013). Pentecostalism also utilizes modern media technologies such as television, radio, and social media to reach wider audiences. This media presence has amplified Pentecostal influence across denominational boundaries and contributed to the diffusion of charismatic spirituality within other Christian traditions (Jenkins, 2011). The appeal of Pentecostalism is further strengthened by its emphasis on individual empowerment and divine intervention in everyday life. Many believers perceive Pentecostal spirituality as offering practical solutions to problems such as illness, poverty, and spiritual attacks

(Ukaegbu, 2003). As Pentecostalism continues to grow, its influence on older Christian traditions raises important questions about identity, continuity, and theological adaptation.

4. Pentecostal Influence on Anglican Worship and Spirituality

Pentecostal influence has significantly reshaped worship practices within many Anglican congregations in Nigeria. Traditional Anglican liturgy has increasingly incorporated charismatic elements such as lively praise music, spontaneous prayer, and healing services. These practices reflect broader trends within global Christianity toward experiential spirituality (Anderson, 2013). Many Anglican churches now organize prayer vigils, revival meetings, and deliverance services that resemble Pentecostal worship patterns. These events often attract large congregations and are perceived as spiritually vibrant compared to traditional liturgical services (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). This transformation has generated debates about the preservation of Anglican identity. Some clergy argue that excessive Pentecostal influence risks undermining the theological depth and liturgical heritage of Anglicanism. Others believe that charismatic renewal represents a legitimate contextual adaptation that revitalizes the church. Despite these tensions, the integration of Pentecostal spirituality has also revitalized evangelism within Anglican congregations. Charismatic worship styles often appeal to younger generations who seek emotionally engaging religious experiences. Thus, Pentecostal influence illustrates how religious traditions evolve through interaction with new spiritual movements while attempting to maintain continuity with their historical roots. Conversely, today, as a result of Pentecostal influence, many individuals attend the Anglican Church services with the primary expectation of receiving miraculous solutions to their life's problems. Some seek financial breakthroughs, while others desire healing, protection, or marriage. This phenomenon has led to a subtle shift in focus, where the emphasis on spiritual growth, discipleship, and community is sometimes overshadowed by the pursuit of tangible, immediate benefits. As a result, church membership has become increasingly transient, with attendees "church hopping" in search of the next miraculous experience. This "church prostitution" undermines the development of deep, meaningful relationships within the church community (Mpigi and Onuegbu, 2025).

5. Identity and Continuity in Contemporary Anglicanism

The identity of the Anglican Communion is deeply rooted in historical developments that emerged during the sixteenth-century Reformation in England. The separation from Roman Catholic authority during the reign of Henry VIII created the institutional foundation for what would later become a global communion of churches. Despite this political break, Anglicanism retained many liturgical and sacramental features of Catholic Christianity, thereby establishing a distinctive identity that combined continuity with reform (Avis, 2008). Central to Anglican identity is the theological concept of the *via media*, which seeks to balance Catholic tradition with Protestant principles. This approach emphasizes Scripture as the ultimate authority while also valuing the role of tradition and reason in theological reflection. The Anglican theological framework, therefore, encourages moderation and dialogue rather than rigid doctrinal uniformity. This flexibility has historically allowed Anglicanism to adapt to different cultural contexts while maintaining a recognizable ecclesiastical identity (McGrath, 2012).

Another key component of Anglican identity is its liturgical tradition, particularly the use of the Book of Common Prayer. First compiled by Thomas Cranmer in the sixteenth century, this text standardized Anglican worship and provided a common framework for prayer, sacramental rites, and daily devotion. The prayer book became one of the most influential liturgical texts in Christian history and remains a defining feature of Anglican spirituality (Booty, 1998). The episcopal structure of Anglican governance also contributes significantly to its identity. Anglican churches are led by bishops who are believed to stand in continuity with the historic episcopate of the early church. This structure preserves a sense of apostolic succession and provides institutional stability across generations. Bishops serve not only as administrators but also as guardians of doctrine and liturgical practice within their dioceses (Avis, 2008).

In Nigeria, Anglican identity developed through missionary activities of the Church Missionary Society during the nineteenth century. Missionaries introduced Anglican liturgy, theology, and educational institutions that shaped the development of Christianity in the region. Over time, indigenous leadership emerged within the church, leading to the formation of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), which is now one of the largest Anglican provinces in the world (Kalu, 2008).

Anglican identity in Nigeria also reflects a process of cultural adaptation. While early missionary Christianity often discouraged indigenous cultural expressions, contemporary Anglican churches increasingly incorporate African music, languages, and cultural symbols into worship. This development demonstrates how continuity with Anglican tradition can coexist with contextual innovation (Sanneh, 2003). Despite these adaptations, Anglicanism continues to emphasize sacramental worship, liturgical order, and theological reflection. These elements differentiate Anglican identity from the more spontaneous worship styles commonly associated with Pentecostal churches. However, the growing popularity of Pentecostal spirituality has created new pressures that challenge these traditional forms (Anderson, 2013).

A shift from 'growth' to 'health' is already apparent in church circles. Warren who wrote extensively on missions and church growth has turned attention to church health. His focus has been on outward looking both of members and buildings. This assessment is a shift from what really makes a healthy church. A healthy church must be a growing church characterized by Christ centered leadership, gift oriented lay ministry, passionate and Christ centered spirituality (Mpigi, 2018).

The preservation of Anglican identity, therefore, requires careful negotiation between historical continuity and cultural adaptation. As Pentecostal influence continues to expand across Nigeria and Africa, Anglican churches must continually reinterpret their traditions in ways that remain faithful to their historical heritage while engaging contemporary spiritual expectations.

Continuity is one of the defining features of Anglican ecclesiology and worship. The Anglican Church emphasizes historical continuity with the early Christian church through its liturgical practices, sacramental theology, and episcopal governance. This continuity provides stability and ensures that Anglican worship remains connected to centuries of Christian tradition (Avis, 2008). Liturgical continuity is particularly evident in the regular use of structured worship services based on historic prayer books and church calendars. Anglican worship follows a rhythm of liturgical seasons such as Advent, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. These seasons guide the spiritual life of congregations and connect contemporary believers with the historical experience of the global Christian church (Bradshaw, 2010). The sacramental life of the church also contributes to this continuity. Anglican theology recognizes sacraments such as baptism and

the Eucharist as central acts of Christian worship. These rituals are understood as visible signs of divine grace and serve as key markers of Anglican identity. Through these sacramental practices, Anglican communities maintain a spiritual connection with the historic traditions of Christianity (McGrath, 2012). Ecclesiastical structures also play a crucial role in maintaining continuity. The hierarchical organization of dioceses under bishops ensures institutional stability and doctrinal oversight. This system allows the Anglican Church to maintain unity across diverse cultural contexts while preserving core theological principles (Avis, 2008). However, continuity within Anglicanism does not imply complete resistance to change. The Anglican tradition has historically demonstrated flexibility in adapting liturgical practices and pastoral strategies to different cultural environments. This adaptability has enabled Anglicanism to expand globally without losing its essential identity (Walls, 2002). In Nigeria, Anglican continuity is maintained through theological education, diocesan structures, and the preservation of liturgical traditions. Seminaries and theological colleges train clergy who are responsible for sustaining Anglican doctrine and worship practices across generations (Kalu, 2008). At the same time, the growing influence of Pentecostal spirituality has introduced new elements into Anglican worship, including charismatic prayer, healing ministries, and contemporary music. These developments illustrate how continuity and change interact within religious institutions (Ukaegbu, 2003). Thus, Anglican continuity is best understood not as static preservation but as a dynamic process in which historical traditions are continually interpreted within new cultural contexts.

6. Conclusion

Today, Anglicanism increasingly reflects a process of identity reconstruction shaped by interaction with Pentecostal spirituality. Anglican congregations are redefining their identity by integrating charismatic worship practices while preserving episcopal governance and sacramental theology. This reconstructed identity reflects broader trends in global Christianity where denominational boundaries are becoming more fluid. Many believers participate in multiple Christian networks, blending liturgical and charismatic expressions of faith. In Nigeria, Anglican churches often incorporate African music, prophetic prayer, and revival meetings alongside traditional liturgical services. This synthesis demonstrates the evolving nature of Anglican identity in the Pentecostal age. Institutional structures play a critical role in preserving Anglican continuity despite changes in

worship styles and theological emphasis. The hierarchical system of bishops, dioceses, and parishes provides organizational stability and doctrinal oversight. Anglican seminaries and theological colleges ensure that clergy receive training grounded in historical theology and Anglican ecclesiology. This education helps preserve doctrinal continuity across generations. Liturgical texts, ecclesiastical laws, and synodical governance further reinforce Anglican institutional identity. These mechanisms regulate church practices and prevent radical deviations from established traditions. Even when charismatic elements are introduced into worship, Anglican clergy remain accountable to diocesan authority. This accountability helps maintain a balance between innovation and tradition. The synergy between identity, continuity, and change is therefore clearly illustrated in the interaction between Anglican tradition and modern Pentecostalism. While Anglicanism seeks to preserve its historical heritage through liturgy, theology, and institutional structures, it also faces pressures to adapt to contemporary spiritual expectations. Pentecostalism has introduced new forms of worship, spirituality, and evangelism that resonate strongly with many believers in Rivers State. These developments have influenced Anglican congregations, leading to the gradual incorporation of charismatic practices within Anglican worship. Despite these changes, Anglican institutional structures continue to preserve historical continuity. Continuity is maintained through episcopal structure, sacramental theology, and historical memory. Change is expressed through charismatic renewal, media engagement, and contextual worship.

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