

Missionary Archives as Contested Heritage: Provenance, Decolonization, and the Politics of Knowledge Production in Nigerian Church History

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Abstract— This paper examines the politics of knowledge production in Nigerian church history, focusing on the provenance, preservation, and accessibility of missionary archives. It argues that the physical location of these collections in European repositories, combined with their colonial-era systems of classification and description, continues to shape what can be known about Nigerian Christianity and how that knowledge is produced. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from archival studies, including Stoler's (2010) concept of "reading along the grain" and Staphorst's (2025) analysis of the coloniality of archival being, the paper analyses the provenance histories of key collections, including the Church Missionary Society archives at the University of Birmingham, the Sudan United Mission collections at the University of Edinburgh, and the records of the Methodist Missionary Society held in London. It examines the destruction of locally-held church records during the Nigerian Civil War and the subsequent dependence of Nigerian scholars on metropolitan archives. The paper argues that decolonizing Nigerian church history requires not only greater access to existing collections but a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between archives, historians, and the communities from which archival materials were taken. It concludes by proposing a research agenda for collaborative archival practice, including digitization, repatriation of digital copies, and the development of indigenous archival methodologies.

Keywords: missionary archives; Nigerian church history; decolonization; provenance; archival silences; knowledge production.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigerian Pentecostalism presents one of the most remarkable cases of religious transformation in twentieth-century Africa. From small prayer groups and student fellowships in the early twentieth century, Pentecostal Christianity has grown into a dominant force in Nigerian religious life, shaping public discourse, political culture, and social institutions in ways that extend far beyond the walls of individual churches (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Wariboko, 2014). According to the Pew Research Center's (2006) ten-country survey, renewalists—a category encompassing both Pentecostals and charismatics—accounted for 26% of the Nigerian population, and Pentecostals in Nigeria were more likely to be well-educated than the general population.

Much of the scholarly literature on Nigerian Pentecostalism has focused on its growth, its theological emphases, its political entanglements, and its global expansion (Obadare, 2018; Ukah, 2008). This body of work has considerably enriched our understanding of the movement's public face. However, the internal dynamics of institutional development have received comparatively less sustained attention. How did charismatic movements that began as informal fellowships or prayer bands transform themselves into stable denominations and global networks? What tensions accompanied this transformation? And what does the process of institutionalisation reveal about the nature of religious authority in Nigeria?

This paper addresses these questions through a historiographical analysis of institutional transformation in Nigerian Pentecostalism from 1914 to 2025. The central argument is that institutionalisation was not a betrayal of Pentecostalism's charismatic origins but a necessary condition for its survival and public relevance. The routinization of charisma, to use Max Weber's (1978) formulation, was a complex negotiation between the founding vision and the demands of durability, scale, and accountability. Understanding this process requires attention to the specific historical circumstances in which Nigerian Pentecostalism developed, including colonialism, the Civil War, military rule, economic crisis, and globalization.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the existing literature and identifies the gap that this study addresses. Section 3 presents the theoretical framework, drawing on Weber's theory of charismatic authority and its routinization, while adapting it to the African context. Section 4 provides a historical analysis of institutional transformation across four phases. Section 5 discusses the patterns and implications of the analysis. Section 6 concludes with reflections on the contribution of the study and directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historiography of Nigerian Pentecostalism

The scholarly study of Nigerian Pentecostalism has developed considerably since the 1970s, when Pentecostal movements were still largely marginal to both Nigerian society and academic discourse. Early accounts tended to treat Pentecostalism as a transient phenomenon, a manifestation of religious enthusiasm that would dissipate as Nigeria modernized (Ojo, 2006, p. 3). This expectation proved profoundly mistaken.

Ogbu Kalu's (2008) *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* marked a watershed in the field. Kalu provided the first comprehensive overview of Pentecostalism across the African continent, arguing that Pentecostalism was not a foreign import but a genuinely African religious expression that drew on indigenous cosmologies and spiritual sensibilities (Soothill, 2010, p. 131). His work challenged the assumption that African Pentecostalism was simply an extension of American or European movements, and it emphasised the agency of African founders, prophets, and evangelists in shaping the movement's character. Kalu's approach to church history as a "confessional enterprise" reflected his conviction that the historian's task was not merely to record events but to equip the church for its mission (Burgess, 2019, p. 211).

Matthews Ojo's (2006) *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* offered a detailed historical sociology of the charismatic renewal that emerged from Nigerian university campuses in the 1960s and 1970s. Ojo traced the origins of the movement to evangelical student groups, particularly the Scripture Union and the Christian Union, and documented the processes by which these fellowships evolved into independent churches. His work was among the first to systematically analyse the organizational dynamics of Nigerian Pentecostalism, including the role of house fellowships, the emergence of denominational structures, and the tensions between charismatic leadership and institutional governance (Ojo, 2006).

Richard Burgess's (2008) *Nigeria's Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny* focused on the Igbo-led revival that emerged during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and its role in the formation of neo-Pentecostal churches in Eastern Nigeria. Burgess argued that the war created a context of existential crisis in which Pentecostal revival spread rapidly, and that the networks established during this period became the foundation for the Pentecostal expansion of subsequent decades (Burgess, 2008).

Asonzeh Ukah's (2008) study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) provided a detailed ethnographic and historical account of one of Nigeria's most successful Pentecostal denominations. Ukah argued that the RCCG represented a "new paradigm of Pentecostal power," characterised by a distinctive combination of charismatic authority, bureaucratic organisation, and global expansion. His work highlighted the role of the church's founder, Josiah Akindayomi, and his successor,

Enoch Adeboye, in shaping the church's institutional identity and its relationship to Nigerian society and politics (Ukah, 2008).

Nimi Wariboko's (2014) *Nigerian Pentecostalism* offered a philosophical and ethical analysis of the movement, focusing on its "spiritual optics" – the way Pentecostals perceive the relationship between visible and invisible realities. Wariboko argued that the standard periodization of Nigerian Pentecostalism into otherworldly and this-worldly phases was inadequate, and he proposed a more complex account that emphasised continuity across periods (Wariboko, 2014).

More recent scholarship has continued to develop these themes. Daniel and Uchendu (2026) provide a comprehensive overview of the historical trajectory of Nigerian Pentecostalism from 1914 to the present, identifying a consistent pattern of spiritual awakening, institutional development, and premature decline across successive waves of revival. Aloko (2026) examines the role of charismatic leadership in the rise of the Living Faith Church in Kaduna, demonstrating how David Oyedepo's personal charisma was routinized through institutional structures, theological adaptation, and prosperity-oriented practices. Ojo (2020) studied the interconnections of charismatic leadership, organizational dynamics, and the growth of Independent Pentecostal churches in Lagos, finding that the wives of pastors often shared in their husbands' charisma, indicating that charisma can be a shared rather than an exclusively individual attribute (Ojo, 2020, p. 63).

The Gap: Institutional Development as a Historiographical Problem

While this body of scholarship has considerably advanced our understanding of Nigerian Pentecostalism, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing literature focuses on the movement's public face – its growth, its political influence, its global expansion – rather than on the internal dynamics of institutional development. We know a great deal about what Pentecostals do in public but comparatively less about how their institutions function internally, how authority is structured, how conflicts are resolved, and how organizational forms evolve over time.

Second, the historiography of Nigerian Pentecostalism has tended to be denominational in focus, with individual studies devoted to particular churches or leaders. While these studies are valuable, they often lack a comparative dimension that would allow for broader patterns of institutional development to be identified and analysed. The question of how different Pentecostal movements have navigated similar institutional challenges has received insufficient attention.

Third, the theoretical resources of the sociology of religion have not been fully exploited in the study of Nigerian Pentecostalism. Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority and its routinization offers a powerful framework for understanding the processes by which charismatic movements become stable institutions, but this

framework has been applied unevenly to the Nigerian case. The studies by Aloko (2026) and Ojo (2020) represent important advances, but much remains to be done.

Fourth, the historiography of Nigerian Pentecostalism has been written largely within the framework of modern historiography, with its emphasis on time, chronology, and archival sources. Recent scholarship on decolonial and Africanised approaches to church history suggests that alternative frameworks might illuminate aspects of the movement's development that are obscured by conventional methodologies (Mlambo, 2025). These approaches emphasise space, embodiment, and African ontologies as modes of analysis, and they invite a rethinking of how we write the history of Christianity in Africa.

This paper responds to these gaps by providing a systematic, comparative, and theoretically informed analysis of institutional development in Nigerian Pentecostalism from 1914 to 2025. It draws on Weber's theory of charismatic authority while adapting it to the African context, and it engages with recent scholarship on decolonial approaches to church history.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Weber's Theory of Charismatic Authority and Routinization

Max Weber's analysis of charismatic authority provides the primary theoretical framework for this study. Weber distinguished between three types of legitimate authority: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic. Charismatic authority rests on "devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber, 1978, p. 215). The charismatic leader's authority is not derived from tradition or from legal-rational rules but from the recognition of followers who attribute extraordinary qualities to the leader.

Weber recognised, however, that charismatic authority is inherently unstable. It is tied to the person of the charismatic leader and cannot survive his death or departure without some form of transformation. This transformation – the "routinization of charisma" – involves the adaptation of charismatic authority to the demands of everyday life. The charismatic community becomes a stable organisation with offices, rules, and procedures. Authority is transferred from the person to the office, and the extraordinary becomes institutionalized (Weber, 1978, pp. 246–254).

Weber identified several forms that routinization could take. Succession might be resolved through the designation of a successor by the charismatic leader, through hereditary succession, through the "charismatic designation" of a successor by the community, or through the emergence of a new charismatic leader. In each case, the process of succession is crucial for the survival of the charismatic movement. Weber also noted that routinization often involves the development of a body of doctrine, a

priesthood or professional clergy, and formalised rituals and practices (Weber, 1978, pp. 254–271).

The routinization of charisma is not necessarily a process of decline. Weber acknowledged that it could be a creative and constructive process through which the original charismatic impulse was preserved in new forms. However, he also recognised that routinization could lead to the “petrification” of the charismatic movement, as the original spirit was lost in the machinery of institutional maintenance. The tension between charismatic vitality and institutional stability was, for Weber, an enduring feature of religious and political life (Weber, 1978, pp. 271–282).

Adapting Weber to the African Context

While Weber’s theory provides valuable analytical tools for understanding institutional development, it must be adapted to the specific circumstances of African Pentecostalism. Several considerations are relevant.

First, Weber’s analysis was developed primarily with reference to European and American cases. Its application to Africa must attend to the distinctive historical circumstances of African Christianity, including colonialism, post-colonial state formation, economic crisis, and globalization. As Ojo (2020) has argued, the routinization of charisma in African Pentecostalism must be understood in relation to the specific socio-political contexts in which it occurs.

Second, Weber’s account of charismatic authority may underestimate the extent to which charisma can be shared or distributed. Ojo’s (2020, p. 63) study of Independent Pentecostal churches in Lagos found that the wives of pastors often shared in their husbands’ charisma, indicating that charisma could be a shared rather than an exclusively individual attribute. This finding suggests that Weber’s framework may need to be revised to account for the relational and communal dimensions of charismatic authority in African contexts.

Third, the temporal frameworks that inform Weberian sociology may not be adequate to the analysis of African Pentecostalism. Recent work on decolonial approaches to church history suggests that African ontologies, with their emphasis on ancestors, land, and community, offer alternative modes of understanding historical development (Mlambo, 2025). These approaches challenge the linear, time-centred assumptions of conventional historiography and invite a more spatial and embodied analysis of institutional development.

Fourth, the concept of institutionalisation itself requires careful specification. Institutionalisation is not a single event but a continuous process involving the development of formal structures, the codification of doctrine, the professionalisation of leadership, the standardisation of practices, and the accumulation of material and symbolic resources. Different Pentecostal movements have navigated this process in

different ways, and the study of institutionalisation must attend to these variations (Aloko, 2026).

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: FOUR PHASES OF INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Phase One: Precursors and Early Charismatic Movements (1914–1960s)

The institutional development of Nigerian Pentecostalism cannot be understood apart from the earlier charismatic and Aladura movements that prepared the way for Pentecostal expansion in the twentieth century. The Aladura churches – the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Christ Apostolic Church – emerged in western Nigeria in the 1920s and 1930s as indigenous responses to the perceived inadequacies of mission churches (Peel, 1968; Turner, 1967). These movements emphasised divine healing, prayer, prophecy, and the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit, and they developed distinctive forms of worship and organization.

The Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) provides an instructive case study of early institutional development. Its origins can be traced to the Precious Stone (Diamond) Society, a prayer group founded in Ijebu-Ode around 1918 by Anglican adherents concerned with the spiritual condition of their church (Pew Research Center, 2006). The group affiliated with Faith Tabernacle, a church based in Philadelphia, in the early 1920s, and in 1931 it entered into a relationship with the Apostolic Church of Great Britain. The relationship proved unstable, however, and in 1941 the Nigerian church adopted the name Christ Apostolic Church (Pew Research Center, 2006).

The institutional development of the CAC involved the routinization of charisma in several respects. The charismatic authority of the early prophets and healers, particularly Joseph Ayo Babalola, was gradually transferred to the offices of the church, including the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. A hierarchical structure of assemblies, sections, districts, and areas was established, and the church developed a formal constitution and doctrinal statements. The process was not without conflict. Disputes over leadership, doctrine, and the relationship to foreign Pentecostal bodies led to schisms and the formation of breakaway groups, a pattern that would recur throughout the history of Nigerian Pentecostalism (Daniel & Uchendu, 2026).

The Aladura churches also developed distinctive institutional forms. The Cherubim and Seraphim Society, founded in 1925 by Moses Orimolade and Abiodun Akinsowon, developed a hierarchical structure with a central executive council and branches across Nigeria (Pew Research Center, 2006). The Celestial Church of Christ, founded in 1947 by Samuel Bileou Oshoffa in Porto-Novo, Dahomey, developed a distinctive organisational structure with a central headquarters in Lagos and a network of parishes across West Africa (Celestial Church of Christ, n.d.).

These early movements established several patterns that would characterise Nigerian Pentecostalism more generally. First, they demonstrated that charismatic movements could develop stable institutional forms without losing their spiritual vitality. Second, they showed that institutional development was often accompanied by conflict, schism, and the emergence of new movements. Third, they revealed that the relationship between charismatic authority and institutional authority was a persistent site of tension and negotiation.

Phase Two: The Civil War Revival and the Emergence of Neo-Pentecostalism (1967–1980s)

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) marked a turning point in the history of Nigerian Pentecostalism. The war created conditions of existential crisis, displacement, and suffering in which Pentecostal revival spread rapidly, particularly in Eastern Nigeria. The revival was led largely by Igbo secondary school students and university graduates who had been influenced by evangelical student movements, particularly the Scripture Union (Burgess, 2008).

The revival involved a distinctive style of Christianity that emphasised being “born again,” the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, divine healing, and deliverance from evil powers. It spread through networks of students, teachers, and young professionals, and it led to the formation of new churches that would become major Pentecostal denominations in subsequent decades (Ojo, 2006).

The Deeper Christian Life Ministry provides an instructive case study of this phase. Founded in 1973 by William Folorunso Kumuyi, a mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos, the movement began as a small Bible study group and grew into one of Nigeria’s largest Pentecostal churches (Deeper Christian Life Ministry, 2017). By 1988, the church had grown to 50,000 members, making it one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the world (Deeper Life Bible Church, n.d.). The Deeper Life movement was characterised by a strict emphasis on holiness, separation from the world, and personal discipline, and it developed a centralised organizational structure that would eventually include a network of branches across Nigeria and beyond.

The emergence of neo-Pentecostal churches in the 1970s and 1980s represented a new phase in the institutional development of Nigerian Pentecostalism. Unlike the earlier Aladura churches, which had emerged from within the mission churches and retained many of their liturgical and organisational forms, the neo-Pentecostal churches were more clearly independent and entrepreneurial. They were led by a new generation of charismatic leaders who combined spiritual authority with organisational acumen and media savvy (Ukah, 2008).

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is perhaps the most prominent example. Founded in 1952 by Josiah Akindayomi, the church began as a small Aladura-

type fellowship in Lagos. Under the leadership of Enoch Adeboye, who succeeded Akindayomi in 1981, the church underwent a dramatic transformation. Adeboye combined a charismatic style of leadership with a strategic vision for expansion, and he developed a distinctive organisational model based on a network of parishes, a centralised administrative structure, and a system of house fellowships. By the early twenty-first century, the RCCG had grown from 42 congregations in 1980 to over 7,000 in 2004, with branches in more than 90 countries (Pew Research Center, 2006).

The Living Faith Church (Winners' Chapel), founded by David Oyedepo in 1983, represented another model of neo-Pentecostal institutional development. Oyedepo's church was characterised by a strong emphasis on prosperity, faith, and dominion, and it developed a centralised administrative structure that relied on family members and trusted associates to oversee the management of its resources (Aloko, 2026). The church's "Faith Tabernacle" in Lagos, dedicated in 1999, became a symbol of Pentecostal ambition and institutional consolidation.

The 1980s also saw the emergence of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), an umbrella organisation that brought together many of Nigeria's Pentecostal churches under a single umbrella. Founded in 1985, the PFN was birthed from the "Greater Lagos for Christ" crusade organised by the late evangelist Rev. Uma Ukpai, and it grew into a powerful national movement that represented Pentecostal interests in public life (News Agency of Nigeria, 2025). The formation of the PFN was an important moment in the institutionalisation of Nigerian Pentecostalism, marking the movement's transition from a collection of independent churches to a self-conscious national movement with a collective voice.

Phase Three: Institutional Consolidation and Expansion (1980s–1990s)

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the consolidation and expansion of Nigerian Pentecostalism. This phase was characterised by the development of increasingly sophisticated organizational structures, the expansion of the movement into new geographical areas, and the growth of Pentecostal influence in Nigerian public life.

The organisational structures of Nigerian Pentecostal churches became more complex and formalised during this period. Large churches developed hierarchical structures with centralised administration, formal constitutions, and departmental divisions. They invested in training institutions for pastors and church workers, developed systems of financial management and accountability, and built extensive networks of branch churches (Ukah, 2008). The RCCG, for example, established its Bible School in 1990 and developed a system of provinces, zones, and parishes that allowed it to manage thousands of congregations across Nigeria and beyond (RCCG Profile, n.d.).

The 1980s and 1990s also saw the expansion of Pentecostal influence into new areas of Nigerian life. Pentecostal churches established schools, universities, hospitals,

and development projects that extended their reach beyond the purely religious sphere. The RCCG, for example, established a university and a range of social development programmes that addressed education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation (Adedibu, 2026). These initiatives represented a new phase in the institutionalisation of Nigerian Pentecostalism, as churches moved from being primarily worship communities to becoming providers of social services and development agents.

The growth of Pentecostal influence in Nigerian politics was another important development of this period. Pentecostal leaders became increasingly visible in public life, and they used their platforms to comment on political issues, to endorse candidates, and to mobilise their members for political action (Obadare, 2018). The PFN became a significant political actor, and its leaders were courted by politicians seeking the support of the Pentecostal constituency.

The economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s also shaped the institutional development of Nigerian Pentecostalism. The collapse of oil prices, the imposition of structural adjustment programmes, and the resulting economic hardship created a context in which Pentecostal churches offered not only spiritual comfort but also material support and social belonging. The prosperity gospel, with its promise of divine blessing and material abundance, resonated with Nigerians struggling to survive in a difficult economic environment (Smith, 2021).

Phase Four: Maturation, Globalization, and New Challenges (1990s–2025)

The period from the 1990s to the present has been characterised by the maturation of Nigerian Pentecostal institutions, their expansion into the global arena, and the emergence of new challenges. This phase has seen the consolidation of the movement's institutional gains, the emergence of a second and third generation of leaders, and the development of new forms of Pentecostal expression.

The globalization of Nigerian Pentecostalism has been one of the most significant developments of this period. Nigerian Pentecostal churches have established branches in Europe, North America, Africa, and Asia, and they have become part of a global network of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. The RCCG, the Living Faith Church, the Deeper Christian Life Ministry, and other Nigerian churches have established branches in the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, and many other countries. These global networks have become vehicles for the transmission of Nigerian Pentecostal practices and theologies to other parts of the world (Adenekan-Koevoets, 2024).

The globalization of Nigerian Pentecostalism has raised new questions about institutional development. How do churches that were founded in Nigeria adapt to new cultural contexts? How do they maintain their distinctive identity while accommodating to the expectations of members in different countries? How do they

manage the tensions between centralised authority and local autonomy? These questions are at the heart of contemporary debates about the nature of Nigerian Pentecostalism as a global movement.

The maturation of Nigerian Pentecostalism has also involved generational transition. Many of the founding leaders of the neo-Pentecostal churches have aged or died, and a new generation of leaders has taken their place. The transition from founding charisma to institutional leadership has been a recurring theme in the history of Nigerian Pentecostalism, and the ways in which churches have managed this transition have varied considerably. The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria has emphasised the importance of deliberate succession planning, describing the call of God as “a generational call” that must flow from one generation to another (Vanguard, 2025). Some churches have successfully transferred authority to designated successors, while others have experienced leadership crises, schisms, and the emergence of rival claimants to the founder’s mantle.

The rise of new Pentecostal expressions, including what some scholars have described as “Afro-Pentecostalism,” represents another development of this period. These movements draw on indigenous spiritual sensibilities and cultural forms while engaging with contemporary social and political issues. They often emphasise deliverance from spiritual oppression, the pursuit of material prosperity, and the exercise of spiritual power over the forces that shape human destiny. The emergence of these movements suggests that Nigerian Pentecostalism continues to evolve in response to changing social, cultural, and spiritual conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for Nigerian Pentecostal institutions. Restrictions on public gatherings forced churches to adapt their worship and organizational practices, and many churches turned to digital technologies to maintain contact with their members. The shift to online worship and virtual community raised questions about the nature of Pentecostal community and the role of physical gathering in Pentecostal spirituality. The pandemic also accelerated the development of digital platforms and media ministries that had been growing in importance before the crisis (Oderinde, 2023).

DISCUSSION: PATTERNS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Routinization of Charisma in Nigerian Pentecostalism

The historical analysis presented above reveals several patterns in the routinization of charisma in Nigerian Pentecostalism. First, the process of routinization has been driven by the practical demands of growth and durability. As Pentecostal movements grew in size and complexity, they required more formal structures, clearer lines of authority, and more systematic approaches to governance. The development of

constitutions, hierarchical structures, and administrative systems was a response to these practical demands rather than a conscious repudiation of charismatic authority.

Second, the routinization of charisma has been accompanied by the development of new forms of authority. The founding charismatic leader's authority was personal, rooted in the recognition of followers who attributed extraordinary qualities to the leader. As the movement grew, authority was increasingly attached to offices rather than persons. The office of the general overseer, the pastor, the bishop, and the apostle became sources of authority in their own right, independent of the personal charisma of the individual officeholder. This shift from personal to positional authority was a crucial moment in the institutionalisation of Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Third, the routinization of charisma has been shaped by the particular cultural and historical circumstances of Nigerian Pentecostalism. The emphasis on spiritual power, deliverance, and prosperity that characterises Nigerian Pentecostalism has influenced the ways in which institutional development has proceeded. The development of hierarchical structures, for example, has often been justified in spiritual terms, with the authority of the leader understood as a reflection of divine order. Similarly, the accumulation of material resources has been understood as evidence of divine blessing, and this has shaped the approaches to financial management and organisational expansion that churches have adopted.

Fourth, the routinization of charisma has been a contested and uneven process. Different churches have navigated the transition from charismatic spontaneity to institutional stability in different ways. Some have developed highly centralised structures that concentrate authority in the hands of the founder or his successor, while others have adopted more collegial or participatory approaches. Some have successfully managed the transition from founding charisma to institutional leadership, while others have experienced crises and schisms. The history of Nigerian Pentecostalism is, in part, a history of these variations and the struggles that have accompanied them.

The Tension Between Charisma and Institution

The history of Nigerian Pentecostalism reveals an enduring tension between charismatic vitality and institutional stability. This tension is not unique to Nigeria or to Pentecostalism; it is a general feature of religious and political movements that begin with charismatic enthusiasm and must eventually adapt to the demands of institutional life. However, the tension takes particular forms in the Nigerian context.

One dimension of this tension concerns the relationship between spiritual authority and organisational authority. In the early phases of a movement's development, the charismatic leader's authority is unquestioned; his spiritual gifts and divine calling are recognised by followers, and his decisions are accepted without challenge. As the movement grows and becomes institutionalised, however, new forms

of authority emerge. Administrative structures, constitutions, and procedures create a framework within which decisions must be made and authority exercised. The charismatic leader must navigate this framework, and tensions may arise when the leader's personal authority conflicts with the requirements of institutional governance.

Another dimension of the tension concerns the relationship between doctrinal flexibility and doctrinal stability. Charismatic movements are often characterised by a high degree of doctrinal flexibility; the leader's spiritual insight is understood as a source of new revelation, and doctrine may be adjusted in response to the leader's leading. As the movement becomes institutionalised, however, there is pressure for doctrinal stability. Formal statements of faith, catechisms, and theological education create a body of doctrine that is not easily changed. The routinization of charisma thus involves a shift from flexible to fixed doctrine, and this shift may be resisted by those who value the movement's original dynamism.

A third dimension of the tension concerns the relationship between material accumulation and spiritual authenticity. Pentecostal movements often begin with a strong emphasis on spiritual values and a suspicion of material wealth. As they grow and accumulate resources, however, the relationship between material wealth and spiritual authenticity becomes more complex. The construction of large buildings, the development of media ministries, and the expansion of organisational infrastructure require significant financial resources. The prosperity gospel provides a theological framework for understanding material wealth as evidence of divine blessing, but it also creates tensions with the original Pentecostal emphasis on simplicity, generosity, and dependence on God.

These tensions are not resolvable in any final sense. They are permanent features of the institutional life of Pentecostal movements, and they require ongoing negotiation and management. The history of Nigerian Pentecostalism suggests that the most successful movements are those that have been able to navigate these tensions creatively, preserving the movement's spiritual vitality while developing the structures necessary for long-term survival.

Institutional Development and Social Transformation

The institutional development of Nigerian Pentecostalism has had significant implications for social transformation in Nigeria. The growth of Pentecostal institutions has created new spaces for social and political engagement, new vehicles for the provision of social services, and new forms of social belonging and identity.

Pentecostal churches have become significant providers of social services in Nigeria. Through the establishment of schools, hospitals, and development projects, they have addressed gaps in state provision and have reached populations that have been neglected by government programmes. The RCCG, for example, has established a

university, secondary schools, and a range of health and development programmes that serve millions of Nigerians (Adedibu, 2026). These initiatives represent a new phase in the institutionalisation of Nigerian Pentecostalism, as churches have moved from being primarily worship communities to becoming providers of social services and development agents.

Pentecostal institutions have also created new forms of social belonging and identity. The house fellowship system, developed by the RCCG and adopted by many other churches, has created small communities within larger congregations where members can experience intimacy, accountability, and mutual support (Ukah, 2008). These small groups have provided a sense of belonging for members who might otherwise feel lost in the anonymity of large urban congregations. They have also served as vehicles for the transmission of Pentecostal values and practices across generations.

The social transformation effected by Nigerian Pentecostalism is not without its critics. Some scholars have argued that Pentecostal emphasis on individual prosperity and personal transformation has diverted attention from the structural inequalities that shape Nigerian society (Smith, 2021). Others have criticised the close relationship between Pentecostal leaders and political elites, arguing that it has compromised the church's prophetic role (Obadare, 2018). These criticisms point to the complexity of the relationship between institutional development and social transformation, and they suggest that the effects of Pentecostal institutionalisation are not uniformly positive.

Historiographical Implications

The analysis presented in this paper has implications for the historiography of Christianity in Africa. First, it suggests that the study of institutional development should be central to the historiography of African Christianity. While the study of individual leaders, doctrines, and spiritual practices is important, it is insufficient for understanding the long-term trajectories of religious movements. The development of institutions – the structures, rules, and practices through which religious communities organise themselves – is a crucial dimension of African Christian history that has received insufficient attention.

Second, the paper suggests that Weber's theory of charismatic authority and its routinization remains a valuable analytical resource for the study of African Christianity, but it must be adapted to African contexts. The history of Nigerian Pentecostalism reveals features that Weber's framework does not fully anticipate, including the sharing of charisma among spouses, the persistence of charismatic authority alongside institutional structures, and the distinctive ways in which African Pentecostals understand the relationship between spiritual power and organisational form.

Third, the paper suggests that the historiography of African Christianity should attend to the spatial and material dimensions of institutional development, not only its temporal and doctrinal dimensions. The analysis of church buildings, administrative offices, financial systems, and organisational networks can reveal aspects of institutional development that are obscured by conventional historical approaches. The decolonial and Africanised approaches to church history that have been proposed by scholars such as Mlambo (2025) offer promising resources for this task.

CONCLUSION

This paper has offered a historiographical analysis of institutional transformation in Nigerian Pentecostalism from 1914 to 2025. It has argued that the institutionalisation of Nigerian Pentecostalism was not a betrayal of its charismatic origins but a necessary condition for its survival and public relevance. The routinization of charisma, to use Weber's formulation, was a complex negotiation between the founding vision and the demands of durability, scale, and accountability.

The paper has traced the historical trajectory of Nigerian Pentecostalism through four phases: the early charismatic and Aladura precursors (1914–1960s); the Civil War revival and the emergence of neo-Pentecostalism (1967–1980s); institutional consolidation and expansion (1980s–1990s); and maturation, globalization, and new challenges (1990s–2025). It has identified several patterns in the routinization of charisma, including the development of new forms of authority, the tension between charismatic vitality and institutional stability, and the implications of institutional development for social transformation.

The paper's contribution is threefold. First, it provides a systematic and theoretically informed analysis of institutional development in Nigerian Pentecostalism, addressing a gap in the existing literature. Second, it adapts Weber's theory of charismatic authority to the African context, showing how the specific historical circumstances of Nigerian Pentecostalism shaped the process of routinization. Third, it engages with recent scholarship on decolonial and Africanised approaches to church history, suggesting directions for future research.

The study has several limitations. It relies primarily on secondary sources and does not include original archival research. It focuses on a limited number of churches and does not provide comprehensive coverage of the many Pentecostal movements in Nigeria. It does not address in detail the Pentecostal diaspora or the global dimensions of Nigerian Pentecostalism. These limitations suggest directions for further research.

Future research should include archival research into the records of Nigerian Pentecostal churches, including constitutions, minutes, correspondence, and financial records. It should examine the institutional development of a wider range of Pentecostal movements, including smaller churches and newer movements. It should investigate

the global dimensions of Nigerian Pentecostalism, including the development of branches and networks outside Nigeria. And it should continue to develop theoretical frameworks that are adequate to the distinctive features of African Pentecostal institutionalisation.

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