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THE ROLE OF CHARISMATIC SPIRITUALITY AND ETERNAL JUDGMENT IN REGULATING SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG IBIBIO CHRISTIANS

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Abstract

Charismatic spirituality and the consciousness of eternal judgment have remained significant forces shaping moral behaviour among Christians in Ibibio land. The growing influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Akwa Ibom State has heightened emphasis on prophecy, healing, miracles, deliverance and teachings on heaven and hell as instruments for spiritual transformation and moral discipline. Despite this religious expansion, contemporary society continues to experience moral challenges such as corruption, cultism, sexual immorality, materialism and social disorder, raising concerns about the relationship between spirituality and ethical conduct among believers. This study examines the role of charismatic spirituality and eternal judgment in regulating social behaviour among Ibibio Christians. The study adopts historical, descriptive and analytical approaches in examining the interaction between charismatic experiences, eschatological consciousness and moral responsibility within the Ibibio Christian context. Findings revealed that charismatic spirituality significantly influences the moral consciousness of many Ibibio Christians through prophecy, revival programmes, deliverance ministries and teachings on holiness and divine accountability. The study further discovered that the doctrine of eternal judgment serves as a moral restraint by encouraging believers to avoid sinful behaviour and pursue righteous living. It was equally observed that the Ibibio traditional worldview, which recognizes spiritual realities and supernatural causality, contributed greatly to the acceptance and growth of charismatic Christianity in the area. The paper therefore argues that charismatic Christianity can contribute more effectively to moral transformation in Ibibio land when spiritual experiences are balanced with sound biblical teaching, ethical leadership and genuine emphasis on holiness and social responsibility.

Keywords: Charismatic Spirituality, Eternal Judgment, Social Behaviour, Ibibio Christians, Morality.

Introduction

Religion has continued to play significant roles in shaping moral consciousness and social behaviour within African societies, especially among the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State. Among Christians in Ibibio land, charismatic spirituality and the doctrine of eternal judgment have become influential religious forces regulating ethical conduct, interpersonal relationships and communal life. The rapid growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Nigeria has increased emphasis on spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, miracles, speaking in tongues and deliverance as manifestations of the Holy Spirit and evidence of divine presence. These practices have gained wide acceptance among the Ibibio because they resonate strongly with the traditional worldview which acknowledges supernatural realities and spiritual causality. Furthermore, biblical teachings concerning heaven, hell, salvation and divine judgment continue to shape the moral decisions of many believers.

The consciousness that human beings will one day give account of their actions before God serves as a moral restraint against sinful behaviour and social misconduct. Through sermons, prophetic messages and revival programmes, charismatic churches encourage holiness, repentance, honesty and peaceful coexistence among members. However, despite the proliferation of charismatic churches and the emphasis on holiness, contemporary society still experiences moral challenges such as corruption, cultism, sexual immorality, materialism, false prophecy and greed. This situation raises concerns regarding the extent to which charismatic spirituality and the consciousness of eternal judgment genuinely influence moral transformation among believers. This study therefore examines the role of charismatic spirituality and eternal judgment in regulating social behaviour among Ibibio Christians.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The Concept of Charismatic Spirituality

The term "charismatic" is derived from the Greek word *charisma*, which means "gift or grace" or "spiritual gift." In Christian theology, charismatic spirituality refers to a pattern of Christian life and worship that emphasizes the active manifestation of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, miracles, visions and discernment of spirits. Charismatic spirituality is established in biblical passages such as 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, where spiritual gifts are presented as divine endowments given for the edification of the Church. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) describes charismatic spirituality as a Christian experience centred on prayer, healing, prophecy and deliverance through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the same vein, Onyinah (2010) maintains that its rapid growth in Africa is connected with its response to problems such as sickness, poverty and fear of spiritual forces. Essien and Edem (2024) observe that Nigerian Pentecostal churches are widely known for their emphasis on miracles, healing and prosperity. At the same time, genuine charismatic spirituality should produce lives marked by love, holiness, honesty, humility and compassion.

The Concept of Eternal Judgment

The doctrine of eternal judgment refers to the Christian belief that God will judge every human being according to his or her deeds and determine each person's eternal destiny in heaven or hell. This teaching is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Passages such as Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:31–46, Romans 14:10–12 and Revelation 20:11–15 present God as the final judge

of humanity. Erickson (2013) describes eternal judgment as God's righteous assessment of human conduct according to His holy standards. For this reason, Christians believe that every action has eternal consequences. Among African Christians, this doctrine is easily understood because it agrees with traditional beliefs about life after death and moral accountability. Essien (2021) observes that Pauline teaching on judgment corresponds with the Ibibio worldview, which accepts that human actions attract spiritual consequences. As a result, the doctrine continues to encourage holiness, repentance, honesty, justice, compassion and responsible Christian living.

Conceptualizing Social Behaviour

Social behaviour refers to the way people relate with one another within society according to accepted values, norms and standards of conduct. It includes attitudes and actions that either promote peaceful coexistence or create disorder in the community. Giddens (2009) explains that social behaviour consists of human interactions shaped by the values, beliefs and institutions of society. Among these institutions, religion occupies an important place because it provides moral principles that guide human conduct (Essien & Edem, 2). Within Christianity, believers are expected to live according to biblical teachings on love, honesty, justice, peace and self-control. In Ibibio society, social behaviour has long been guided by cultural values and religious beliefs. Nana and Udom (2024) note that honesty, respect for elders, hard work, sexual discipline and communal responsibility were highly valued, while stealing, adultery and dishonesty attracted both social and spiritual sanctions. Christian churches continue this moral responsibility through preaching, counselling and discipline.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY IN IBIBIO LAND

The history of Charismatic Christianity in Ibibio land cannot be properly understood outside the broader history of Christianity in Eastern Nigeria and the religious worldview of the Ibibio people. Before the advent of Christianity, the Ibibio possessed strong beliefs in spiritual realities, divination, healing, spirit possession and mystical causality. Traditional religious practices acknowledged the activities of spirits, deities and ancestors in human affairs. Diviners, priests and spiritual specialists occupied important positions because they were believed to possess supernatural abilities to reveal hidden things, heal diseases and communicate with spiritual forces. Ojo (2014) observes that prophecy and divination formed important aspects of traditional Ibibio religious consciousness even before the coming of Christianity. Consequently, when Christianity introduced biblical concepts of prophecy, healing and spiritual gifts, many Ibibio people easily identified with such practices because they resonated with their indigenous worldview.

Christianity was introduced into Ibibio land in the nineteenth century through the activities of missionary bodies such as the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Mission and Qua Iboe Mission. These churches emphasized evangelism, education and moral instruction but paid relatively little attention to charismatic manifestations such as prophecy, visions, healing and speaking in tongues. Their worship was generally formal and doctrinally regulated. Nevertheless, many indigenous converts desired deeper spiritual experiences capable of addressing issues such as sickness, barrenness, witchcraft attacks and spiritual insecurity. This spiritual vacuum created fertile ground for the emergence of prophetic and charismatic Christianity in the region. The earliest wave of charismatic and prophetic Christianity emerged through the influence of The Apostolic Church during the 1930s.

According to Ojo (2014), The Apostolic Church arrived in Calabar and later spread into Ibibio areas around 1933 through the missionary activities of Pastor I. J. Vaughan and Joseph Ayo Babalola. The church advocated divine healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, fasting and prayer. These practices appealed greatly to the spiritual orientation of the Ibibio people and laid the foundation for later prophetic movements. Among the most notable pioneers was Bishop John Etefia, founder of the Mount Zion Light House Full Gospel Church. Originally a member of The Apostolic Church, Etefia became widely known for his intense prayer life, prophetic gifts and healing ministry. Following disagreements with church leadership, he established the Mount Zion Light House Full Gospel Church in Calabar in 1944, and the movement later spread throughout Ibibio land. Worship services were characterized by prophecy, healing, fasting, visions and intense spiritual exercises. Ojo notes that prophecy in the Mount Zion tradition was viewed as essential for guidance in matters relating to sickness, marriage, travel, business and spiritual warfare. The movement also adopted indigenous forms of expression, including the use of Efik and Ibibio languages, thereby making Christianity more culturally accessible.

Another significant pioneer was Apostle Donald Etim Asuquo, founder of the Full Gospel Assembly in 1962 in Ibiono Ibom. According to Ojo (2014), Apostle Donald became renowned for his prophetic ministry and healing activities which attracted large followership across Akwa Ibom State. The Full Gospel Assembly became popular for prolonged prayer meetings, prophetic counseling and spiritual healing sessions while emphasizing the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The evolution of charismatic Christianity entered another phase with the rise of Pentecostalism during the 1970s and 1980s. Amaowoh notes that the Charismatic Movement in Nigeria gained remarkable momentum during this period, particularly through university fellowships and interdenominational evangelical groups. The movement gradually spread into Akwa Ibom State and influenced many historic churches, introducing new emphases on speaking in tongues, miracles, healing and spontaneous worship.

Several Pentecostal ministries later emerged in Uyo and other parts of Ibibio land with strong prophetic orientation. One of the most influential contemporary prophetic figures discussed by Ojo is Archbishop Cletus Bassey, founder of Destiny Mission International Church and Vision Bible College, Uyo. He represents what Ojo describes as the "second wave" of prophetism among Pentecostal churches in Uyo metropolis. Unlike earlier prophetic churches, these ministries adopted modern worship styles, media evangelism and prosperity-oriented teachings while retaining emphasis on prophecy and supernatural manifestations. Ojo (2014) further explains that contemporary Pentecostal prophetism in Uyo metropolis involves prophetic declarations, anointing services, miracle crusades, deliverance sessions and personalized prophecy. Prophets became highly sought after by ordinary church members, politicians, business people and government officials seeking divine direction concerning personal and public matters. Other contemporary figures who contributed to the expansion of charismatic spirituality include Prophet Elijah Mboho, Dr. Sylvanus Ukafia, Apostle Akan Weeks and Prophet John Linus. Their ministries popularized prophetic conferences, healing programmes and power encounters across Akwa Ibom State.

The growth of charismatic Christianity in Ibibio land has therefore been shaped by both indigenous religious consciousness and biblical interpretations concerning spiritual gifts. Ojo

rightly argues that the Ibibio traditional belief in divination and spiritual mediation created an enabling environment for the acceptance of Christian prophetism. Consequently, charismatic Christianity developed not only as an imported religious movement but also as a contextualized form of Christianity that responded to the existential and spiritual concerns of the people. Today, charismatic Christianity has become one of the most influential expressions of Christianity in Ibibio land. Its emphasis on miracles, prophecy, deliverance and spiritual empowerment continues to attract large followership. At the same time, the movement has generated debates concerning false prophecy, commercialization of spirituality and excessive dependence on prophetic revelations. Nevertheless, charismatic spirituality remains a dominant force in shaping Christian experience, moral consciousness and social behaviour among many Ibibio Christians.

BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON ETERNAL JUDGMENT AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

The doctrine of eternal judgment occupies an important place in biblical teaching because it presents God as the righteous Judge before whom every human being will one day give account. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the Bible teaches that people are morally responsible for their actions and that their conduct has eternal consequences. This belief encourages believers to live in obedience to God and to pursue righteousness throughout their lives. In the Old Testament, divine judgment is closely associated with God's holiness and justice. God rewards those who obey Him and judges those who persist in wickedness. Although the Old Testament does not explain eternal judgment as fully as the New Testament, several passages point to future accountability. Daniel 12:2 declares that "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (NRSV).

Likewise, Ecclesiastes 12:14 states that "God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." These passages teach that no human action is hidden from God and that every person will ultimately answer to Him. The prophets also devoted much attention to moral responsibility. They warned Israel against idolatry, injustice, oppression and other forms of disobedience, calling the people to repentance and covenant faithfulness. Amos condemned the exploitation of the poor, while Isaiah and Jeremiah repeatedly appealed to the nation to return to God. According to Udoette (2012), the prophets understood divine judgment as an expression of God's holiness and justice rather than punishment alone. Their message was intended to restore the people to righteous living. The New Testament presents the doctrine of eternal judgment more fully through the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Jesus frequently spoke about heaven, hell, eternal life and the final judgment. In Matthew 25:31–46, He describes the separation of the righteous from the wicked according to the way they treated others. Those who showed love, compassion and care inherit eternal life, while those who neglected these responsibilities face eternal punishment. Jesus also called people to repentance and readiness for God's kingdom (Mark 1:15). His parables of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13), the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) all teach vigilance, faithful stewardship and accountability before God. Essien and Edem (2024) observe that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus demonstrates that wealth and social status do not exempt anyone from God's judgment.

The apostles continued this teaching. Paul writes that everyone will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and that "each of us will be accountable to God" (Rom. 14:12). Essien (2021) notes that Paul's teaching on the last things encourages believers to live holy and disciplined lives as they await Christ's return. The Book of Revelation concludes with the vision of the great white throne judgment, where all are judged according to their works (Rev. 20:11–15). Biblical teaching therefore presents eternal judgment as a strong basis for Christian morality. It reminds believers that righteous living is not simply a social expectation but a divine requirement. This teaching has also found ready acceptance among African Christians, including the Ibibio, whose traditional worldview already recognizes moral accountability and the consequences of human actions after death.

CHARISMATIC SPIRITUALITY AND THE REGULATION OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG IBIBIO CHRISTIANS

Charismatic spirituality has become one of the most influential religious forces shaping Christian experience and social behaviour among the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State. The movement emphasizes direct encounter with the Holy Spirit through prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, visions, miracles and deliverance. These spiritual experiences are not merely understood as private religious encounters but as transformative forces that shape attitudes, values and conduct within society. Among many Ibibio Christians, charismatic spirituality functions as a mechanism for moral regulation by promoting holiness, discipline, fear of God and communal responsibility. The rapid expansion of charismatic Christianity in Ibibio land is closely connected with the traditional worldview of the people. Before the coming of Christianity, the Ibibio already believed in the existence of spiritual powers, mystical causality and divine intervention in human affairs.

Ojo (2014) explains that traditional Ibibio religion gave significant attention to prophecy, divination and spiritual mediation long before the advent of Christianity. Consequently, charismatic Christianity found fertile ground among the Ibibio because it addressed existential concerns such as sickness, barrenness, witchcraft, spiritual attacks and uncertainty about the future. Charismatic churches in Ibibio land place strong emphasis on moral transformation as evidence of genuine spirituality. Believers are encouraged to abandon sinful lifestyles such as fornication, drunkenness, dishonesty, violence and occult practices. Through preaching, prophecy and counseling, church leaders seek to regulate the conduct of members in accordance with biblical principles. Kudadjie (2020) argues that the work of the Holy Spirit should produce moral virtues such as love, humility, self-control and compassion in the lives of believers.

Thus, charismatic spirituality is expected to transform not only religious experience but also social behaviour. One of the major instruments through which charismatic spirituality regulates behaviour is prophecy. In many charismatic churches, prophetic messages are believed to reveal divine approval or disapproval concerning human actions. Prophecy is often used to warn believers against immoral behaviour and encourage repentance. Ojo (2014) notes that prophecy in Uyo metropolis influences decisions concerning marriage, business, travel and interpersonal relationships. Many believers therefore avoid behaviours perceived as sinful because they fear prophetic exposure, divine punishment or spiritual consequences. Deliverance ministry also plays significant role in regulating behaviour among Ibibio Christians. Charismatic churches frequently interpret immoral behaviour such as addiction,

sexual immorality, violence and criminality as manifestations of spiritual bondage. Deliverance sessions are therefore organized to free individuals from evil influences and restore moral stability.

This understanding reinforces the belief that spiritual transformation leads to ethical transformation. The individual who undergoes deliverance is expected to demonstrate a changed lifestyle that portrays Christian values. Furthermore, charismatic spirituality encourages communal discipline through testimonies, fasting, prayer meetings and revival programmes. Testimonies of transformed lives are often presented as evidence of the power of God to reform human behaviour. Individuals who were formerly involved in cultism, witchcraft, prostitution or criminality publicly testify about their conversion experiences, thereby motivating others toward moral reform. Amaowoh (2021) observes that charismatic movements in Akwa Ibom State have contributed significantly to evangelism through crusades, conventions, testimony evangelism and power encounters.

These activities often promote moral consciousness within society. Another important dimension of charismatic spirituality among Ibibio Christians is the emphasis on holiness and separation from worldly practices. Many churches discourage members from participating in practices perceived as morally corrupt such as occultism, fetish rituals, indecent dressing, substance abuse and fraudulent activities. This moral strictness is reinforced through sermons, church discipline and prophetic warnings. The fear of losing spiritual power or divine favour often compels believers to conform to accepted moral standards. However, charismatic spirituality has not been without challenges. Despite the emphasis on holiness and morality, some charismatic ministries have been criticized for commercialization of prophecy, materialism and false spiritual claims.

Ojo (2014) points out that false prophecies and manipulative prophetic practices have at times created fear, confusion and division within families and churches. Some ministers exploit vulnerable individuals through excessive emphasis on miracles, prosperity and spiritual dependence. This has raised concerns regarding the authenticity and ethical implications of certain charismatic practices. Nevertheless, charismatic spirituality continues to function as a major moral force among Ibibio Christians. Through teachings on holiness, prophecy, eternal judgment and spiritual accountability, charismatic churches shape public morality and influence social conduct. The movement has contributed to behavioural reform, increased religious commitment and heightened consciousness of divine presence among believers. In contemporary Ibibio society where moral challenges such as corruption, cultism, sexual immorality and materialism persist, charismatic spirituality remains one of the dominant religious mechanisms through which Christians seek moral order and social discipline.

CONTEMPORARY MORAL CHALLENGES AND THE RESPONSE OF CHARISMATIC CHURCHES IN IBIBIO LAND

Contemporary Ibibio society, like many other societies in Nigeria, is confronted with numerous moral and social challenges that threaten communal stability and ethical values. Despite the rapid growth of Christianity and the expansion of charismatic churches across Akwa Ibom State, problems such as corruption, cultism, sexual immorality, fraud, materialism, drug abuse, ritual killings and domestic violence continue to persist within society. These realities have generated serious concern regarding the moral condition of

contemporary Christians and the effectiveness of the Church in shaping ethical behaviour among believers. One of the major moral challenges confronting Ibibio society is the increasing rate of materialism and corruption. The desire for wealth, political influence and social recognition has driven many youths and adults into fraudulent activities, internet scams, bribery and ritual practices. In some cases, individuals who publicly identify as Christians are also implicated in unethical practices that contradict biblical teachings on honesty and righteousness.

A notable example is the case of Victor Ekpong Thompson, an Akwa Ibom indigene arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for allegedly defrauding American investors of about $525,276 through forged documents and false claims relating to mineral resources and deep seaport investments in Nigeria. Such incidents reveal the extent to which greed and excessive pursuit of material wealth have penetrated contemporary society, including among professed Christians. Akpan (2014) observes that modernization and economic pressure often create social environments where moral values become weakened and individual success is pursued at all costs. Within Ibibio land, this situation has affected both the church and the wider society.

Sexual immorality also remains a serious challenge among many young Christians. Issues such as fornication, adultery, indecent dressing, pornography and cohabitation have become increasingly common in contemporary society. The influence of globalization, social media and secular entertainment has contributed significantly to moral decline among youths. Essien and Edem (2024) argue that modern Pentecostal churches sometimes focus excessively on prosperity and miracles while paying insufficient attention to moral discipline and social responsibility. Consequently, some believers emphasize outward spirituality without corresponding ethical transformation. Cultism and youth violence constitute another major social problem within Ibibio communities. Secret cult activities, gangsterism and drug abuse have continued to threaten peace and security in schools and urban centres. Many youths become involved in cultism because of peer pressure, unemployment and the desire for protection or social recognition.

Furthermore, the breakdown of family values and parental negligence have worsened the situation. Nana and Udom (2024) maintain that traditional Ibibio society once possessed strong communal mechanisms for regulating behaviour, but modernization and urbanization have weakened many of these moral structures. In response to these challenges, charismatic churches in Ibibio land have intensified efforts toward moral and spiritual reform. Through revival programmes, prophetic conferences, crusades and deliverance services, churches seek to promote repentance, holiness and moral discipline among members. Preaching on eternal judgment, heaven and hell is frequently used to discourage immoral behaviour and encourage righteous living. Erickson (2013) notes that the doctrine of eternal accountability serves as a moral restraint because believers recognize that all human actions will ultimately be judged by God.

Charismatic churches also employ prophecy as a tool for moral correction and social regulation. Prophetic messages often expose sinful behaviour, warn against immoral conduct and call individuals to repentance. Ojo (2014) explains that prophecy among churches in Uyo metropolis influences personal and communal behaviour because many believers perceive

prophetic utterances as direct communication from God. Consequently, members often avoid certain behaviours out of fear of spiritual exposure and divine punishment. Additionally, many charismatic churches organize youth programmes, counseling sessions and prayer meetings aimed at redirecting young people toward responsible living. Deliverance ministries are also used to address issues such as addiction, occult involvement and destructive lifestyles. Testimonies of transformed lives are frequently presented during church services as evidence of the power of God to change human behaviour.

Amaowoh (2021) observes that charismatic movements in Akwa Ibom State have significantly contributed to evangelism and social transformation through crusades, conventions and testimony evangelism. However, despite these positive contributions, some charismatic ministries have also been criticized for commercialization of spirituality, false prophecy and excessive prosperity teachings. In certain cases, religious leaders exploit vulnerable individuals through manipulative prophetic practices and material demands. This contradiction weakens the moral credibility of the church and creates public skepticism regarding charismatic Christianity. Nevertheless, charismatic churches remain influential institutions in the moral and spiritual life of Ibibio society. Through teachings on holiness, spiritual accountability and eternal judgment, they continue to play significant roles in regulating social behaviour and promoting moral consciousness among believers.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that charismatic spirituality and the consciousness of eternal judgment have played significant roles in shaping moral behaviour among Ibibio Christians. The emergence of charismatic Christianity in Ibibio land was strongly influenced by the people's traditional worldview which already acknowledged spiritual realities, prophecy and divine intervention in human affairs. Through prophecy, healing, deliverance and teachings on holiness, charismatic churches have continued to regulate social conduct and promote moral discipline within society. Biblical teachings on eternal judgment equally provide strong moral foundation for Christian responsibility by emphasizing accountability before God. The fear of divine punishment and the hope of eternal reward encourage many believers to pursue righteous living and avoid immoral behaviour. Although contemporary society continues to experience moral challenges such as corruption, sexual immorality, cultism and materialism, charismatic churches remain active in confronting these problems through evangelism, revival programmes and prophetic ministries. Nevertheless, the study also observes that certain excesses such as false prophecy, commercialization of spirituality and prosperity-centered teachings have negatively affected the moral integrity of some churches. Therefore, for charismatic spirituality to continue contributing positively to Ibibio society, there is need for balanced biblical teaching, ethical leadership and genuine emphasis on moral transformation alongside spiritual experiences.

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