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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Promotion of Regional Peace and Security in Nigeria: the Role of the Church

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Abstract

The technological advancement in the 21st century has paved way for national growth and development in Nigerian society. The church is not aloof to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to foster peace and security locally and globally. The paper examines the role of the church in the use of ICT in the promotion of regional peace and security in Nigeria. The study adopted the historical, descriptive and participatory observation methods. Findings show that ICT has helped to reshape church ideology and practices to further contribute to the peace and security in Nigeria. Hence, the study recommends that the church should judiciously make use of ICT in the promotion of regional peace and security in Nigeria.

Keywords: church, Nigeria, regional peace, security, technology

Introduction

One of the menaces facing the world today is the inability to maintain peace and order within and beyond the territorial boundaries. The unique characteristic of a society is the presence of peace in daily interactions among the inhabitants, and the existence of peace among the international relations. Chaos and insecurity are two indispensable occurrences in the global world and particularly in Nigerian society where kidnapping has become the means of livelihood for some particular group of people who are dressed with either their faces veiled or unveiled but with highly sophisticated armed equipment that are disastrous to man's existence.

The church from time immemorial has been in the forefront of preaching the essence of peace to the society in which it exists. Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian faith was seen on several occasions to be an advocate of peace. He preaches peace in the Beatitudes sermon (Mt 5:9 NKJV),

farewell speeches (Jn 14:27; 16:33 ESV)[1] and in his daily living he lived a peaceful life devoid of chaos with the earthly rulers and the society to which he belonged. Peace theology was also alluded to by Jesus Christ (2Thess 3:16; Col 3:15; Phil 4:7 ESV)[2] and several other biblical passages. They all attested to the true nature and beauty of Christian faith and the obligation of the church to be a peace promoter in theology and pragmatic ways within the socio-political and religious milieus.

In the light of promoting peace and security, the church has been a leading figure that is being looked upon as an agent of peace. Church engagement of peace has received new shape due to the emergence of technology. In times past, the church has been confined to limiting its activities within a particular locality, area, or nation due to its traditional methods such as in-gathering, physical gathering, and use of traditional means of communication such as beating a gong and sending a middle man to deliver messages, amongst others. However, the annexation of technology in the activities of the church to further propagate the gospel has made the church have national and regional reflection, thus, contributing to the peace and security discourses in the global world.

ICT became a point of contact to the world through which the church function has a mediator, facilitator, and originator of peace and security with the socio-political compasses in the world. It is pertinent to say here that peace can be internal and external, nationalised and internationalised, localised and regionalised depending on the scope of operation. However, the extension of peace and security within the regional compass emanated from its availability from within. This implies that both peace and security are a national phenomenon which cut across all regions in the society that requires a holistic approach from the church. The church cannot function universally without influencing peace within the society of its existence.

The scope of the study is to examine the role of the church in the promotion of regional peace and security through its teachings and endeavours (evangelistic acts, crusades, and retreats) with particular reference to the Pentecostal denominations in Nigerian society. The study is situated in the Nigerian society where several church leaders, especially Pentecostal ministers, deemed-it-fit to discuss several existential issues such as killing, banditry, cybercrimes, ritual, moral decadence, and bad governance with the society through its evangelistic campaigns, visitations, and sermons in different regions in Nigeria. Therefore, the paper is divided into a clarification of terms, research methodology, the Nigerian society, and peace and security in the 21st century, technology and the church: an innovative approach, the role of the church, and conclusion.

1. Definition of Terms

1.1 Information and Communication Technology

Technology is a broad concept that deals with a species' usage and knowledge of tools and crafts, and how it affects a species' ability to control and adapt to its environment. In human society, it is a consequence of science and engineering, although several technological advances predate the two concepts.[3] The word technology comes from two Greek words, transliterated *techne* and *logos*. *Techne* means art, skill, craft, or the way, manner, or means by which a thing

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1   John 14:27; 16:33 English Standard Version (ESV).
2   2 Thess 3:16; Col 3:15; Phil 4:7 ESV.
3   New World Encyclopedia, 'Technology', accessed 17th January 2024, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/ Technology#cite_note-1.

is gained. *Logos* means word, the utterance by which inward thought is expressed, a saying, or an expression.[4] Therefore, the word 'technology' can be defined as the systematic way of doing things. The concept of technology is not limited to scientific components. George Harrison further writes:

> Technology is not only limited to the scientific or material components of using scientific materials and human resources in order to meet human need or purpose, but can also include its providence in the Information and Communication Technology which has contributed to the dissemination of information, aid teaching and learning process and brings positive development to the Nigerian education.[5]

Information is power and a very important drive to development in a society. It gives the impetus for growth and development through the appropriate use of relevant skills to convert the available information into a concrete idea. Technology in this study is domicile in the domain of Information and Communication Technology to further enhance peace and security within and outside the society. ICT in this includes the internet, computers, printed materials, visual and audio-visual mechanisms, and social media.

1.2 Peace

Peace is often seen as the state of tranquillity, prosperity, progress, and conflict-free society. Friday Ogbuehi cited Ike that peace is a serene state of existence which characterises happiness and contentment.[6]In the view of Church-Hill Amadi-Nche and Ibiene Opuine peace is mainly concerned with the creation and maintenance of a just order in society and the resolution of conflict by non-violent means. Peace also entails the eradication of violence, oppression, greed, and environmental destruction by positive intervention of conflict.[7] Peace can be both voluntary and involuntary. Peace is voluntary when an individual, group, or nation put in place appropriate measures to enhance peace (Heb 12:14; Rom 12:18 ESV).[8] It can also be involuntary when an individual, groups, and/or nation enjoys a certain level of comfort, progress, tranquillity as a result of the blessing from the divine (Ps 29:11; 85:8; Jn 14:27; 16:33 ESV).[9] Literally, the word peace is derived from the original Latin word *pax*, which means a pact, a control, or an agreement to end war or any dispute and conflict between two people, two nations, or two antagonistic groups of people.[10] It can also be internal and external, positive and negative.

1.3 Regional

The word 'regional' as used in this study includes the Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western regions of Nigeria.

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4   College of Engineering, Oregon State University, 'Technology', accessed 17th January 2024, https://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Technology/technology.html#:~:text=Etymology,a%20saying%2C%20or%20an%20expression.

5   George Harrison, *Managing Technological Change: Strategies for University and College Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006), 10.

6   Friday Ogbuehi, 'The Role of Women in Fostering Peace and Justice in Nigeria', *Nigerian Journal of Christian Studies,* vol. 3, number 1, 2019, 46–66.

7   Church-Hill Amadi-Nche and Ibiene Opuine, 'Women as Agents of Peace and Social Development in the South Eastern Nigeria', *International Journal of African and Asian Studies,* Vol. 69, 2020, 38.

8   Heb 12:14; Rom 12:18 ESV.

9   Ps 29:11; 85:8; Jn 14:27; 16:33 ESV.

10   Ven. B. Khemanando, 'Bloomsbury, Dictionary of Word Origins', in *Buddhism and Peace* (Calcutta: Lazo Print, 1995), 387.

1.4 Security

Security is the state of safety in a society where lives and properties are protected from harm, destruction and or theft. In the religious domain, security may be viewed as the spiritual safety of life from evil machinations and eternal damnation. According to *The Economic Times,* the term 'security' basically can be considered as a tool, a fungible and negotiable one that offers a monetary value.[11] From the preceding definitions, it is right to say that security as a general parlance has a different meaning in the socio-politico-economic and religious milieus. However, the centre of equilibrium to these diverse definitions of security is the idea of safety. Safety of lives and properties enables other aspects of the society to function. Jonathan Bonk corroborates the essence of security as the sine qua non of every society, since it is a determinant to progress and growth and development that exist in it.[12]

1.5 Church

The word 'church' is derived from the Greek word *ecclesia*. Tosin Abolaji cited Terfa Anjov that the word 'church' has different interpretations that include the literal meaning *Ekklesia,* which is 'called-out,' yet to what extent this sense applied in its general usage is unclear. It was a political term which applied to an assembly of citizens 'called-out' for a particular purpose.[13] Traditionally, the word church is seen as the building where Christians gathered to worship. The first set of Christians were named in Antioch (Acts 11:26 ESV)[14] as a result of their behaviour, teachings, and attitudes to life that is a replicate of Jesus' pattern and theology. The church is believed to be the gathering of Christ's representatives who are to take 'Christ' to the entire world. It is pertinent to say that the word church as used in this study refers to the Pentecostal Churches which includes the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church, Living Faith Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Christ Embassy Church, and Mount Zion Mission, Akwa Ibom.

1.6 Research Methodology

The paper adopts the historical, descriptive and the participatory observation research methods. The historical data was derived from books, journals, and online materials which were adequately engaged within the scope of the paper. The paper adequately references the areas gotten from historical method as earlier mentioned. To further engage the discussion, the authors who were active participants in the study observed the flow of peace measured within the identified churches to curb social vices in Nigerian society. The authors describe the observed data to further corroborate the historical antecedents of ICT, peace and security in Nigeria, thereby leading to the authors' submissions on the use of ICT to promote regional peace and security in Nigeria. The study focused on the leading Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria because they are denominations with great numerical strength, national influence, and leading frontiers in the use of ICT

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11   The Economic Times, 'What is Security', 17th January 2024. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition /security.

12   Jonathan Bonk, 'Religion and Security in Africa: a Christian Perspective', in *Religion and Security Issues*, Proceedings of 2013 Biennial International Religious Studies Conference, ed. Jacob K. Ayantayo and Samson A. Fatokun (Ibadan: John Archer for Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, 2015), 102.

13   Tosin Abolaji, 'The Role of Christ Apostolic Church Youth Fellowship to the Growth of CAC in Ilorin Metropolis' (B.A. diss., University of Ilorin, 2022), 12.

14   Acts 11:26 ESV.

among different Nigerian church denominations in the promotion of regional peace and security in Nigerian society.

2. Nigerian Society and Peace and Security Issues in the 21st Century

The concept of 'peace and security' in Nigerian society has been jeopardised due to various atrocities happening in the society. These atrocities have undermined the concept of peace and security, thus leaving the society in a state of emergency. One of the features of peace is security and one of the insights into security is peace, thus, peace explains security and vice versa. The predominant Nigerian society is badly affected with kidnapping for money, killing for various rituals, and cyber larceny amongst others, which are increasing day after day, thus, giving the country an image of 'insecurity and societal unrest'. Ezekiel Akano decries the day-to-day crisis, kidnapping, killing, and political brouhaha in all nooks and crannies of the world, making one feel that the words peace and security are delusional in our present dispensation.[15]

James Okolie-Osemene notes that security is an essential requirement in the sustenance of every modern state in the international political system. This position is based on the need for sovereign nations to ensure that their territorial integrity is maintained, and without the control of their territories by other states. Thus, the maintenance of national security has remained a primary duty of the state.[16] It must be established that the matter of national security is not the role of the state alone; rather it also involves the active participation of the church through its peace theology to navigating the societal complexity in 21st century Nigeria.

The state of peace and security in Nigerian society has been degraded since it embraces conflict, unrest, and, above all, insecurity. Akiti Alamu rightly observes that insecurity brings a concatenation of appalling circumstances that make it difficult for people to live in peace and safety, and as well overcome their developmental challenges.[17] Joshua highlights that between 2011 and 2015, the Federal Government of Nigeria expended a huge sum of 4.6 trillion naira, defending the territorial integrity and internal security of the country.[18] Despite this measure in combating against insecurity, Alamu affirmed that there is an upsurge in abduction, a crime wave, kidnapping, assassination, religious crises, senseless killings, and other vices.[19] Traditionally, security issues mainly centre on the physical danger to a state which manifests in imbalances in military power. In actual sense, however, security matters transcend military power.[20] Akpuru-Aja Aja corroborates this view that security is not all about the use of arms such as guns as there is also security in food consumption, social relations, health, and the political order.[21]

The causes of insecurity and the absence of peace in Nigeria range through political, social, economic, religious, and natural factors. In the 2013 Proclamation issued by the Federal Government, the preamble to this Proclamation reads:

15   Ezekiel Akano, 'Religion, Peace and Security in Nigeria: A Christian view', in *A Century of Nigeria's Amalgamation 1914-2014: Challenges of Integration*, ed. A. Gbade et al. (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited, 2015), 194.

16   James Okolie-Osemene, 'A Historical Perspective of Nigeria's Internal Security Since 1999', in *Internal Security Management in Nigeria*, ed. O.O. Oshita, I.M. Alumona, and F.C. Onuoha, (Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8215-4_4.

17   Akiti Alamu, *Religion and Public Affairs in Nigeria* (Ilorin: K-Success Media, 2021), 208.

18   Olufemi Joshua, 'Nigeria Spends N4.62 trillion on National Security in 5 years, yet widespread insecurity remains', 17th January 2024, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/185285-nigeria-spends-n4-62-trillion-on-national-security-in-5-years-yet-widespread-insecurity-remains.ht ml?tztc=1.

19   Alamu, *Religion and Public Affairs in Nigeria,* 208.

20   G. C. Nwizu and Alozie Cyprian, 'Africa and the Challenges Of Security Governance In The 21st Century', *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies,* Vol. 11, December, 2018, 1.

21   Aja Akpuru-Aja, 'Policy and strategic studies, uncharted waters of war & peace in international relations', revised edition, (Abakaliki: Willy Rose & Appleseed Publishers, 2009), 35.

> Nigeria has been experiencing serious crises, internal tension and civil disturbances which presently constitute grave threats to peace, order, good governance, security and safety of life and property, and that these crises and disturbances transcend religious, political, and ethnic divide with the perpetrators of the crises utilizing terrorist tactics, thereby occasioning serious breakdown of law and order.[22]

In the present, the Nigerian situation is constantly threatened by security challenges in different parts of the country. It is therefore germane to put in place required conflict resolution mechanisms to resolve these conflicts and avoid protraction. There is an enormous consideration before adopting any form of resolution approach.[23] Natural factors can also be a cause of unrest and insecurity in the state. These include natural hazards such as flood, famine, illness, pestilence, and/or disease outbreak such as the Ebola scenario, Lassa fever, and the Covid-19 pandemic. All of these pose threats to the socio-politico-economic and religious milieus.
The implications of this can be seen in the increase in crime rate and persistent insecurity issues within the Nigerian landscape. Ndubuisi-Okolo Purity and Theresa Anigbuogu write:

> Nigeria which is perceived as the giant of Africa has witnessed an unprecedented incidences of insecurity ranging from the activities of Fulani Herdsmen; Boko Haram insurgencies, armed robber attacks, kidnapping, political/religious crisis, murder, destruction of oil facilities by Niger delta militants, child abduction/trafficking.[24]

There is no place that is a danger-free zone in Nigeria. Garam, where 14 people were abducted, is located along the Sabon-Wuse-Bwari road, while Zhibi, where three others were also kidnapped, is a community sharing boundaries with Dei-Dei town, which is under the Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT.[25] The Boko Haram sects, bandits, and kidnappers are now gallivanting through society with little or no fear, and thus perpetuating evil at the expense of peace and security of the nation. These recent incidents among many others have shown that Nigerian society is unsafe and there is a need for the state to wake up to its challenges in order to provide a safe and friendly environment for the growth and development of the nation.

3. ICT and the Church: an Innovative Approach

The Nigerian mega Pentecostal churches are the leading figures in the use of technology to further promote peace and security discourses among the various people of different regions in Nigeria. The regions which include the Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western regions house these mega churches such as Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church, Living Faith Church, Christ Apostolic Church, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, and Christ Embassy Church amongst several others and are leading the populace in the different regions in Nigeria.

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22 The Federal Government Official Gazette, 'State of Emergency (Certain States of the Federation) Proclamation, 2013', 17th January, 2024, https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/ng/2013/ng-government-gazette-dated-2013-05-20-no-27.pdf.

23 Yisa Jonah and Yemisi Olawale, 'Conflict Peace and Security: The Nigeria Experience', *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences,* Vol.9, No.1, 2019, 48–57.

24 Ndubuisi-Okolo Purity and Theresa Anigbuogu, 'Insecurity in Nigeria: the Implications for Industrialization and Sustainable Development', *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management* Volume 6, Issue 5, 2019, 7–16.

25 Daily Trust, 'Insecurity: Bandits Abduct 17 in Niger State', 18th January 2024, https://dailytrust.com/insecu rity-bandits-abduct-17-in-niger/.

The adoption of technology, particularly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by the church is an innovative approach that brings about the holistic intervention to the continuous growth and development, and through it peace discourse in the society. Regarding (ICT) according to David Imhonopi and Ugochukwu Urim as cited by Gemande:

> Technology has made positive impact on information generation, storage, retrieval, transmission and communication. It encompasses all those technologies that enables the handling of information and facilitates the different forms of communication amongst human actors between human beings and electronic systems and among electronic systems.[26]

From the foregoing, ICT has aided a transformation in the way information is retrieved, saved, and transmitted as other than the traditional methods of handling it. It highlights the past, enlightens the present, and gives an insight to the future. This is because information saved in the past can be brought into the present to shed more light on situations and in turn helps to plan for the future.

These mega Pentecostal Churches are growing fast in Nigerian society and control a larger percentage of the Nigerian population. Babatunde Adedibu noted earlier that the proclivity of Nigerian megachurches is not only in terms of their grandiose edifices, but also their religious innovations, creativity, and development initiatives in the various communities where they are situated.[27] The three important terms used by Adedibu, 'religious innovations, creativity and development initiatives', can also find expression in the adoption of technology in the church and the diversification of the gospel through ICT.

The church in the early 1900s showed little concern regarding the adoption of technology in its services. In fact, some churches were selective in the kind technology to be adopted for services, such as the Deeper Life Bible Church and even still today, it does not allow the use of certain technological instruments such as drums in it services. Similarly, some Pentecostal churches such as Christ Apostolic Church has guidelines on how technology can be used in its service. However, it is pertinent to say that Deeper Life Bible Church is one of the leading Pentecostal churches in Nigeria that largely embrace the use of ICT in the propagation of the gospel. Oladutun Kolawole notes:

> The truth cannot be denied; advancement in technology has given Christianity a right to be heard and to reach the world extensively. As times goes by, there have been advances in Christianity when there are advances in technology. In many cases, the Church has been one of the first bodies to benefit from technological advancements; for example as projectors place the words on a screen this ensures everyone can sing along. Technology allows people to interact with the gospel in a profounder way. This has impact just as Gutenberg's printing press did.[28]

The foregoing assertion of Kowale is an undeniable fact that the advancement in technology has wider publicity to the Christian faith. Churches now use sophisticated technologies to enhance

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26   David Imhonopi and Ugochukwu M. Urim, 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects', *Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Creative Art*, 2011, 6(2), 1–14.

27   Babatunde A. Adedibu, 'Nigerian Pentecostal Megachurches and Development: A Diaconal Analysis of the Redeemed Christian Church of God', *Religions* 2023, 14, 70, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010070.

28   Oladutun P. Kolawole, 'An Evaluation of the Use of Technology in the 21st Century Nigerian Church', *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 100 (2019), 4, https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_3_vol_100_2019__nigeria.pdf.

worship sessions and the service entirely. In fact, e-church services such as e-worship or e-sermon have now paved the way for the continuous use of technology by churches since it avails them the opportunity to communicate to millions of people at a time. To corroborate this assertion, Akiti Alamu opines that religion is global, and information technology has played a great part in bringing religious services to the doorstep of the people through the internet, newspapers, publishing houses, television stations, and websites and so on.[29]

The use of ICT in the church is a transformative and innovative approach put in place in order to foster unity, peace, and harmony among hundreds of millions of people in a heterogeneous society like the Nigerian community. The persistent use of traditional means of communication would bring about little or no productive records in reaching out to the world. For instance, in 21st century Nigerian society, the Nigerian population is over 230 million[30] which makes it difficult for the church to operate as it were in the 1900s. The advancement of technology in communication, transport, and records amongst others has paved way for easy access of the church to unreached society. Marc Prensky opines that Christian education that does not incorporate ICT into the teaching and delivery of the gospel or theology cannot be relevant to the present crop of youth.[31] Similarly, Tan also argues that social networking has to become part of Christian education or the church will find itself increasingly marginalised in the lives of digital natives.[32]

4. The Role of the Church

Several challenges have beleaguered Nigerian society ranging through the economic, social, political, and religious. The increase in killing has taken different dimensions such as manslaughter, suicide, 'abunculicide' (killing of an uncle), murder, 'androcide' (systematic killing of men), 'familicidal in commutatione eiusposiosio' (the act of killing a family member for property and/or possessions), amongst others.[33] Kidnapping and banditry are another form of killing in Nigerian society. They are lucrative businesses in the Nigerian society and have thrived more than several other businesses due to much money being acquired within a short span. It is pertinent to say that failure to pay the ransom demanded leads to the killing of the victims.

The role of the church cannot be undermined in the holistic navigation of the Nigerian complexities to further ameliorate causes of unrest, instability, and insecurity within the socio-politico-economic and religious ventures. The church has harnessed into its structures, services, and guides the use of technology to ensure the safety of members and Nigerian society at large in the various regions in Nigeria.

4.1 Planting of Technological Equipment on Church Buildings

The church is not unaware of the various malicious activities taking place in the socio-political spaces and also occurrences that have happened over time in the Nigerian churches such as thievery, kidnapping, banditry, and the so called 'unknown gunmen' who have made the churches a den of thieves and a graveyard for worshippers and Nigerian society in general. Therefore, among

29   Akiti Alamu, 'Globalization and its Effect on Christianity' *CENTREPOINT: A Journal of Intellectual, Scientific and Cultural Interest,* Vol. 11–12, No. 1, 2004, 59.
30   The World Factbook, 'Nigeria', accessed 8th November 2023, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/.
31   Marc Prensky, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part II: Do They Really Think Differently?', *Horizon,* 9 (6), 2001, 1–6.
32   Jonathan Tan, 'Ministry Meets Social Networking Connecting with the Digital Natives', *New Theology Review,* November 2009, 37–44.
33   Academic Accelerator, 'List of types of Killing', accessed 18th January 2024, https://academic-accelerator.com/ encyclopedia/list-of-types-of-killing.

the Pentecostal mega churches, the planting of technological equipment for security purposes, such as Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), being high-definition cameras strategically placed throughout the premises enable comprehensive coverage, helping security teams monitor key areas in real-time. These systems act as a deterrent, enhance situational awareness, and provide valuable evidence in the event of an incident.[34] For instance, a woman stole a bag after a service at a Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) somewhere in Lagos. The CCTV footage clearly recorded the moment she acted but then she was apprehended and unable to escape.[35] According to Gbonegun in *The Guardian*, the 30,000-seat capacity of the Deeper Life Church at Gbagada, Lagos State has CCTV placed in it.[36] Ologbonyo as cited by Popoola Yaqoub corroborates that the use of security gadgets like drones, CCTV, and others will help in tackling insecurity if employed.[37]

4.2 The Church Intervention on Social Vices

It is pertinent to note that social vices within the Nigeria context include but are not limited to cultism, cybercrimes, kidnapping, banditry, indecency, sexual immorality, among several others which have posed threats to peace and security within Nigerian society. The intervention of the church to curb these social maladies through the use of ICT cannot be underestimated as the church is seen at the forefront of maintaining peace and orderliness in Nigerian society. The church discouraged youth and members' involvement into the cybercrime business usually called 'Yahoo-Yahoo' and encouraging the growth of entrepreneurial spirit among its members. In fact, these churches engage their members to learn technological skills and consider different avenues of exploring and inculcating these skills into living a godly life. In a recent post by *Gong News* three cult members repented upon hearing the sermon during the 77th convention of the Mount Zion Mission. It states:

> Three members of two different cult groups of the Black Ax and Iceland, Emmanuel Atangakak aged 32, Mfon Bassey aged 30 and Godwin Asukwo aged 29 have renounced membership of their cult groups. The three repentant cultists took their decisions at the Mount Zion Mission Incorporated 2023 International Annual Convention, held at Oron in Akwa Ibom State. The 77th convention of the church is themed; 'The later glory of this house shall be greater than the former', taken from the book of Haggai chapter 2:9. According to them, they took such decisions as they were touched by the messages they have heard at the convention ground as the spirit of God has ministered to them to repent.[38]

It must be categorically stated that the church adoption of information and communication technology in its services has changed the landscape of the church worship with remarkable experience of repentance. Through ICT, this profound story has been able to reach millions of people over the internet without being restricted to those in the church space.

34   High Edge Media, 'The Role of Technology in Enhancing Church Security: A Holistic Approach', Medium.com, 22nd December 2023, https://medium.com/@highedgemedia/the-role-of-technology-in-enhancing-church-security-a-holistic-approach-9290c07234ed.

35   Linda Ikeji, 'Photos/Video: Woman paraded after CCTV caught her stealing a handbag in a Redeemed Christian church of God branch in Lagos', 20th September 2017, https://www.lindaikejisblog. com/2017/9/photosvideo-woman-paraded-after-cctv-caught-her-stealing-ahandbag-in-a-redeemed-christian-church-of-god-branch-in-lagos.html.

36   Victor Gbonegun, 'How Deeper Life's 30,000 capacity hqtrs was built, by officials', 23rd April 2018, https://guardian.ng/property/how-deeper-lifes-30000-capacity-hqtrs-was-built-by-officials/.

37   Popoola Yaqoub, 'Nigeria is God's Own Project: Won't Disintegrate –CAC General Evangelist', 14th June 2021, https://independent.ng/nigeria-is-gods-own-project-wont-disintegrate-cac-general-evangelist/.

38   Editor 1, 'Akwa Ibom: 3 cultists confess, renounce membership at Church convention ground', Gong News, 13th December 2023, https://gongnews.net/akwa-ibom-3-cultists-confess-renounce-membership-at-church-convention-ground/.

4.3 Peace Theology in Written, Video, and Audio-Visual Formats

The church has engaged in several peace discourses using different biblical passages when sermonising its congregants-onsite and online congregants. The theology of peace encompasses two facets which depicts man's dual relationship (God and man, man and man). The church admonishes the worshippers through its written peace theology which can be found in written format such as on tracts, webpages, video, and audio-visual formats such as the use of television channels, YouTube channels, radio stations, and several social media channels to promote peace in Nigerian society. There are several biblical passages that make allusion to peaceful coexistence such as the Beatitudes (Mt 5:9 ESV),[39] the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37 ESV),[40] moral suggestion (Rom 12:18 ESV),[41] moral inclination (Heb 12:14 ESV),[42] conflict resolution (1Cor 1:12-23 ESV)[43] amongst others show the intent of preachers in the 21st century churches as promoters of peace in Nigerian society. According to Jacob Osaji:

> Religious institutions and leaders should have some defined roles to play in the maintenance of peace and security in Nigeria. Religion, no doubt, is a force to reckon with in the lives of individuals and the nation at large, because it is a tool that provides inspiration to Nigerians to unite and fight social upheavals, moral decadence, and political stability and promote economic development through hard work.[44]

The extract above from Osaji identifies the essence of religious institutions and leaders in the maintenance of peace and security in Nigeria. It is pertinent to say that Nigerians are religiously inclined especially during turbulent times and, as such, obey religious leaders with large crowds, prophetic utterances, and manifestations. In the light of peace theology, prayers are also raised for the nation which receives wide coverage from different news agencies and websites managers about the restoration of peace and its progress within and abroad. It is the duty of church leaders to be involved in activities that would bring peace, progress, and tranquillity to the nation where they serve.[45]

4.4 Creation of ICT Job Opportunities in the Church

The church is a leading figure in the use of ICT, and technological advancement seems to be a complex practice to the older generation, that is, those born in the early 1960s to 1980 find it unbearable to cope with the intricacy in the use of ICT. Therefore, the churches have put in place media teams which cut across youths from different ethics background to provide smooth usage of ICT in sermon delivery and propagation of peace. In fact, this innovation of ICT employees in the churches has led to the designation of church ICT officer or media manager to be a fast-growing phenomenon in the Nigerian churches. These ICT officers helped the church to manage its social media handles, websites, recording, storing, and transmission of sermons

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39   Mt 5:9 ESV.
40   Lk 10:25-37 ESV.
41   Rom 12:18 ESV.
42   Heb 12:14 ESV.
43   1 Cor 1:12-23 ESV.
44   Jacob Osaji, 'Religion, Peace and Security in Nigeria', in *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURELS),* Vol.6 No.2, 2016, 50.
45   Peter Awojobi, 'The Role of Church Leaders in National Security in Nigeria Context', 18th January 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359159823_The_Role_of_Church_Leaders_in_National_Security_in_Nigeria_Context.

amongst several others. Apart from church buildings and church schools, the church has also put in place security measures through the employment of ICT officers in a church owned guesthouse in Nigeria. Some other interventions of the church include establishments of pure water and bread factories, drivers, cleaners, gardeners, and security guards who are employed with the criteria of being computer literate and this has further tightened the security measures in the society. Most important is the interest of the church in employing high skilled technicians, computer experts, and data analysts to further use their skills in a right dimension by helping the church and the society, thus leading to low crime rate.

4.5 Transmission of Sermons through Information and Communication Technologies

The world is vast, and it will continue to grow in numbers and size as long as the act of procreation is not stopped. Therefore, the use of some Information and Communication Technologies such as the internet, web pages, social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram among others are necessary for the promotion of peace and security discourses in the society. Most of these Pentecostal mega churches use diverse mediums to reach out to the society and, thus, lead to the establishment of online services. Upcoming denominations, who are yet to have a web page, still maintain the use of social media to propagate the gospel, which is also a message of peace for the society. It must also be stated that due to the advancement in technology, Pentecostal ministers like Pastor E.A. Adeboye, Pastor Williams Kumuyi, and Prophet Hezekiah Oladeji have been able to sermonise the entire nation without leaving a particular spot or location. This, however, owes to the provision and utilisation of technologies. The radio and television electronic media will be useful tools in communicating religious messages to people. Osaji suggested that their attitude may change positively and they could have moral and spiritual rebirth.[46]

4.6 The Adoption of ICT has Enhanced Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogues

The church has held several meetings through the use of ICT aided facilities such as media stations like the DOVE station of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria and the You-Tube space. Ben Onu and Johnwealthy Wobodo opined that ICT has enhanced the relationship of Christian denominations in Nigeria for better and mutual understanding.[47] Johnwealthy further cited Greenfield and Droogers who maintain that proliferation of the church sites has categorised church founders especially among the Pentecostals as religious entrepreneurs, conducting church relationships in a manner akin to the interactive framework of a marketplace.[48] These engagements have on local, regional, and national levels fostered peace within Nigerian society. Also, ICT has helped in the promotion of interfaith dialogue in Nigerian society. Muritala Bidmos writes:

> The interaction between the Muslims and Christians at interpersonal level in some regions in Nigeria is harmonious and pleasant. For instance Muslim and Christians belong to the same political party with common aspiration to win election. In the South - West region of Nigeria, maturity, tolerance, love and group solidarity are evidently displayed by members of the same family who

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46   Jacob Osaji, 'Religion, Peace and Security in Nigeria', 51.
47   Ben Onu and Johnwealthy Wobodo, 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Ecumenical Movements in Nigeria', *Niger Delta Journal of Gender, Peace & Conflict Studies* Vol. 2 No. 3rd September 2022, 105–118.
48   Johnwealthy Wobodo, Contemporary church & information & communication technology: a study of Diocese of Ikwerre (Anglican Communion) Rivers State (2007-2017) (Dissertation, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, 2020).

are Muslims and Christians. They are co-workers and business associates. They meet in banks and markets. There is always sense of mutual trust and respect through exchange of pleasantries and gifts during festivals.[49]

The above submission of Bidmus highlighted various areas of interaction between people of different faiths in Nigerian society which has been further expanded through the use of ICT applications.

4.7 Discouraging Tribalism Using ICT

The issue of tribalism is not alien to the church. Tribalism among the Early Church first has its way in the Acts 6 account that pictured the dissension between the Hellenistic Jews and the Jews over the distribution of relief materials. The position of the Early Church concerning tribalism was evidence in this regard. Likewise, the Nigerian church leaders have delved much into tribal related issues.
The church has engaged different media platforms such as news outlets, social media, television and radio stations to warn members and Nigerians in general to shun the act of tribalism. Daniella Ogbeche writes:

> The General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, Pastor E. A. Adeboye, on Sunday warned his members in the habit of introducing tribalism into the RCCG, especially concerning unions to desist from such. Adeboye warned that anyone who introduces ethnicity into the fabrics of the mission will die a sudden and premature death.[50]

It is of note to say that the popular Pentecostal minister Adebooye, as indicated above, being aware of the danger of the prevalence of tribalism, thus warns his congregation to desist from such acts. The church through the use of information and communication technology has been able to tackle this ethical vice.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Information and Communication Technology has contributed to the socio-politico-economic and religious milieus of the society through its promotion of peace and security which is incorporated in its teachings, actions, and several other endeavours. The advancement in technology should be conceived of as a blessing rather than a curse to the human race. The church in the early 1900s did not fully embrace the use and adoption of technology in its whole services. However, as the world continues to progress, the church cannot remain static in the moving world. Hence, the church becomes one of the pioneers and leading persona in the use of technology in Nigerian society. The state of peace and security in Nigerian society is deteriorating day by day. Kidnapping, killing, stealing, bribery and corruption, tribal clashes, insurgences, economic imbalances, political brouhaha, and religious intolerance among others have undermined the growth, development, and lives and properties of the average Nigerian.
The state of peace and security has led to the mass exodus of great potentials in search for greener

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49   Muritala A. Bidmos, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience* (Abuja: Panaf Publishing, Inc. 2006), 161.
50   Daniella Ogbeche, 'Keep your tribalism out of church or die mysteriously – Pastor Adeboye warns', Daily Post, 1st August 2016, https://dailypost.ng/2016/08/01/keep-tribalism-church-die-mysteriously-pastor-adeboye-warns/.

pastures, thus leaving the society unattended and growing worse day after day. The church stands in the middle of it all, with a great potential to influence, correct, and reposition the society in its physical and spiritual states. However, in order to actualise this, the church has made effective use of technology in its acts of planting security gadgets, peace theology, job creation, transmission using the internet and social media to further ameliorate the causes of insecurity in Nigeria.

The study recommends that:

1. The church should judiciously make use of technology in the promotion of regional peace and security rather than using it to promote conflict and misunderstanding in Nigeria;
2. The church should endeavour to translate sermons into readable texts such as into other native languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) on a regular basis;
3. The church should avoid any instigating speeches online such as in radio and television transmissions and others to curb the tendency of religious violence;
4. The church should engage in training those in rural societies on the use of technology such as computers in order for them to be able to utilise technologies for peace promotion;
5. The church should organise security symposiums, lectures, and webinars for youth and the church enlighten them about security tips;
6. The church should advise the government on the importance of good governance and national integration in order to enjoy a peaceful society.

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