

Understanding the Reasons for the Unity of Roman Catholics in Nigeria in the Midst of Rising Pentecostalism

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Abstract

This study examines the reasons why Roman Catholic congregants remain faithful to their mother church, notwithstanding the many attractions of Pentecostal churches. The rising number of Pentecostal churches is something that should have given the Roman Catholic Church something to worry about. Rather, Pentecostalism has served as an environment where Roman Catholics go to find solutions to their problems – which may be physical or spiritual – and then return to their mother church. One begins to wonder what makes it so difficult for Roman Catholics to leave their church completely and become members of Pentecostal faith communities. Existing literature has failed to provide reasons for the unity of Roman Catholics in the midst of the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Data was gathered from periodicals, gazettes, Roman Catholic archives, and relevant academic literature. Documentary analysis was adopted. The findings showed that Roman Catholics see the Roman Catholic Church as the first church, their family church, a church less exposed to exploitative tendencies through prophecies, and a church that synchronises African language and culture with its worship, among others. Notwithstanding that some Roman Catholics attend Pentecostal churches for one reason or another, including seeking solutions to their spiritual problems, most times they return to the Roman Catholic Church due to their perceived fulfilment.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church; Catholic Church; Pentecostal churches; Pentecostalism; Nigeria; denominational loyalty

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Introduction

The Roman Catholic congregants in Nigeria seem to be steadfast in their loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. Despite the many distractions brought about by the rising number of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, the population of the Roman Catholic Church has continued to increase. The reason for the increasing number of Pentecostal churches is their concentration on healing, deliverance and prosperity, exorcism and material possessions (Uroko 2024a).

One would have thought that the rising number of Pentecostal churches is something that should have given the Roman Catholic Church something to worry about. Rather, Pentecostalism has served as an environment where some Roman Catholics go to find solutions to their problems – which may be physical or spiritual – and then return to their mother church. One begins to wonder what makes it difficult for Roman Catholics to leave their church completely and become members of Pentecostal faith communities.

The Roman Catholic Church was introduced to Nigeria between the 1470s and 1500s by the Portuguese traders who travelled to Benin and other environments in West Africa. Augustinian and Capuchin missionaries began the missionary journey. However, spasmodic missionary activities started in Benin in 1515 when some Catholic missionaries set up a school in the Oba's palace for his sons and the sons of his chiefs who had converted to Christianity (Fafunwa 1974). However, in 1840, Roman Catholicism became stable in Nigeria with the Holy Ghost Fathers, particularly the Spiritans, who arrived in southeastern Nigeria in 1885, and by 1903 had covered northern Nigeria. "The foundation of what became the Province of Nigeria was laid in 1952 with the establishment of the Holy Ghost Juniorate Ihiala. The Holy Ghost Novitiate Awomama was erected in 1958" (Congregation of the Holy Spirit n.d.). Due to the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, it has maintained its position as the Christian denomination with the highest population.

The four major groups that left the Roman Catholic Church during the 16th-century Protestant Reformation were the Lutherans, Reformed churches, Anglicans and Anabaptists. These four branches represent major, distinct movements that differ primarily in their approach to tradition, church-state relations and theology. The Lutherans and Anglicans generally take a more conservative, liturgical approach, while the Reformed churches emphasise sovereignty, and the Anabaptists pursue radical separation from the state and believer's baptism.

The emergence of contemporary mega-Pentecostal churches in the early 20th century was pre-dated by the Great Schism which took place in 1054. This was a landmark event in the history of Christianity, marking the first significant split between the Eastern Orthodox Church toward the eastern and Roman Catholic Church toward the western parts of the Mediterranean world (Sturiale and Watt 2024).

There are many academic works on the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria (e.g., Nwogu et al. 2021). Also, there is literature on Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria (Ayegboyin 2006; Uroko 2024a). Finding a study that explained the growth of the Roman Catholic Church in the midst of Pentecostal incursion was difficult.

This study adopts the narrative design. Data was gathered from periodicals, gazettes, Roman Catholic archives, and relevant academic literature. Documentary analysis was used to analyse the data. The study examines the stability of the Roman Catholic Church in the midst of Pentecostal Church aggression in Nigeria. First, the Reformation that led to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church is discussed. Second, the coming of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria is explored. Third, the reasons for the fidelity of Roman Catholic congregants to the Roman Catholic Church are sketched.

The Lutheran Church

The division between East and West escalated in 1517 through the activities of Martin Luther (1483–1546) – who was both a theologian and an Augustinian monk – and the publication of his 95 Theses on 31 October 1517. Luther advocated the printing of the Bible in the language of the reader, rather than in Latin, which was made possible through the introduction of movable type in Europe in 1447 by the German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg (Harvey 2023). The movable type is the use of movable components that involves printing text by arranging separate characters or letters on metal pieces.

Pope Leo X (who reigned from 1513 until his death in 1521) denounced the Protestant Reformation movement of Luther and excommunicated him from the Catholic Church in 1521. However, Luther's popularity held firm and affected numerous nobles in Germany. There emerged debates between the followers of Luther (theologians) and those of the Pope (Catholic governments). In 1526, at the meeting of the Reichstag, it was agreed with a recess that each government should be free to decide which religion it wished to follow. However, the recess was cancelled in 1529 and Luther's followers started a protest and established the Protestant church. The name "Protestant" connotes a more dynamic meaning. Wydra (2023, 498) explains that:

The very term Protestantism has not primarily a theological but a political meaning. Six princes protested against the Edict of Speyer of 1529 in which the emperor revoked concessions made to Luther and declared him a heretic. Protestantism was not a united movement which would have assembled ideological forces, propagandistic myths, or outright lies to combat Catholic faith, doctrine or identity. Martin Luther was not consciously modern, set to destroy the spiritual order of Christendom. He should be considered as being "at the limits", a mediating link at the borderline between the declining medieval and the emerging modern world.

Luther's original aim was not to disintegrate the Catholic Church, but rather to emphasise the supremacy of Scripture. However, although one would have expected the disintegration and collapse of the Roman Catholic Church, it has stood stronger.

The Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal Christianity came to Nigeria due to the influence of the Azusa Street Revival of 1906, which was led by William Joseph Seymour. There were earlier expressions of Pentecostal charisms in Topeka, Kansas, and Houston, Texas, in the United States (US), where Charles Parham had been ministering (Goff 1988). The Faith Tabernacle Church of Philadelphia was the first to arrive in Nigeria before 1920. Historically, it was in May 1897 that the Faith Tabernacle Congregation was formally established in North Philadelphia (Mohr 2010). This was followed by the Apostolic Church in 1930 and the contemporary mega-Pentecostal churches, such as Deeper Life, Living Faith, Dunamis and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, among others. Since the last decade, there has been a continuous increase in the number of Pentecostal churches, which it was originally thought could lead to the collapse of the Roman Catholic Church, but instead, it seems to have strengthened the Roman Catholic Church.

The Great Schism

The Great Schism, which took place in 1054, shaped Christian politics, Christian theology, and global religious blocs. Although the division within the Catholic Church began in the fourth and fifth centuries, it was probably affected by the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western regions with two different capitals located in Rome and Constantinople, respectively. The Roman Empire was split in 395 AD upon the death of Theodosius I, the Roman Emperor in Constantinople (Ricketts 2018; Sandberg 2008). The split did not happen during the time of Emperor Theodosius I (AD 379–395) because, in the face of religious schism, political turmoil, and barbarian threats, he managed to maintain imperial power and forge a political dynasty that would dominate both east and west for over half a century (Hebblewhite 2020). However, the Western Empire collapsed in AD 476 after the dethroning of the last Western emperor, Romulus Augustulus (Schwartzwald 2015). The Eastern Empire endured until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (Morley 2010). The two empires had two different languages, which were Latin and Greek, respectively, and the churches located there grew in different contexts.

Some theological disputes seem to have escalated the contention within the Catholic Church. The Nicene Creed stated, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.” It was believed that the Western Church added “the Son” to the creed without consulting the church in the East. The Eastern Church saw this as an insult. Then there came the emergence of the superiority of papal authority. The Church in Rome claimed that the pope had the superior and final authority over all Christians, and he was the head of all Christians and

the attendant Eucharistic celebration (Knowles 1967; Schatz 1996). The Eastern Church was not satisfied with this; instead, it insisted that the final authority rested in the council of bishops with the five patriarchs of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. This could also be seen as a form of pentarchy, because it is believed that Rome was founded by Peter; Constantinople was founded by Andrew; Alexandria was founded by Mark; Antioch was founded by Peter; and Jerusalem was founded by James (Mallon 2013). The churches in the East and West started to adopt divergent practices in their communion. For instance, the Church in the East used leavened bread, had different fasting practices and allowed priests to marry, which was different from the Church in the West.

The most troubling factor that escalated the Great Schism was the disagreement over church control and jurisdiction in Italy. Pope Leo IX (who reigned from 1049 until his death in 1054) delivered a message through Cardinal Humbert to go to Constantinople and see Patriarch Michael Cerularius in order to settle a dispute. Unfortunately, the discussion did not end on a successful note. After the death of Pope Leo IX, Cardinal Humbert and other legates placed a bull of excommunication on the Hagia Sophia altar on 16 July 1054. This excommunication was after a series of acrimonious debates between Cardinal Humbert and other legates such as Frederick of Lorraine and Peter of Amalfi (Mayne 1954; Whalen 2007). Patriarch Michael Cerularius was unhappy with this action, so he excommunicated the papal legates. The action of Cardinal Humbert was declared null and void because the pope did not ratify it. It reached a point of no return in 1204 when Western crusaders sacked Constantinople, escalating the relations between the East and the West further. Although in 1965, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I lifted all excommunications, this did not unite the Church, which now has the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Orthodox Church on the other hand. Thus, both churches have divergent doctrinal, liturgical, and administrative differences. Roman Catholicism grew more in Western Europe before spreading throughout the world, whereas Eastern Orthodoxy developed in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. The Roman Catholic Church has a centralised authority under the pope, but the Eastern Orthodox has a decentralised authority.

The Protestant Reformation

In the 16th century, the Protestant Reformation reached its climax in Europe with an affront on the authority and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It ended the ancient hegemony of the Catholic Church in Western Europe and altered political and economic fortunes (Becker, Pfaff and Rubin 2016). In 1517, Luther criticised the sale of indulgences and other perceived ills in the Catholic Church. Luther's ideas spread throughout Europe and led to the formation of Christian traditions that differed from Roman tradition.

The Lutheran tradition grew from Luther's teachings. The word "Lutheran" actually began as an insult used by Luther's opponents. Luther later tried to discourage his

supporters from calling themselves Lutherans since they really followed Jesus Christ, not the man, Martin Luther (Kleinhans 2007). In Luther's theology, there is an emphasis on being justified by faith alone (*sola fide*) and the authority of the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) rather than church tradition; and it also rejects papal authority. Luther maintained that God restrains and overcomes sin and evil in two ways, namely: outwardly through the institutions and offices of the State; and inwardly through the proclamation of the Word of God, both as law and gospel, by the ministry of the Church (Nürnberg 2012). The most important theme in the Lutheran gospel is justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Reformed Churches

At the same time, but distinct from Luther's movement in Germany, the Swiss Reformed tradition was developed mainly in Switzerland and other parts of Europe. The first generation reformers were Luther and Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) in Germany; Ulrich (or Huldrych) Zwingli (1484–1531) who led the Reformation in Zurich; and Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) who served as the leading reformer in Basel. This tradition laid emphasis on the authority of the Bible, the sovereignty of God, and on the doctrine of predestination, although the focus was more on biblical teaching and preaching. Switzerland needed spiritual reform just as much as Germany or any other nation at the time. The Swiss Reformation continued under the second generation reformer John Calvin's (1509–1564) efforts. Three periods can be distinguished within the Swiss Reformation, namely: (1) from 1516 until Zwingli's passing in 1531, the German cantons saw the Zwinglian Reformation; (2) from 1531 until Calvin's death in 1564, French Switzerland saw the Calvinistic Reformation; and (3) the work of Beza in Geneva and Bullinger in Zurich (Schaff 1994).

The Anglican Church

The English Reformation, initiated by King Henry VIII, brought about the establishment of the Anglican tradition in England in the 1530s. It was during this period that Henry VIII separated the Church in England from the authority of the Pope in Rome and established what he called the "Church of England". According to Kalis (2025), "Anglican Church History is usually dated from the Act of Supremacy in 1534, which made King Henry VIII (1491–1547) the head of the Church in England". A critical look at the theology of Anglicanism shows that it combined elements of the Roman Catholic liturgy and Protestant theology. However, the Anglican way of worship and doctrines were shaped by the reforms of King Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth I.

The Anabaptist Churches

The Anabaptists, on the other hand, were a more radical wing of the Protestant Reformation. When the four men known as the Zwickau prophets preached Anabaptist doctrine in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1521, they created quite a commotion. Additionally, a distinct Anabaptist group was established in Zurich, Switzerland, around 1525, and further Anabaptist communities originated in the Netherlands and Moravia,

which is today the Czech Republic (Goertz 1984). The Anabaptists rejected infant baptism since they believed that baptism should be administered only to believers who could profess their faith. They based their theology on the theme of separation of church and state, voluntary church membership, and discipleship. The Anabaptists were persecuted by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant authorities.

The Pentecostal Churches

The Azusa Street Revival

In April 1906, William Joseph Seymour (1870–1922), gathered people for prayers in Los Angeles, California, US. Seymour was influenced by Charles Fox Forham who preached that preaching in tongues was the true evidence that someone has the Holy Spirit. He was also influenced by John Alexander Dowie who taught about divine healing. Seymour was a Roman Catholic but he abandoned them in a building at No 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles. This building was a former African Methodist Episcopal Church building that was converted to a warehouse with dilapidated wooden buildings with dirt floor. It was there that people began to speak in tongues, and there was prophecy and healing everywhere. This characteristic was believed to be a replication of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles.

The Azusa Street revival brought so many changes. Thousands of people from many parts of the world travelled to Azusa Street seeking to have the same spiritual experience and some received baptism by the Holy Spirit and returned home as missionaries. The Azusa Street Revival came to symbolise early Pentecostal churches' theological assumptions and especially their eschatological hopes. As a symbolic point of origin, Azusa Street offered theological and historical meaning for the Pentecostal experience and the movement itself (Kgatla 2016). It brought about worship embedded in prayers, testimonies, singing and preaching. It also brought about racial integration because people from different racial backgrounds worshipped together which was a time when racial abuse was common in the US. There was the systemic discrimination against African Americans. It was after this revival that Florence Crawford, who underwent spiritual experiences at Azusa Street, founded the Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon. It led to a boom in Pentecostal spirituality in Nigeria and throughout the world, with the formation of the Faith Tabernacle Church and Assemblies of God throughout Nigeria.

The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria

The early introduction of the Roman Catholic Church to Nigeria by the Portuguese explorers and missionaries of the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) failed. In 1472, these societies tried to convert the locals through the Oba of Benin and the Olu of Warri. However, due to suspicion that these missionary societies were linked to the slave trade, they were unsuccessful. The Portuguese missionaries encountered very sophisticated communities with established political

systems, religion, traditions and culture, which shaped how Christianity was received. These missionaries had the aim to convert the “heathen” or the benighted Nigerians to Christianity through education (Fafunwa 1974), inculturation, acculturation, association and assimilation. The Portuguese missionaries showed little regard for the culture of the Nigerians. They were insistent that the Africans abandon their cultural practices. Also, diseases such as malaria and others, killed many of the missionaries. Thus, the number of missionaries, their lack of adequate finances, and the language barrier led to the collapse of the Portuguese missionary journey. During the 18th century, the European missionaries who remained in Nigeria concentrated on commerce rather than mission; thus, the Nigerians maintained their traditional religious practices. Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church was carried away with the European religious conflicts including the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, internal reform efforts, and competition with Protestant missions in other global regions (Hastings 1994). Further, the slave trade at that point led to the collapse of the Roman Catholic mission in Nigeria. Corroborating further, Erivwo (1979) notes that even if it be admitted that on the whole the Roman Catholic Church at the time did not approve of the slave trade, it took no positive steps to discourage the inhuman trafficking and its violation of human dignity.

In the 19th century, the French and Irish missionaries made another attempt at establishing the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria. The Society of African Missions (SMA) and the Holy Ghost Fathers spearheaded the mission. Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac formed the SMA in 1856, but Father Francisco Borghero led the SMA to Lagos in 1862. However, the expansion of the Roman Catholic Church was achieved by the Spiritans (the Holy Ghost Fathers) at Owerri, Onitsha and Calabar through the efforts of Father Joseph Lutz and Father Léon Lejeune. On 10 May 1863, the SMA formed the first surviving Catholic mission station in Lagos, Western Nigeria, and this marked the beginning of modern Roman Catholicism in Nigeria (Ajayi 1965). The Spiritans were able to achieve the greatest success of the Roman Catholic Church in Igboland with the establishment of a parish in Onitsha on 5 December 1885.

The Roman Catholic Church entered Northern Nigeria from 1903 to 1904. Roman Catholic mission stations were established in Jos, Lokoja and the middle belt regions such as Benue. In the 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church expanded and achieved its greatest stability since its emergence in 1472 in Nigeria. The Roman Catholic Church began to establish many parishes, schools, hospitals, microfinance banks and universities. This feat was solidified by the training and ordination of local Nigerian priests, thereby reducing cultural complexities in evangelisation.

Roman Catholics Seeking Solutions in Pentecostal Churches

Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in their various expressions – classical, charismatic and Neo-Pentecostal – constitute about 75% of the total number of Christians (Rausch 2010). Some Roman Catholics are searching for solutions to their spiritual problems, and they sometimes go to Pentecostal churches for solutions. Some of them who feel

that their children are not progressing run to some of these Pentecostal Churches for prayers. Thus, Roman Catholics look for a sense of security due to the fear of what would befall their family members and need reassurance that God can protect them (Quora n.d). Others who seek a husband go to some of these charismatic Pentecostal Churches for prayers. Also, some barren women go seeking spiritual help for their barrenness. In fact, others who may have searched for children and finally become pregnant go to these Pentecostal churches for God to preserve the child in their womb. This is done most times when the woman may have been experiencing miscarriages. Pentecostals believe in the ecstatic phenomena such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing, insisting that these were gifts common in the early church and given to the contemporary Pentecostal movements (Rausch 2010).

Some Roman Catholics seek healing for their ailments. They believe that some of these ailments are caused by evil spirits and witches, which only the violent prayers of the Pentecostals could destroy (Ogonu 2019; Uroko 2024b). Warfare prayers, deliverance prayers, or dangerous prayers, are intense, aggressive and highly emotive forms of prayer used to combat perceived spiritual enemies, demons, or curses. Some members have cancer; others have children with special needs. Some men and women may take their wives and husbands to the Pentecostal churches for prayers to cure their illness. There are other times Roman Catholics go to the church for deliverance. In African cosmology, there is a general idea that wicked spirits, who are the cause of all misfortunes and failures, saturate everywhere. Thus, deliverance from these malevolent spirits is sought by most Nigerians, of whom the Roman Catholics comprise a great percentage (Uroko 2024a). Those who feel that their spiritual husband or wife is depriving them of some benefits go to the Pentecostal churches for deliverance. Some families feel that they need to be exorcised from demons and ancestral spirits' curses. Thus, they rush to the Pentecostal churches for the removal of spells and other demonic enslavements.

There are various reasons why Roman Catholics perceive that they are not receiving what they are looking for in the Church. The Pentecostal churches focus more on miracles, which the Roman Catholic Church seems less interested in. The Roman Catholics believe that one should be content with one's situation, whereas the Pentecostals believe that any situation can be changed through praying for a miracle from God. This brings about the radicalism in prayers by Pentecostal churches, as corroborated by Green (2017), who states that Jesus challenges each one of His followers to pray violent prayers so that the status quo or their average life can be changed and they will be given more opportunity to make a difference in the world. The Roman Catholic Church does not prophesy and give visions to its members; hence, they seek such services in the Pentecostal churches which believe more in prophecies. People are anxious to know what will happen in future for themselves, their children, their spouses and their extended families. Thus, the Pentecostal churches create an avenue through which some prophesy through genuine ways, and others prophesy through juju or other diabolical ways.

The role of the Roman Catholic clergy seems to be focused more on homilies and pastoral care, and they do not seem to be interested in carrying out deliverance services in their parishes. This is because it is believed that the priests' focus should be on God and their mission, and they must distance themselves from magical, occult and animistic practices and return to the Gospel of truth, which truly sets people free (Mullick 2020). They also do not seem to be interested in conducting ecstatic prayer sessions and night vigils. These reasons provide a forum for Roman Catholics to seek solace in the Pentecostal churches.

The Unity of Roman Catholics in Nigeria

The Roman Catholic Church has the highest Christian population in Nigeria, with the majority of its members from eastern Nigeria (Igboland). With approximately 30 million adherents in Nigeria, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in Nigeria and has become a dominant force in the country's politics (Akinkuotu 2025). The Roman Catholic Church is known for non-radical evangelism, unlike the Pentecostal churches, yet its members show commitment and unity in the face of rising Pentecostalism with its attendant emphasis on healing, deliverance and prosperity. There are so many reasons for the commitment of Roman Catholics to their church, notwithstanding the enticement from Pentecostal charismatic practices.

Most Roman Catholics see their church as a family church, which makes it impossible for them to change to another church. Roman Catholics have a song that says, "I was born a Catholic, and I will die a Catholic". For the members of the Roman Catholic Church, changing from one church to another is a way of betraying one's father or lineage because being a Roman Catholic is an inheritance. Although some children of Roman Catholics attend secondary schools or tertiary institutions and switch to the Pentecostal churches and fellowships, as soon as they return home, they revert to the Roman Catholic Church. This is because of the proliferation of fellowships on campuses in Nigeria. According to Oluwaseu, Ango and Ukozor (2025), it is the religiosity of present-day youth that makes them join any campus fellowship, leading to the establishment of more campus fellowships.

The Roman Catholic Church has no rigid mode of living the Christian life. This makes its members comfortable compared to the rigid practices of the Pentecostal churches which have many doctrines that touch on personal and social life (Ngwoke 2024). The Roman Catholic Church allows the wearing of earrings, adornments and makeup; however, in some Pentecostal churches, at their prayer meetings, Bible study and other church-related events with many people in attendance (Smith 2021), members are told that wearing ornaments and makeup is sinful. This makes Roman Catholics unable to synchronise their lifestyle when they try to leave the Roman Catholic Church for other churches.

In Nigeria, there is no universal, national ban on females wearing trousers across all Catholic churches, although individual Roman Catholic parishes have banned immoral

dressing, such as wearing short skirts or dresses and trousers in the church. This is based on the belief that holiness starts on the inside and should be reflected on the outside (Zavada 2024). Parents approve of these control mechanisms because they are seen as ways of instilling discipline in their children in the Roman Catholic Church. In some Pentecostal churches, people are allowed to attend the way they are dressed – they may wear shorts, skirts and even trousers and may even sing in the choir and participate as ushers. A critical look revealed that these half-naked ladies make their way to the auditorium with confidence, and the pastors allow them because they do not want the church to scatter or these girls to be discouraged from coming to church (Abiazem 2021). This is not what parents want to see their children turn to. Thus, no matter why Roman Catholics may run to the Pentecostal church for deliverance, they usually return to the Roman Catholic Church after finding a solution to their problems.

Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church allows a man and a woman who are not married to carry on with their marriage and wedding ceremony in the Church even though the woman fell pregnant, which encourages Roman Catholics not to run away to other churches. This is rarely permitted in Pentecostal churches except for intending couples who hide their pregnancy status. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church allows for the annulment of a marriage if it is not working between the two, but the Pentecostal churches see marriage as a do-or-die engagement. A marriage can be annulled if either partner: failed to disclose their infertility challenge or any ailment; lied about their financial or marital status; is an ex-convict; or lied about their genotype and HIV status, among others. According to Ewherido (2020), divorce legally ends a valid marriage, but an annulment, which is obtainable for Catholics in Nigeria, declares the original marriage invalid. He further quips that in Roman Catholicism, divorcees may not remarry, and if they do, they are excluded from participating in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, whereas a person whose marriage is annulled may remarry because it is assumed that they were never married. After all, the earlier marriage has been voided.

There is also the issue of the time factor in worship. The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria seems to have shorter church services compared to Pentecostal churches where the worship times last for up to three hours. According to Everest (2025), beginning from 05:30 to 11:00, many Roman Catholic parishes in Nigeria have already concluded three masses. This is further corroborated by Chimton (2024), who states that the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria has the best Mass attendance in the world, as many as 94% of self-identified Nigerian Catholics surveyed said they attend weekly or daily Mass. This is one reason that Roman Catholics prefer to remain in the church because it affords them the opportunity of attending meetings and going about their business. In many Pentecostal churches, the services last up to five hours, and because Roman Catholics are not used to that form of time, they find it difficult to remain in the Pentecostal Church whether they are invited or come looking for a solution to their problem.

The Roman Catholic Church has few or no cases of extortion of members through prophecy or manipulation compared to the Pentecostal churches. The Roman Catholic

Church has codified interpretations for understanding prophecy, such as the *Providentissimus Deus* (Corbitt 2018). *Providentissimus Deus* means “the Most Provident God”. It was a declaration by Pope Leo XIII on 18 November 1893 urging the Church to dive deeper into Sacred Scripture, not just as a source of theology but as a personal encounter with the living God (Orate Fratres 2020). However, some Pentecostal churches use prophecy and vision to steal hundreds of thousands of Nigerian nairas from their unsuspecting members. It is because of this “prophecy for money” model that more Pentecostal churches are being established monthly in Nigeria. They do not joke with tithes and offerings because they are formidable ways of making quick money (Uroko 2021). In fact, it is these very extortions by prophets and prophetesses in Nigerian Pentecostal churches that have forced so many Pentecostals to stop attending church.

The Roman Catholic Church has an organised system of worship which involves everything from the celebration of Mass to choir ministration. During prayer and worship services, the Roman Catholic Church uses indigenous Nigerian languages, music, cultural practices and even symbols. Thus, there is active participation in the liturgy by the Roman Catholic faithful (Saint Paul Seminary 2025). This gives them a sense of belonging that makes them unwilling to change to the Pentecostal churches which are known to have more European worship and songs with rarely nuanced African cultural songs.

Finally, Roman Catholics insist that they want to remain with the first church to be established on Earth; as it has everything they need for survival, both physically and spiritually. This is corroborated by Marina (2025), who states that millions of Roman Catholics worldwide hold firmly to the belief that their church traces directly back to the historical Jesus, with Peter appointed as the first bishop, a lineage claimed to be unbroken for nearly two millennia. Thus, switching to another church, like the Pentecostal church, would prove to be counterproductive.

Conclusion

The early introduction of the Roman Catholic Church through the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) failed. However, the Society of African Missions (SMA) and the Holy Ghost Fathers spearheaded the Roman Catholic missions that succeeded in Nigeria during the 19th century. The 21st century witnessed the appearance of an increasing number of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, which one would have expected to have obliterated the Roman Catholic Church; however, the Roman Catholic Church still has the largest Christian denomination in Nigeria. Many reasons have sustained the loyalty of Roman Catholics to their church. Most Roman Catholics see the church as a family church, which makes it impossible for them to change to another church. Also, the Roman Catholic Church has no rigid mode of living the Christian life compared to the Pentecostal churches. Some Roman Catholic parishes have banned immoral dressing, such as females wearing short skirts or dresses and

trousers in the church, which makes parents comfortable in making sure their children continue to attend church. There is also the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has shorter church services compared to some Pentecostal churches. These reasons and others, as mentioned previously, seem to have sustained the Roman Catholic Church. Even if they attend Pentecostal churches for a variety of reasons, such as finding solutions to their spiritual needs, Roman Catholics typically return to the Roman Catholic Church because they perceive that they are fulfilled.

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