



RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL COHESION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL SERMONS

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Abstract

This research investigates the influence of Pentecostal religious discourse on promoting social cohesion in Nigeria, with a particular emphasis on sermons from six notable Nigerian preachers: Pastor Enoch Adeboye, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, Apostle Joshua Selman, Pastor Paul Enenche, and Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo. Through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study examines the linguistic characteristics, ideological frameworks, and social ramifications present in these sermons. The research demonstrates how Pentecostal preachers utilize discursive techniques such as inclusive language, moral framing, and calls for unity to foster national cohesion, ethical governance, and a sense of collective responsibility. The results indicate that these sermons motivate believers to engage actively in tackling national challenges such as corruption, poverty, and ethnic strife, thereby positioning the church as a catalyst for moral and social change. Nonetheless, the study also highlights potential divisive aspects within the discourse, particularly regarding the portrayal of prosperity and moral integrity, which may alienate economically disadvantaged groups. In spite of these issues, the overarching message of the sermons cultivates a shared sense of purpose and accountability among congregants, encouraging them to emphasize national unity and social justice. This paper emphasizes the profound effect of religious discourse on shaping public perceptions, enhancing social cohesion, and impacting national progress in Nigeria.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, social cohesion, religious discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, national unity, ethical governance, Nigeria.

Introduction

Religious discourse, particularly within Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, significantly impacts the social structure of the nation (Akinwontu, 2021). Nigeria is characterized by its multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, where religious organizations frequently play a pivotal role in shaping community values, identities, and collective behaviors (Abdul-rauf and Abdlateef, 2024). Among these organizations, Pentecostal churches have emerged as one of the most powerful influences in molding societal attitudes and fostering social cohesion (Ngwoke, 2025). This paper investigates the discourse utilized in selected Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, analyzing how preachers use language to promote unity, tackle national issues, and enhance social cohesion.



Social cohesion denotes the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a society (Fonsesca et al., 2019). It is a vital component for national development and peace, especially in a nation like Nigeria, which grapples with challenges stemming from ethnic and religious diversity, political instability, and social inequality. While religion has the capacity to promote unity, it can also lead to division if misapplied. Thus, comprehending the discourse strategies employed by Pentecostal preachers is crucial for assessing the role of religion in either fostering or obstructing social cohesion.

This study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its methodological framework to explore the underlying ideologies and power dynamics present in Pentecostal sermons. CDA has been selected as the methodological approach for this research due to its effectiveness in revealing the connections between language, power, and society. CDA serves as a robust instrument for examining how language constructs and mirrors social power structures, ideologies, and power relations (Fairclough, 1995). This methodology is particularly pertinent for analyzing religious discourse, as it facilitates a more profound understanding of how language is employed not merely to convey ideas but also to influence social and political contexts

CDA presents numerous benefits when it comes to analyzing Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria (Akinwotu, 2021). Firstly, it facilitates the identification of discursive strategies employed by preachers to shape social identities, encourage collective action, and enhance national unity. For instance, preachers frequently utilize inclusive language, moral framing, and metaphors that aim to bring their congregation together around common values and objectives. CDA offers a structured approach to recognizing these strategies and comprehending their effects on social cohesion. Secondly, CDA highlights the significance of ideology in influencing social behavior and attitudes. Religious discourse is fundamentally ideological, as it often mirrors and reinforces specific belief systems (Solas and Jerlyn, 2025). By utilizing CDA, this research can reveal the foundational ideologies that inform Pentecostal sermons and assess how these ideologies either promote or obstruct social cohesion. For example, Pentecostal preachers might invoke concepts of righteousness, morality, and national transformation that are designed to align the actions of their followers with the collective welfare of the nation. Lastly, CDA is particularly effective in scrutinizing power dynamics within religious discourse. In the Nigerian context, Pentecostal preachers wield substantial authority, both within their congregations and in the broader society (Franscis, 2025). By examining the language used in Pentecostal sermons, CDA can uncover how preachers exert power over their congregants and how their discourses shape societal norms and values. This understanding is crucial for grasping how Pentecostal churches influence public opinion and contribute to the development of national identity.

By concentrating on Pentecostal sermons, this paper aims to investigate how religious discourse aids in the formation of social identity and the enhancement of social cohesion in Nigeria. Furthermore, this paper is essential given Nigeria's current social challenges. The nation has faced significant ethnic, religious, and social tensions that necessitate a deeper understanding of the role of religious discourse in fostering unity and addressing these challenges.



2. Literature Review.

A thorough literature review is crucial for establishing the theoretical and empirical foundation for this research. Consequently, the literature review presented here systematically analyzes existing studies related to religious discourse, social cohesion, Pentecostalism, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This aims to provide insight into the current academic conversation surrounding these subjects and to highlight the importance of the present study within this wider academic framework.

2.1 Religious Discourse and Social Cohesion.

Religious discourse encompasses the communicative actions that arise within religious contexts and are utilized to express, reinforce, or contest religious beliefs, practices, and norms (Pihlaja, 2021). These discourses are intricately linked to the formation of social identity, the development of communities, and the establishment of collective moral frameworks (Foucault, 1972). Religious leaders, particularly in Pentecostal environments, employ language to construct narratives that delineate what is considered “right” and “wrong,” what is “acceptable” or “unacceptable,” and what it signifies to be a member of the religious community. Once articulated, these moral boundaries frequently influence broader societal interactions, positioning religious discourse as a significant factor in fostering social cohesion.

Social cohesion is a term that generally refers to the capacity of a society to sustain internal unity despite its diversity (Moustakas, 2023). In a nation like Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and political divisions are widespread, the function of religious discourse in enhancing social cohesion becomes vital. While religious discourse has the capacity to create divisions, it can also serve to unite, particularly when leaders frame unity as a moral imperative for social and national stability. Scholars such as Reibold et al. (2025) contend that social cohesion is nurtured through shared values and mutual trust, both of which religious institutions, especially Pentecostal churches, can foster through their sermons.

Religious discourse is essential for fostering social cohesion by establishing common moral frameworks and shaping group identities. As noted by King et al. (2020), religious institutions frequently contextualize social issues within moral parameters, encouraging adherents to act in accordance with their beliefs. In this regard, Pentecostal churches in Nigeria focus not only on individual salvation but also on collective moral accountability, national transformation, and the solidarity of the faithful for the benefit of society. This ethical and moral perspective is often conveyed through sermons, which serve as a lens for individuals to perceive their roles within the larger community, influencing their behaviors and attitudes towards national unity.

2.2 Pentecostalism in Nigeria.



Pentecostalism in Nigeria has experienced significant growth since the 1980s, representing a transformative change in the country's religious landscape. Pentecostal churches, known for their focus on the charismatic influence of the Holy Spirit, personal salvation, prosperity gospel, and proactive involvement in societal matters, have emerged as influential catalysts for change within Nigerian society (Olowu, 2017). The impact of Pentecostalism is particularly pronounced in its moral and social discussions, where topics such as poverty, corruption, governance, and national advancement are prominent themes.

The prosperity gospel, a fundamental aspect of Pentecostal doctrine, advocates the belief that faith results in material wealth and that individual prosperity signifies divine approval (Maxwell, 1998). In Nigeria, this doctrine has profoundly shaped the national mindset, instilling a moral obligation for adherents to strive for personal achievement while also contributing to societal improvement. Nevertheless, this message is not without its controversies. While it promotes economic empowerment, it may also lead to the marginalization of the impoverished by portraying their hardships as a deficiency in faith or effort. Critics contend that such rhetoric could exacerbate socio-economic disparities instead of promoting the inclusive development necessary for social harmony (Akinwotu, 2021).

Despite its emphasis on individual wealth, Pentecostalism also addresses wider societal concerns. Churches frequently deliver messages that advocate for moral integrity, national unity, and political responsibility. For instance, ministers often highlight the importance of fighting corruption and maintaining ethical standards in governance, connecting personal ethics with national advancement. Within this framework, Pentecostal leaders motivate their congregants to engage in national matters, providing a form of religious activism that aims to connect faith with civic participation (Driskell et al., 2008).

While the reach of Pentecostalism is extensive, it can also be divisive at times, as various Pentecostal factions may compete for adherents or utilize religious rhetoric to assert themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Christian faith. This rivalry can weaken social cohesion by fostering sectarianism or intolerance among different religious communities. However, when ministers focus on unity, national prosperity, and the church's role in tackling Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, Pentecostal discourse can aid in the establishment of a unified social framework.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Religious Studies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as a methodological framework for investigating how language constructs and mirrors social power, ideologies, and social practices (Fairclough, 1995). Within the realm of religious studies, CDA has been effectively utilized to scrutinize the ways in which religious language influences social realities, shapes group behaviors, and delineates moral and ideological boundaries. The emphasis of CDA extends beyond the linguistic characteristics of the text to encompass the social practices surrounding it, including the historical context, institutional power dynamics, and cultural ideologies that inform religious communication (Farrelly, 2019). CDA is particularly adept at analyzing Pentecostal sermons, as it facilitates the



identification of discursive strategies employed by preachers to frame social issues, construct collective identities, and motivate action. Such strategies may involve the use of metaphors, rhetorical appeals, and moral framing, which preachers utilize to convey messages of unity, righteousness, and national transformation. For example, metaphors of light and darkness, frequently found in Pentecostal sermons, not only express spiritual concepts but also carry political and social connotations, positioning the believer as an agent of societal change (Olowu, 2017).

A significant advantage of CDA in the analysis of religious discourse is its concentration on power and ideology. Religion is fundamentally ideological, as it offers a framework through which adherents interpret the world and comprehend social hierarchies and moral orders (Foucault, 1972). By employing CDA, researchers can dissect how Pentecostal preachers utilize language to either reinforce or contest prevailing power structures, particularly concerning social issues such as inequality, governance, and national identity. CDA allows for the exploration of how religious discourse constructs dominant ideologies that influence the behaviors and attitudes of individuals and groups within society (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Moreover, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) facilitates a contextual examination of religious discourse, taking into account not just the text but also the socio-political and historical backdrop in which it is created. For example, regarding Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria, CDA aids in uncovering how preachers tackle matters such as ethnic and religious divisions, poverty, and corruption within the unique Nigerian setting, marked by political instability and social inequality. By grasping these contextual elements, CDA offers a sophisticated method for analyzing how religious discourse fosters social cohesion and promotes national unity.

2.4 The Role of Religion in Nation-Building and Social Cohesion

Religion has historically been acknowledged as a pivotal element in the process of nation-building, especially in heterogeneous and multi-ethnic nations such as Nigeria. Although it possesses the capacity to create divisions, religion can also serve as a unifying force, offering a common moral framework and a collective identity that surpasses ethnic and political boundaries (Alshehri, 2024). In Nigeria, religious institutions—most notably Pentecostal churches—play a significant role in influencing social behavior and fostering national unity through their teachings on social justice, moral integrity, and community advancement.

Pentecostal sermons frequently tackle pressing national concerns such as corruption, ineffective governance, and economic disparity, presenting a religiously framed narrative of hope and change. The church's capability to galvanize its members towards collective efforts aimed at establishing a morally structured society renders it a vital participant in Nigeria's nation-building endeavors. Moreover, Pentecostal churches in Nigeria often propose alternative moral perspectives that contest the existing order, particularly regarding issues like political corruption, moral decline, and social injustice (Smith, 2021). Through their messages, Pentecostal preachers envision an ideal society grounded in Christian principles, one devoid of corruption and poverty, where peace and unity are paramount.



Nevertheless, religion can also serve as a source of division, especially when religious factions advocate exclusivist ideologies that alienate other groups. Pentecostal churches are not exempt from this phenomenon; while their doctrines frequently highlight unity, they can also exacerbate sectarianism and inter-religious strife. In certain instances, Pentecostal churches have faced allegations of utilizing religious rhetoric to incite division by fostering intolerance or aligning with particular political factions or interests (Chigbu et al., 2024). Consequently, while Pentecostalism has the potential to promote social cohesion, its influence must be scrutinized to comprehend both its unifying and divisive aspects.

3. Methodology

This research seeks to explore the role of Pentecostal religious discourse, especially through sermons, in fostering social cohesion in Nigeria. The primary methodology employed in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which facilitates a thorough investigation of the intersections between language, power, and ideology within religious discourse. CDA allows for the identification of discursive strategies utilized by preachers to advocate for social unity, national transformation, and moral accountability. In this context, the analysis focuses on six sermons delivered by notable Pentecostal preachers in Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria. These sermons were chosen based on their thematic significance to social cohesion, encompassing national unity, ethical governance, moral transformation, and community development.

3.1 Data Collection

The data for this research comprises six sermons presented by highly influential Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria, selected for their emphasis on social issues, moral integrity, and national transformation. The chosen preachers are renowned for their extensive influence both within Nigeria and on an international scale, and their teachings frequently address societal issues such as unity, leadership, and community development.

The selected preachers and their corresponding sermons are as follows:

1. Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye – *Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Lagos*. Pastor Adeboye is one of the most influential religious leaders in Nigeria. His sermons are renowned for addressing the spiritual and moral aspects of social and national issues. In his sermon titled "*When God Moves*", Pastor Adeboye discusses the transformative power of divine intervention in the lives of individuals and nations. He emphasises the need for national unity, the importance of collective moral responsibility, and the role of faith in overcoming societal challenges. This sermon aligns with the broader theme of social cohesion, highlighting the role of faith and unity in national development.



2. Pastor Chris Oyakhilome – *Christ Embassy, Lagos*.
Pastor Oyakhilome is known for his charismatic style and teachings on prosperity and spiritual growth. His sermon *"The Secret of Wealth: Divine Principles for Prosperity Revealed"* explores the principles of divine prosperity, linking personal success to national prosperity. Through this sermon, Pastor Oyakhilome addresses issues such as economic development, the ethics of wealth, and the importance of responsible leadership. His teachings also highlight how individual success, when achieved through ethical means, can contribute to the broader prosperity and unity of a nation.
3. Pastor W.F. Kumuyi – *Deeper Life Bible Church, Lagos*.
Pastor Kumuyi, a respected figure in Pentecostalism, is known for his teachings on holiness, unity, and the ethical responsibilities of Christians. In his sermon *"Love, Unity, and Fellowship in a Living Church"*, he addresses the importance of fostering unity within the church as a means of promoting national cohesion. He emphasises that the church, as a body of believers, must reflect love, fellowship, and unity to contribute positively to society. This sermon aligns with the theme of social cohesion by stressing the necessity of unity within religious communities as a foundation for wider societal peace and solidarity.
4. Apostle Joshua Selman – *Eternity Network International, Abuja*.
Apostle Selman is known for his deep, prophetic teachings and his ability to address critical national issues through spiritual discourse. In his sermon *"The Power of Unity"*, Apostle Selman focuses on the significance of unity in the body of Christ and the nation. He speaks to the need for believers to transcend ethnic and social divisions, emphasising that only through unity can Nigeria overcome its socio-political challenges. The sermon explores the relationship between spiritual unity and national development, positioning unity as the key to solving Nigeria's most pressing issues.
5. Pastor Paul Enenche – *Dunamis International Gospel Centre, Abuja*.
Pastor Enenche's sermons often address the intersection of spirituality, social justice, and national development. In his sermon *"The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation"*, Pastor Enenche speaks on Nigeria's challenges, including corruption, poverty, and political instability. He calls on Nigerians, especially the church, to take an active role in nation-building through spiritual awakening and collective action. His sermon stresses the need for moral leadership, ethical governance, and national unity, all of which contribute to the broader goal of social cohesion.
6. Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo – *COZA (The Commonwealth of Zion Assembly), Abuja*.
Pastor Fatoyinbo is known for his motivational and empowering sermons. In *"Living by the Word"*, he explores the transformative power of the Bible in shaping personal lives and societal structures. His sermon focuses on how living according to the word of God can address national challenges and contribute to social cohesion. Pastor Fatoyinbo emphasises the role of Christian teachings in shaping ethical behaviour, encouraging Nigerians to live by biblical principles that promote unity, integrity, and social harmony.

Data Analysis.



The sermons will be examined through the lens of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which facilitates an exploration of the interplay between language, power, and social practices within religious discourse. The CDA framework, as developed by Norman Fairclough, is especially effective in scrutinizing how Pentecostal preachers utilize language to shape social identities, advocate for collective values, and sway societal behaviors. The analysis will be conducted at three interconnected levels:

1. **Textual Analysis:** This level entails a linguistic examination of the sermons, concentrating on the vocabulary, rhetorical techniques, and discursive strategies employed by the preachers. Significant elements such as inclusive language, moral framing, and metaphor usage will be scrutinized. For instance, Pastor Oyakhilome's sermon employs the metaphor of "divine prosperity" to associate personal wealth with national success, framing financial achievement as a moral and spiritual obligation. Likewise, in Pastor Adeboye's
2. **Discursive Practice:** The second level of analysis will concentrate on the production, distribution, and consumption of the sermons, taking into account the social context in which the preachers convey their messages. This involves investigating how the mode of delivery—whether through church services, social media, or television—affects the interpretation and influence of the sermons. For instance, Pastor Kumuyi's sermon, which highlights love and unity within the church, may resonate differently based on the audience's socio-political context, particularly in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria.
3. **Social Practice:** At this level, the analysis will link the religious discourse to wider societal concerns. The sermons will be scrutinized to determine how they shape ideologies related to national unity, governance, and moral accountability. For example, Apostle Selman's emphasis on unity will be analyzed in relation to Nigeria's ethnic and religious divisions, evaluating how the sermon fosters social cohesion and peacebuilding. Likewise, Pastor Enenche's sermon will be assessed for its call to action regarding national rebirth, connecting moral governance with national prosperity.

Rationale for Selecting Preachers and Sermons

The preachers chosen for this research are among the most prominent Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria. Their sermons are extensively disseminated through various channels—churches, television, radio, and social media—ensuring that their messages reach vast audiences throughout Nigeria. These sermons were specifically selected because they tackle issues of national unity, social justice, and personal transformation, all of which are essential for social cohesion. The influence of these preachers and the extensive reach of their sermons provide a significant dataset for examining the role of religious discourse in shaping national attitudes and behaviors. By focusing on both Lagos and Abuja, two key centers of religious and political life in Nigeria, the



study captures the diversity of Pentecostal teachings and their impact across urban and national contexts.

Limitations of the Study.

While the preachers selected are influential, it is crucial to acknowledge that they do not encompass the entire spectrum of Pentecostal thought in Nigeria. Pentecostalism in Nigeria is varied, with differing theological orientations and practices. Additionally, this study concentrates exclusively on sermons and does not incorporate other forms of religious communication such as books, social media posts, or public statements made outside the pulpit. The study also overlooks the personal interpretations of individual congregation members, which may vary from the preached message. Future research could broaden this analysis to include a wider array of preachers and religious discourses.

Findings and Discussion

Discursive Strategies in Pentecostal Sermons

One of the key findings of this study is the frequent use of inclusive language in the sermons, which plays a significant role in promoting social cohesion. Preachers consistently employ pronouns like “we,” “our,” and “us” to create a sense of collective identity and shared responsibility. For example, in Pastor Enenche’s sermon *"The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation"*, he states: *"We, as the people of God, must rise to the challenges of our nation. Our collective action is the key to unlocking the greatness of this nation."* This inclusive language encourages the congregation to view themselves as part of a larger collective effort to address national issues, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. By framing the nation’s challenges as a collective problem, the preacher empowers the congregation to take responsibility for Nigeria’s socio-political transformation.

Similarly, in Pastor Chris Oyakhilome’s sermon *"The Secret of Wealth: Divine Principles for Prosperity Revealed"*, he uses inclusive language to emphasise the collective role of believers in achieving national prosperity: *"As Christians, when we prosper, we lift the nation with us. Our prosperity is tied to the prosperity of our nation. Together, we can make Nigeria the economic powerhouse it is meant to be."* In this case, the preacher links personal prosperity with national development, using the inclusive "we" to foster a shared vision of prosperity and collective success. This creates a sense of community responsibility, where each individual’s success is tied to the broader success of the nation. This section discusses the key discursive strategies used in Pentecostal sermons, analyzing how these techniques function to promote collective identity, unity, and national transformation.

Inclusive Language and Collective Identity: One of the most common and powerful discursive strategies used in Pentecostal sermons is the employment of inclusive language. Preachers



frequently use pronouns like “we,” “our,” and “us” to foster a sense of collective identity and shared responsibility among congregants. By doing so, they blur the lines between the speaker and the audience, creating a unified sense of belonging and communal purpose. This strategy is particularly effective in promoting national unity, as it encourages the congregation to see themselves as part of a larger collective effort to address national issues and promote social cohesion. For example, in Pastor Enenche’s sermon *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation*, he uses inclusive language to call the congregation to action: “We, as the people of God, must rise up to the challenges of our nation. Our collective action is the key to unlocking the greatness of this nation.” Here, the use of “we” and “our” serves to unite the congregation and position them as active participants in the process of national transformation. This inclusionary language creates a shared sense of responsibility and agency, encouraging individuals to take ownership of the nation’s challenges and work together toward a common goal.

Similarly, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome’s sermon *The Secret of Wealth: Divine Principles for Prosperity Revealed* employs inclusive language to emphasize the interconnectedness of individual success and national prosperity: “As Christians, when we prosper, we lift the nation with us. Our prosperity is tied to the prosperity of our nation. Together, we can make Nigeria the economic powerhouse it is meant to be.” By linking personal and national prosperity, Oyakhilome’s use of “we” and “our” underscores the idea that individual success is not separate from the collective well-being of the nation. This creates a sense of shared destiny among the congregation, with each individual’s success contributing to the larger goal of national progress.

In these examples, inclusive language functions as a discursive strategy to promote a unified collective identity. The language not only encourages a sense of belonging within the religious community but also extends this sense of unity to the nation, calling on believers to view national development as a collective, divinely inspired effort.

Moral Framing and Ideological Constructs: Moral framing is another key discursive strategy used in Pentecostal sermons to address societal issues and guide the ethical behavior of congregants. In this strategy, preachers frame social, political, and economic problems within a moral context, urging believers to take action based on Christian principles. This technique positions national issues like corruption, poverty, and political instability as moral challenges that can only be resolved through personal and collective ethical behavior. For example, in Pastor Adeboye’s sermon *When God Moves*, moral framing is used to present Nigeria’s challenges as moral failings: “When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed.” Here, Adeboye frames national problems not just as political or economic issues but as moral crises that require spiritual transformation. The message is clear: for Nigeria to overcome its difficulties, individuals must first experience personal moral regeneration. This approach not only encourages believers to reflect on their own behavior but also calls for a broader societal change that begins with individual moral responsibility. Similarly, in Pastor Enenche’s *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation*, the moral framing of leadership and governance is evident: “We must choose righteous leaders. We must be responsible citizens, and we must demand accountability from those



in power.” The sermon connects the moral behavior of citizens with the ethical governance required to transform the nation. By positioning moral integrity as central to national progress, Enenche’s sermon frames the nation’s political challenges as moral failures that must be addressed through righteous leadership and active citizen engagement.

Moral framing also plays a critical role in addressing issues such as ethnic division and religious conflict. In *The Power of Unity*, Apostle Joshua Selman frames unity as a moral and divine duty: “Unity is not just a desire; it is a divine mandate. We must come together as one nation under God, for only through unity will Nigeria rise.” By framing unity as a spiritual obligation, Selman positions division as a moral failure that must be overcome for the nation to achieve progress. This framing encourages congregants to view national unity as a shared responsibility and to transcend their personal, ethnic, or religious differences for the greater good.

Metaphors and Rhetorical Appeals: Metaphors are powerful rhetorical devices used in Pentecostal sermons to convey complex ideas and evoke emotional responses from the congregation. Through the use of metaphors, preachers can frame abstract concepts, such as moral righteousness or national transformation, in concrete and relatable terms. These metaphors not only help make the message more accessible but also serve to reinforce the ideological constructs promoted by the preacher. In *The Power of Unity*, Apostle Selman employs the metaphor of “light” and “darkness” to illustrate the importance of unity: “When we come together as one, we demonstrate to the world that God’s love is stronger than any ethnic or religious differences. This is the kind of unity that can change a nation.” The metaphor of light and darkness carries significant theological weight, positioning unity as a divine force capable of dispelling societal division and bringing about positive change. By using this metaphor, Selman reinforces the ideological construct of unity as not just a social goal but as a spiritual imperative that can overcome deep-seated divisions within Nigerian society.

Similarly, Pastor Adeboye uses metaphors to frame national challenges as opportunities for divine intervention: “When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed.” Here, the metaphor of “healing” connects the idea of spiritual transformation with the nation’s progress, framing Nigeria’s problems as not just political or economic but as deep moral wounds that require spiritual intervention. This metaphor provides hope to believers, suggesting that through divine intervention and moral regeneration, the nation can be healed and restored to prosperity. Rhetorical appeals to emotions, such as hope, fear, and urgency, are also commonly employed in Pentecostal sermons to galvanize the congregation into action. Preachers often evoke a sense of urgency, urging believers to act swiftly and decisively in addressing national issues. In Pastor Enenche’s sermon, the appeal to national responsibility is underscored by a sense of moral urgency: “We must rise above our differences and work together to rebuild Nigeria. Our nation is in crisis, but through unity, we can overcome any obstacle.” This emotional appeal emphasizes the urgency of the task at hand, urging believers to take immediate action in the service of national transformation.



The Role of Personal Testimonies and Narratives: Another important discursive strategy in Pentecostal sermons is the use of personal testimonies and narratives to illustrate the power of faith and moral behavior in overcoming societal challenges. Preachers often share personal stories or recount examples of individuals who have transformed their lives through faith, highlighting the tangible benefits of living according to Christian principles. These stories serve as persuasive tools, encouraging congregants to take action based on the success of others who have followed the prescribed moral path. In his sermon *Living by the Word*, Pastor Fatoyinbo uses personal testimonies to emphasize the transformative power of Christian teachings: "When we live according to the Word, we create a society that reflects God's righteousness." By sharing stories of individuals whose lives have been changed through faith, Fatoyinbo illustrates how personal transformation can lead to broader social change. These narratives not only encourage believers to adopt Christian values but also reinforce the idea that the moral choices of individuals contribute directly to the collective health of society.

Moral Framing and Ideological Constructs.

Another significant finding is the use of moral framing to address national issues such as corruption, poverty, and ethnic divisions. Preachers consistently frame these societal problems within a moral context, urging the congregation to take action based on religious and ethical principles. For instance, Pastor Adeboye's sermon *"When God Moves"* explores the idea of divine intervention in overcoming societal issues: *"When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed. Our nation needs healing, and it starts with each one of us."* This framing positions the nation's challenges as a moral failing, suggesting that national transformation begins with individual moral regeneration. By connecting personal transformation to national healing, Adeboye calls on his congregation to reflect on their moral behaviour as a catalyst for wider social change.

In Apostle Joshua Selman's sermon *"The Power of Unity"*, unity is framed as a moral obligation for believers, with an emphasis on transcending ethnic and religious divisions. He states: *"Unity is not just a desire; it is a divine mandate. We must come together as one nation under God, for only through unity will Nigeria rise."* Here, unity is presented not merely as a desirable state but as a moral and spiritual duty that believers must fulfil. This moral imperative encourages the congregation to prioritise national unity above ethnic and religious affiliations, positioning unity as essential for societal progress.

Similarly, Pastor Kumuyi's sermon *"Love, Unity, and Fellowship in a Living Church"* calls for unity within the church as a precursor to broader national unity: *"A divided church cannot heal a divided nation. As believers, we must reflect love and unity within the church to bring healing to our nation."* This sermon links the moral health of the church to the social cohesion of the nation, emphasising that the church, as a community of believers, must first embody unity and love before it can contribute to national peace and stability. The study at this point focuses on how Pentecostal



preachers in Nigeria use moral framing to address societal problems, construct moral identities, and reinforce ideological constructs that promote national unity and social cohesion.

Moral Framing as a Tool for Addressing Societal Issues: One of the key functions of moral framing in Pentecostal discourse is its ability to present societal challenges as moral failings that require divine intervention and personal transformation. Preachers often frame national problems like corruption, poverty, and political instability as not just social or economic issues but as moral dilemmas that demand a collective moral response. This framing ties national issues directly to the moral behavior of individuals and calls on believers to embody Christian values as the pathway to resolving these problems. For instance, in Pastor Adeboye's sermon *When God Moves*, the preacher connects the moral transformation of individuals to the national transformation of Nigeria. He states, "When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed." Here, the moral framing is clear: the personal moral regeneration of each believer is directly linked to the nation's collective healing. Adeboye presents societal challenges as stemming from a moral void, suggesting that only through individual moral regeneration, aligned with Christian values, can the nation overcome its issues. This message of moral responsibility is a powerful tool for motivating individuals to view their actions and moral choices as part of a larger, divine plan for national transformation.

Similarly, in *The Power of Unity*, Apostle Joshua Selman emphasizes the need for believers to transcend their ethnic and religious divisions and unite for the common good of the nation. Unity, in this case, is framed not just as a practical necessity but as a divine and moral imperative. Selman's moral framing of unity positions it as a spiritual duty, urging his congregation to view national unity as a reflection of Christian values such as love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. By linking moral principles with the social goal of unity, Selman calls on his followers to act according to a higher ethical standard, thus positioning unity as both a social and spiritual obligation.

Moral Framing in Addressing Corruption and Governance: Corruption and poor governance are central concerns in Nigerian society, and Pentecostal preachers often frame these issues as moral failings that must be confronted through ethical leadership and collective moral responsibility. In *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation*, Pastor Enenche directly addresses Nigeria's political and governance issues, stating, "Nigeria's problems are not beyond God's intervention, but we must choose righteous leaders. We must be responsible citizens, and we must demand accountability from those in power." This sermon emphasizes the moral imperative of choosing leaders who embody Christian principles of righteousness and integrity.

Enenche's moral framing presents political corruption not just as a political issue but as a profound moral failure that undermines the nation's development and prosperity. By framing corruption in this way, he calls on his congregation to not only engage in prayer for the nation's healing but also to actively participate in governance by demanding ethical leadership. This ideological construct reinforces the idea that the moral choices of both individuals and leaders shape the nation's destiny. It positions the church as a moral authority that holds political leaders accountable, while also



urging believers to reflect on their own role in shaping the country's ethical and political landscape. In this context, Pentecostal preachers like Enenche create a link between personal morality and national governance. The moral framing of corruption encourages believers to view ethical leadership as a collective duty, requiring them to advocate for leaders who align with Christian values. This framing also invites believers to examine their own political engagement and call for accountability in ways that align with their religious convictions.

Moral Framing of Prosperity and Socioeconomic Issues: Another significant aspect of moral framing in Pentecostal discourse is the framing of prosperity and socioeconomic issues. Pentecostal preachers often use the prosperity gospel to encourage believers to strive for financial success, linking material wealth to spiritual righteousness. This ideological construct positions prosperity as a sign of divine favor, urging believers to pursue economic success while maintaining moral integrity.

Pastor Chris Oyakhilome's sermon *The Secret of Wealth: Divine Principles for Prosperity Revealed* provides an example of how moral and ideological constructs are used to frame prosperity as a moral duty. Oyakhilome states, "When you align your life with divine principles, prosperity is inevitable. Prosperity is not a matter of chance; it is a result of divine order." This framing positions personal wealth as a direct result of living according to biblical principles, linking financial success to faith and righteousness. By framing prosperity in moral terms, Oyakhilome encourages believers to view their economic success as not just a personal achievement but as a reflection of their moral alignment with God's will.

While this message of prosperity is empowering for many believers, it can also have divisive consequences, as it can marginalize those who are economically disadvantaged. The ideological construct of prosperity can inadvertently suggest that poverty is a result of insufficient faith or poor moral conduct. This framing can be alienating for individuals who face structural inequalities, as it fails to address the broader socio-economic factors that contribute to poverty and economic hardship. As discussed earlier, the prosperity gospel in Pentecostalism may inadvertently reinforce social divisions by blaming the poor for their struggles and positioning wealth as a marker of spiritual success. Despite these potential negative consequences, the moral framing of prosperity also carries positive implications for social cohesion. By encouraging believers to align their financial pursuits with ethical values, preachers promote a form of economic success that is rooted in moral responsibility. This framing encourages believers to engage in ethical business practices and contribute to the national economy in ways that benefit society as a whole. Thus, the prosperity gospel, when framed in moral terms, can foster a sense of collective responsibility, where individual wealth contributes to the greater good.

Moral Constructs and National Unity: The moral framing of national unity is another critical ideological construct in Pentecostal discourse. Preachers often present unity not as a superficial or political goal, but as a moral and spiritual obligation that transcends personal or ethnic divisions. This ideological construct aligns with Christian teachings on love, reconciliation, and community,



framing unity as an essential value for both spiritual and national development. Apostle Selman's sermon *The Power of Unity* offers an example of how unity is framed as a moral duty. He states, "Unity is not just a desire; it is a divine mandate. We must come together as one nation under God, for only through unity will Nigeria rise." This framing of unity as a divine mandate creates a moral imperative for believers to prioritize national cohesion above personal or ethnic interests. By linking unity to spiritual well-being, Selman encourages believers to view their role in promoting unity as a reflection of their faith and commitment to God's will. This ideological construct frames the act of uniting the nation as both a moral and spiritual duty, urging believers to transcend their differences in favor of collective national progress.

Similarly, in *Love, Unity, and Fellowship in a Living Church*, Pastor Kumuyi emphasizes the necessity of internal unity within the church as a foundation for broader national unity. He argues, "A divided church cannot heal a divided nation," highlighting the idea that the church, as a community of believers, must first embody unity before it can effectively contribute to the healing of the nation. This moral framing ties the health of the church directly to the health of the nation, suggesting that the church's internal unity is a prerequisite for national unity.

Power Relations and Leadership.

An important aspect of the sermons analysed is the emphasis on leadership and ethical governance. Several preachers address the moral failings of Nigeria's leadership and urge their congregants to take active roles in governance, politics, and societal transformation. For example, in Pastor Paul Enenche's sermon *"The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation"*, he directly addresses the issue of poor leadership: *"Nigeria's problems are not beyond God's intervention, but we must choose righteous leaders. We must be responsible citizens, and we must demand accountability from those in power."* This statement frames leadership not only as a political issue but as a moral one. The preacher calls on his congregation to hold leaders accountable, urging them to act according to Christian values of righteousness and integrity. This reinforces the idea that moral leadership is central to national progress, with the church playing an active role in calling for ethical governance. In Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo's sermon *"Living by the Word"*, ethical behaviour and leadership are framed as integral to social cohesion: *"The Word of God calls us to live in integrity, to be honest in our dealings, and to be responsible stewards of our resources. When we live by the Word, we create a society that reflects God's righteousness."* Here, living by the Word is positioned as a direct route to personal integrity, which, in turn, influences leadership and national governance. The sermon encourages believers to uphold ethical standards, suggesting that these individual actions will collectively lead to a better society.

This section explores how Pentecostal preachers use religious language to address power relations, frame ethical leadership, and call for moral accountability in both political and societal contexts.

Religious Authority and Power in Pentecostal Leadership: Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria wield significant religious authority, which they use to influence not only their congregations but also



the broader social and political landscape. In many ways, the power of Pentecostal leaders extends beyond the pulpit, as they often serve as moral guides and social influencers, shaping public opinion on issues ranging from ethical governance to national development. This authority is deeply intertwined with their role as spiritual leaders, positioning them as both guides to eternal salvation and leaders within society. For example, Pastor Enoch Adeboye's sermons frequently emphasize the role of God in guiding national leaders and individuals alike. In *When God Moves*, Adeboye presents the idea that divine intervention is necessary for both personal and national transformation, asserting, "When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed." This statement reflects not only the spiritual authority that Adeboye holds but also the power dynamics that Pentecostal leaders seek to establish: leaders—both spiritual and political—are seen as accountable to God and must align their actions with divine principles. Adeboye's framing positions the preacher as an intermediary between God and the political sphere, subtly influencing how congregants view the relationship between religious and political power.

Moreover, the language used by Pentecostal preachers often asserts that their moral authority is directly tied to the spiritual health of the nation. This gives them a unique platform to advocate for changes in leadership and governance, both within the church and in the broader society. By invoking divine authority, preachers establish a form of power that is not solely rooted in secular structures but also in the spiritual well-being of the nation. In this way, the role of Pentecostal leaders transcends traditional religious boundaries, and their sermons encourage believers to view leadership through the lens of religious morality and ethical conduct.

Moral Leadership and Accountability: A critical aspect of Pentecostal discourse on power is the call for moral leadership, particularly in the political arena. Pentecostal leaders often emphasize that those in positions of power, whether religious or political, must adhere to ethical standards that align with Christian values. This moral framework seeks to hold leaders accountable for their actions, framing leadership as a sacred responsibility that goes beyond mere governance. This discourse creates a clear distinction between righteous and corrupt leadership, positioning the church as a moral watchdog, capable of guiding both its followers and political leaders toward ethical practices.

In *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation*, Pastor Paul Enenche emphasizes the need for moral leadership, stating, "Nigeria's problems are not beyond God's intervention, but we must choose righteous leaders. We must be responsible citizens, and we must demand accountability from those in power." This sermon highlights how leadership, both in the church and in government, is presented as a moral issue. Enenche calls on his congregation to not only hold political leaders accountable but also to reflect on their own roles as active participants in the moral governance of the nation. The framing of leadership in moral terms elevates the responsibility of both political and religious leaders to uphold values of integrity, transparency, and justice, thereby positioning the church as a key actor in promoting ethical governance. This call for accountability is not just a critique of political leaders; it also serves as a reminder to Pentecostal leaders



themselves. In *Living by the Word*, Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo encourages believers to live according to biblical principles, asserting that “the Word of God calls us to live in integrity, to be honest in our dealings, and to be responsible stewards of our resources.” Fatoyinbo’s sermon underscores the idea that leadership, whether in the church or in the nation, must be grounded in integrity and righteousness. The implication is clear: if religious leaders expect moral accountability from political figures, they must first demonstrate it in their own actions and teachings.

Leadership and the Church’s Role in National Transformation: Pentecostal preachers often position the church as a powerful force for national transformation, with leadership serving as a critical vehicle for societal change. Preachers argue that for Nigeria to achieve true social cohesion and development, its leaders—spiritual and political—must work together to advance the collective good of the nation. This discourse frames leadership not merely as a position of power but as a call to action that requires leaders to be morally accountable and committed to societal well-being.

In his sermon *The Power of Unity*, Apostle Joshua Selman discusses the role of leadership in transcending Nigeria’s ethnic and religious divisions. He emphasizes that only through unity can Nigeria overcome its socio-political challenges, and this unity must be led by morally grounded leaders. Selman’s sermon reflects the Pentecostal belief that leaders—whether in the church or the government—are responsible for setting the moral and ethical tone for the nation. This view positions religious leaders not only as spiritual guides but also as catalysts for political and social change. The church, therefore, becomes a moral compass for the nation, offering leadership that is grounded in Christian principles of justice, equality, and unity. Similarly, in *Love, Unity, and Fellowship in a Living Church*, Pastor Kumuyi addresses the need for ethical leadership within the church as a foundation for national leadership. He argues that “a divided church cannot heal a divided nation,” indicating that the unity within the church is not just important for spiritual growth but for national progress. This statement underscores the belief that the moral integrity and unity of church leadership are vital for fostering broader national cohesion. By emphasizing the church’s role in setting an example of ethical leadership, Kumuyi frames the church as an essential actor in nation-building.

Power Relations and Political Engagement: Pentecostal preachers also engage with power relations in the context of political participation. While many preachers focus on personal salvation and spiritual transformation, others emphasize the need for believers to take an active role in shaping the political landscape. This political engagement is framed as an extension of religious duty, where ethical governance and moral leadership are seen as essential for the nation’s progress. Preachers like Pastor Enenche, for example, call on their congregations to be involved in national politics, demanding accountability from political leaders and advocating for policies that align with Christian values.

Pastor Enenche’s sermon *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation* reflects the belief that religious leaders should actively engage with political leaders to bring about positive change. He



urges his congregation to participate in the political process, stating that “we must choose righteous leaders” and “demand accountability from those in power.” This call to political action suggests that leadership in the Pentecostal tradition is not limited to religious realms but extends to the political sphere, where believers are encouraged to take on leadership roles and hold elected officials accountable. By framing political engagement as a moral obligation, Pentecostal preachers position their congregants as not just passive observers but active agents in the moral and social transformation of Nigeria. This approach empowers individuals to participate in governance, not just through voting or civic duties, but through moral advocacy and public leadership.

Social Cohesion and National Unity.

A recurring theme in the sermons is the connection between spiritual unity and national unity. The preachers emphasise that, for Nigeria to achieve social cohesion, religious communities must first embrace unity. For instance, Pastor Kumuyi’s sermon calls for internal church unity as a foundation for national healing, while Pastor Adeboye stresses the need for individual transformation to bring about collective national change. Moreover, Apostle Joshua Selman’s sermon on unity advocates for transcending ethnic and religious divides, positioning spiritual unity as the catalyst for national peace and progress. He states: *"When we come together as one, we demonstrate to the world that God’s love is stronger than any ethnic or religious differences. This is the kind of unity that can change a nation."* In this discourse, unity is portrayed as the bedrock of national progress, urging believers to set aside personal or group interests for the common good of the nation.

This section explores the connection between spiritual unity and national cohesion in Pentecostal sermons, examining how preachers like Pastor Adeboye, Pastor Kumuyi, Apostle Selman, and others frame national unity as not only a moral and spiritual responsibility but as an essential requirement for the country’s progress and development.

Unity as a Moral and Spiritual Imperative: One of the most prominent discursive strategies used by Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria is the framing of national unity as a moral and spiritual imperative. In their sermons, unity is not merely presented as a desirable state but as a divine command, grounded in Christian teachings. Preachers often use religious authority to exhort their congregants to prioritize unity above personal or group interests, emphasizing that it is through unity that Nigeria can overcome its social, political, and economic challenges. For example, in Apostle Joshua Selman’s sermon *The Power of Unity*, the preacher frames unity as a divine mandate: “Unity is not just a desire; it is a divine mandate. We must come together as one nation under God, for only through unity will Nigeria rise.” This message underscores the idea that the nation’s success is intricately linked to the spiritual unity of its people. The religious framing of unity as a moral duty places significant pressure on individuals to transcend their personal biases, ethnic divisions, and religious affiliations, urging them to adopt a collective mindset for the



common good. Unity, in this sense, becomes more than just a social goal; it becomes a spiritual act that reflects the believers' obedience to God's will.

Similarly, in Pastor Kumuyi's sermon *Love, Unity, and Fellowship in a Living Church*, unity within the church is presented as the precursor to broader national unity. "A divided church cannot heal a divided nation," Kumuyi asserts. "As believers, we must reflect love and unity within the church to bring healing to our nation." By linking the internal unity of the church with national healing, Kumuyi positions the church as a microcosm of the broader society. This metaphor suggests that just as the church must embody love and unity to fulfill its divine mission, the country as a whole must embody these values to overcome the fragmentation and division caused by ethnic, religious, and political tensions.

These sermons, along with others, frequently use religious language to frame national unity as a moral obligation. Preachers highlight the importance of setting aside ethnic, religious, and cultural differences in favor of collective well-being, and they often remind congregants that God's blessing and intervention are contingent upon their willingness to embrace unity. This strong connection between religious duty and national unity can inspire believers to actively participate in efforts aimed at fostering social cohesion, reinforcing the idea that unity is not only a civic responsibility but a spiritual necessity.

Spiritual Unity as the Foundation for National Progress: Pentecostal preachers often argue that spiritual unity within religious communities is the foundation for achieving broader national unity. By emphasizing shared Christian values and collective prayer, Pentecostal leaders suggest that social cohesion in the broader society can only be realized when believers unite under a common spiritual purpose. This belief is rooted in the idea that spiritual alignment fosters social harmony, and without this alignment, true national progress is unattainable. In Pastor Adeboye's sermon *When God Moves*, he discusses how divine intervention can lead to national transformation, but only if individuals and communities work together in unity. He states, "When God moves, He transforms hearts, and when hearts are transformed, nations are healed." This metaphor of transformation emphasizes the need for a collective moral and spiritual awakening to achieve national cohesion. The idea that national progress is closely tied to spiritual unity suggests that the role of religious institutions is not limited to individual salvation, but extends to the moral and social fabric of society. By fostering spiritual unity within religious communities, Pentecostal preachers position their congregations as agents of broader social transformation, tasked with the responsibility of working towards national progress. Moreover, the emphasis on unity in Pentecostal discourse highlights the church's potential role in bridging the divide between Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious groups. In a country marked by significant ethnic, religious, and political divisions, Pentecostal churches often serve as spaces where unity is not only preached but also practiced. This is especially evident in churches with diverse congregations, where believers from different backgrounds come together under shared religious beliefs and communal activities. The message of spiritual unity, therefore, encourages believers to transcend their ethnic identities and focus on a shared Christian identity that promotes collective social action.



Unity as a Solution to National Challenges: The sermons analyzed in this study also highlight the importance of unity as a means of addressing the nation's pressing challenges, such as corruption, poverty, ethnic divisions, and political instability. Preachers frequently link national unity with the resolution of these issues, framing the lack of unity as a key obstacle to national progress. In this discourse, unity is not just a moral or spiritual concept but a practical solution to Nigeria's most pressing problems. For example, in *The Challenges and Rebirth of a Great Nation*, Pastor Enenche calls on Nigerians to unite in the face of the country's challenges. He states, "We must rise above our differences and work together to rebuild Nigeria. Our nation is in crisis, but through unity, we can overcome any obstacle." This sermon underscores the idea that national challenges, such as political instability and economic hardship, can be addressed only when individuals put aside their personal, ethnic, or religious divisions and unite for the common good. By positioning unity as the antidote to national crises, Enenche frames social cohesion as a critical element for addressing the broader socio-political issues that plague the country. Similarly, Apostle Selman's *The Power of Unity* emphasizes that Nigeria's ethnic and religious divisions hinder the nation's development. He argues that unity is key to overcoming these divisions and building a stronger, more cohesive society. By addressing ethnic and religious tensions directly, Selman's sermon offers a religious solution to one of the most significant barriers to national cohesion in Nigeria. The call for unity in this context is framed as a divine solution, with Selman stressing that only through spiritual unity can Nigeria achieve true peace and prosperity.

The Role of the Church in Promoting Unity and National Transformation: Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria frequently emphasize the church's role as an instrument for promoting unity and national transformation. They argue that the church is uniquely positioned to lead by example, showing the nation how to overcome division and embrace a collective vision for progress. This view positions the church not only as a spiritual institution but as a key player in nation-building and social cohesion. In *Living by the Word*, Pastor Fatoyinbo stresses the transformative power of Christian teachings in shaping personal lives and, by extension, societal structures. He notes, "When we live according to the Word, we create a society that reflects God's righteousness." This assertion connects individual morality with broader societal impact, suggesting that the ethical behavior of Christians, as shaped by their religious teachings, directly contributes to the moral fabric of the nation. The church's teachings on unity, integrity, and social responsibility are therefore seen as foundational to the creation of a cohesive society that can overcome its divisions.

The call for the church to lead by example is also evident in the sermons of other Pentecostal leaders, such as Pastor Kumuyi and Pastor Adeboye. These leaders emphasize that the church must embody the principles it preaches, particularly unity, love, and moral responsibility, if it is to have any meaningful impact on society. By fostering internal unity within the church and aligning its members' actions with national goals, the church is positioned as a moral and social force capable of driving the nation's progress.

Potential Divisive Elements in Religious Discourse.



While the preachers predominantly focus on unity and national progress, some elements in the discourse can also be seen as potentially divisive. For instance, the emphasis on moral righteousness and prosperity sometimes marginalises those who are economically disadvantaged, suggesting that poverty may be a result of insufficient faith or personal shortcomings. In Pastor Chris Oyakhilome's sermon, the message of divine prosperity is clear: *"When you align your life with divine principles, prosperity is inevitable. Prosperity is not a matter of chance; it is a result of divine order."* While this sermon emphasises the power of faith, it can inadvertently alienate those struggling with socio-economic challenges, positioning their difficulties as a result of personal moral failure rather than structural inequalities. The study looks at these divisive elements and their implications for social cohesion in Nigeria.

Prosperity Gospel and Socioeconomic Inequality: One of the most significant divisive elements in Pentecostal discourse is the emphasis on the prosperity gospel. The prosperity message, which is central to many Pentecostal teachings, posits that faith and adherence to biblical principles lead to material wealth, health, and success. Preachers, such as Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, often frame prosperity as a divine right for believers, encouraging individuals to view financial success as a direct manifestation of God's blessing (Krinsky, 2025). While this message promotes personal empowerment and the desire to achieve success, it can be deeply problematic for those who are economically disadvantaged or struggling with systemic inequality. The prosperity gospel tends to marginalize individuals who are economically disadvantaged, often framing their financial struggles as a result of insufficient faith, lack of moral rectitude, or personal failure. For example, in Pastor Oyakhilome's sermon, "The Secret of Wealth: Divine Principles for Prosperity Revealed," the implication that prosperity is directly tied to spiritual correctness suggests that those who are poor are somehow lacking in faith or obedience to divine principles. This perspective reinforces a harmful narrative that blames the poor for their own struggles, neglecting the broader societal and structural factors that contribute to poverty, such as economic inequality, unemployment, and political corruption (Simpson, 2016). Furthermore, by emphasizing prosperity as the ultimate measure of divine favor, the prosperity gospel can create a sense of division between the wealthy and the poor within religious communities. It fosters a form of moral and economic elitism, where those who achieve material success are seen as more faithful or spiritually superior, while those who do not are left feeling spiritually inferior or condemned. This divide is especially pronounced in Nigeria, where there is a stark contrast between the rich and the poor, and religious discourse, which should ideally serve as a unifying force, can instead contribute to further alienation and resentment among the disadvantaged.

Moral Righteousness and Exclusionary Practices: Another divisive element within Pentecostal religious discourse is the emphasis on moral righteousness, particularly the idea that those who do not live according to certain Christian principles are morally inferior. Preachers like Pastor Adeboye and Pastor Kumuyi often focus on the moral obligations of believers to live holy lives, avoiding sin, and upholding ethical standards (Gospel Realm, 2024). While this moral framework is important for personal development and societal transformation, it can also lead to exclusionary practices, where individuals who do not conform to these moral standards are marginalized or



stigmatized. For instance, the sermon “*When God Moves*” by Pastor Adeboye presents national transformation as closely linked to personal moral transformation. While the call for personal holiness is undoubtedly valuable, it can inadvertently create a dichotomy between the “righteous” and the “unrighteous,” further dividing society. Individuals who struggle with personal issues such as addiction, poverty, or family dysfunction may feel excluded from the community of believers if they perceive themselves as morally inadequate or unworthy of divine blessings. This moral absolutism can alienate vulnerable groups and contribute to the social fragmentation that Pentecostalism seeks to address. Moreover, the emphasis on moral purity can lead to the exclusion of those who do not conform to the specific moral and doctrinal standards set by Pentecostal churches. This can manifest in judgments toward individuals who may not meet the church’s expectations regarding lifestyle choices, sexual orientation, or financial status. By framing moral adherence as a prerequisite for inclusion, Pentecostal discourse can unintentionally foster a “them versus us” mentality, pitting the “righteous” believers against the rest of society, and creating social and religious divides.

Ethnic and Religious Divisions: While many Pentecostal preachers, such as Apostle Joshua Selman and Pastor Kumuyi, emphasize unity as a divine mandate, the discourse surrounding unity can sometimes oversimplify the deep ethnic and religious divisions that exist in Nigeria. The sermons frequently encourage believers to transcend ethnic and religious divisions, urging them to embrace unity in Christ as the foundation for national progress (Truth Sermon, 2024). However, while these messages are well-intentioned, they may overlook the complexities of Nigeria’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The blanket call for unity, while appealing, can unintentionally erase the very real ethnic and religious identities that shape people’s lives and experiences. By presenting unity as an absolute, uncritical ideal, preachers may unintentionally dismiss the genuine grievances and conflicts that arise from ethnic and religious marginalization. For example, Nigeria’s ongoing conflicts between different ethnic groups, particularly the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, are deeply rooted in historical, political, and social realities. A message that emphasizes unity without addressing these underlying issues may appear tone-deaf to those who experience ethnic or religious discrimination on a daily basis. Moreover, by positioning unity as a spiritual and moral imperative, Pentecostal discourse may unintentionally pressure individuals to set aside their ethnic or religious identities for the sake of social cohesion, potentially leading to resentment or feelings of neglect. The emphasis on national unity may overlook the need for a more nuanced approach that recognizes and celebrates Nigeria’s diversity, rather than attempting to homogenize it under a single religious or moral framework.

Implications for Social Cohesion

These divisive elements in Pentecostal discourse present challenges for social cohesion in Nigeria. While the emphasis on unity, ethical governance, and national transformation is commendable, it is important to recognize the ways in which religious discourse can unintentionally perpetuate inequality, exclusion, and division. The prosperity gospel, the moral righteousness framework, and the call for unity without addressing ethnic and religious divisions all have the potential to



exacerbate existing societal tensions and hinder the promotion of true social cohesion. For Pentecostalism to truly contribute to social cohesion, there needs to be a more inclusive approach that acknowledges and addresses the socio-economic realities faced by marginalized groups. A more balanced discourse would seek to uplift the poor without placing blame on them for their circumstances, promote moral integrity without alienating those who struggle with personal issues, and advocate for unity while respecting Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity. Only by recognizing and addressing the potential divisive elements in religious discourse can Pentecostalism play its rightful role in fostering national unity and social justice in Nigeria.

Summary of Findings.

The analysis reveals that Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria use a variety of discursive strategies to foster social cohesion, promote national unity, and encourage moral responsibility. Key strategies include the use of inclusive language, moral framing, and rhetorical appeals to unity. These strategies aim to unite the congregation around shared values and to encourage collective action toward national transformation. However, while these discourses generally promote social cohesion, they also contain elements that can be divisive, especially regarding the treatment of socio-economic inequality and the role of personal morality in national progress. The findings suggest that Pentecostal discourse plays a crucial role in shaping social attitudes and behaviours in Nigeria. By linking religious teachings to national issues, preachers encourage their congregations to become active participants in the moral and social transformation of the nation. This underscores the potential of religious discourse to not only influence individual behaviour but also contribute to the broader goal of national unity and social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study has explored the role of Pentecostal religious discourse in fostering social cohesion in Nigeria through an analysis of sermons delivered by prominent Nigerian preachers. By employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examined the discursive strategies, ideological constructs, and social implications embedded in the sermons of Pastor Enoch Adeboye, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Pastor W.F. Kumuyi, Apostle Joshua Selman, Pastor Paul Enenche, and Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo. The analysis highlighted how these preachers use language to shape collective identities, promote moral responsibility, and encourage national unity.

The findings suggest that Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria play a significant role in promoting social cohesion by addressing national issues such as corruption, poverty, and ethnic division. Through inclusive language, moral framing, and rhetorical appeals to unity, these preachers create a shared sense of purpose and responsibility among their congregations, encouraging collective action for national transformation. The sermons emphasise that social cohesion is not only a societal goal but also a moral imperative, urging believers to transcend ethnic, religious, and socio-economic differences for the common good of the nation. However, the study also identified potential challenges within the discourse. The framing of moral righteousness and prosperity can sometimes



marginalise those who are economically disadvantaged, inadvertently reinforcing socio-economic inequalities. While the sermons advocate for unity and national progress, they also risk alienating those who may be struggling due to circumstances beyond their control, such as systemic poverty or political instability.

Despite these potential divisive elements, the overarching message of the sermons is one of unity, ethical leadership, and collective action. By framing national issues through a moral lens, these preachers position the church as an agent of social change and national unity. The emphasis on spiritual unity as the foundation for national progress highlights the crucial role that religious discourse plays in shaping social and political attitudes in Nigeria. Ultimately, this study underscores the transformative power of religious discourse in shaping societal norms and behaviours. Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, through their sermons, contribute significantly to the national conversation on unity, governance, and social justice. By urging believers to live by Christian ethical principles, these preachers inspire their congregations to take active roles in the moral and social development of the nation. The findings suggest that Pentecostal discourse, when framed positively, can be a powerful tool for promoting social cohesion, national unity, and long-term development in Nigeria.

In light of the findings, further research could explore how the discourses of other religious groups in Nigeria contribute to or challenge these efforts for social cohesion, as well as the impact of religious teachings on youth and political engagement. Additionally, examining how congregants interpret and act on these messages in their everyday lives could offer further insights into the practical impact of religious discourse on societal change.

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