




That they may be one (Jn 17:11): Mending the seamless coat of Christ in Assemblies of God Nigeria



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Assemblies of God church in Nigeria, which has for over 40 years now, experienced various crises that have led to succession and factionalism in that church. The once giant of spirituality and the mother of Pentecostalism has grappled with the problem of administration, leadership tussle and bigotry. This study is a review of previous and current crises that AG Nigeria has gone through at the General Council level in a bid to mend what seems to have torn asunder the seamless coat of Christ in line with the prayer of Jesus, 'that they may be one'. The study uses historical-critical method and phenomenological design to analyse the depth of the crack in the church in order to predict the future of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

Contribution: To chronicle the crises in Assemblies of God Nigeria through a study of current and past patterns of events with a view to recommending possible solutions.

Keywords: Assemblies of God; John; Pentecostalism; leadership crisis; bigotry; Nigeria.

Introduction

Jesus' last prayer for himself, for his disciples and finally, for all believers as recorded in John 17 evokes a lot of emotion to first-time readers. It displayed the emptiness that follows an expected parting with a loved one or loved ones. No wonder some scholars consider it a 'farewell prayer' (Borchert 2003:185).¹ Indeed, a departure from family and loved ones is challenging and sometimes depressing. Before his earthly departure, Jesus makes the most passionate prayers recorded in the four gospels in the text of John 17:11, 'that they may be one'. This is with the understanding that even after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, there are strong possibilities of discord. They may disagree on many things including doctrine, fellowship and biblical interpretation. Such becomes the case of the mother of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, Assemblies of God Nigeria (AGN).

History reveals that Pentecostalism is the third ecclesiological system to find its way into Nigeria. The missionary churches were the first, followed by Pneumatic churches (Pew Research Centre 2006).² Early Pentecostal movement in Nigeria evolved from the spirit churches and later found their feet as an independent church system in Nigeria. Assemblies of God church was among the earliest of Pentecostal groups to have succeeded in Nigeria. Its success was soon to be attacked by hiccups resulting from leadership crises and bigotry. The gate of the church was then opposed by the gates of hell. While the church prevailed over all that besieged it, it seems that its present besieging has awakened scholars in Nigeria to enquire of the possible solution to these divisions and crises. This study is done with the intention of understanding Jesus' desire for oneness in the church and to relate it to the present happenings in AG Nigeria. The study chronicles these challenges with the aim to proffer possible solutions to the AG Nigeria crisis. Using historical-critical method and phenomenological design³ to analyse the depth of the crack in the church, the study predicts the future of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

1.Coloe (2018:1) is one of the few Johannine scholars who approach Jesus' prayer in John 17 from a metaphysical reality and view it as 'a homecoming' prayer.

2.Note, the entrance of these three ecclesiological systems in Nigeria is not the same with the three waves of entrance of Christianity into Nigeria as discussed by Kitauze and Achunike (2013:47-48).

3.Though Barton (2007:67) does not see historical criticism as a method, but rather 'a series of explanatory hypotheses, driven by a particular attitude toward text and textual meaning', Smith (1994) sees it as one. As a method, historical criticism, 'arose out of the great reorientation of the human mind that came from the scientific revolution of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the development of historical method in the nineteenth [century]. It produces history in the modern sense, for it consciously and critically investigates biblical documents to write a narrative of the history they reveal' (Krentz 1977:35). In using phenomenological design, semi-structured questionnaire played a vital role in data collection.

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John 17:11

Coloe has pointed out examples of what she called 'Jewish testament tradition'. By this she means the 'Jewish farewell type-scene' demonstrated in:

Jacob's final words to and blessing of his sons (Gen. 49), Moses' final words to the people of Israel in the Book of Deuteronomy, especially chapter 34, and the prayer of Jesus ben Sirach (Sir 51). (Coloe 2018:2)

She takes a step further in comparing these 'testaments' with Jesus' prayer in John 17. It seems reasonable to accept Coloe's (2018:2) comparison of John 17 and the Jewish testament tradition owing to the similarities between these Old Testament dying heroes and Jesus. 'The fact that Kasemann described [the farewell discourse] as "The Testament of Jesus" may give additional point to such a comparison' (Bammel 1993:103). However, Coloe was able to identify other 'unique features' that are best described as 'genre bending'.⁴ This attribute, 'genre bending', when examined deeply explains that John's discourses are marked out as following multidimensional genres unlike the synoptic gospels. Such generic diversity is contributory to the confusion of Johannine scholars, even the brightest of them all.⁵ However, Attridge admits that despite the 'competing theories' associated with the farewell discourses (including Jn 17), 'testament' is one of them. This concretises the opinion that by genre, John 17 is a testament, which shares similarity with Jewish testament theory.

Because 'genre belongs to the domain of exegesis' (Ashton 2007:10), there is a great sense of justice discussing the genre of John 17 under this section, though polemically. This would give rise naturally to an implication, namely, who was the true writer of the book of John. Going back to the genre of John as a helpful tool to unlock the original author of the gospel, it looks like some of the Johannine discourses utilised Greek literary genres,⁶ which is one of the reasons for a massive belief that it is the gospel of the Hellenists (see e.g. Bacon 1933)⁷ '... written by a Greek thinker for Greeks' (Barrett 1978:3). Obviously:

[T]he Hellenistic conception of incarnation visibly enters the domain of Jewish messianism in the Epistles of Paul; in that

4. By 'genre bending', Coloe most possibly refers to a variety of generic markers noted by Attridge, which makes the book of John a distinctive class among the Four Gospels. According to Attridge, there is the nocturnal dialogue (between Jesus and Nicodemus) that aligns well with the *Corpus Hermeticum*. There is also the dialogue with the woman at the well, which 'evokes a type scene, rich with sexual innuendo, of a patriarch encountering his future bride'. Again, there is the speech of Jesus in chapter 5, which 'displays many of the hallmarks of a formal forensic discourse as defined in Greek rhetorical theory'. Yet again, the Bread of Life discourse in John 6, 'looks every bit like a homiletic midrash', etc. But regarding the farewell discourses, Attridge noted that their 'generic affinities' 'have perplexed interpreters' (see Attridge 2002:9–10).

5. A celebrated Johannine scholar, Ernst Kasemann confessed regarding his discussion on the book of John thus 'I shall be discussing a subject which, in the last analysis, I do not understand' (see Buck 1981:20).

6. Köstenberger (2013) agrees that there are considerable levels of affinity between the genre of the Fourth Gospel and the Greco-Roman literary conventions. He, however, argues that such affinities are contained 'in a small specialized body of literature' (p. 435).

7. Bacon (1933:31) refers to John thus: 'From a silent follower of Peter, and later of James, John has become a leader of Hellenistic Christianity'. He speaks further 'Paul and John alike draw upon a Hellenistic interpretation of the gospel probably of Syrian origin' (p. 73).

which we may designate the Johannine Canon, a group of Epistles, Gospel and Apocalypse appearing at Ephesus ... (Bacon 1910:4)

This gives greater impetus to view the fourth gospel as heavily influenced by Greek writings. However, many of the discourses in John including v. 17 have a pure Jewish genre, following the format of apocalyptic literature. After a long discourse on the patterns of apocalyptic literature, especially the Jewish type, and a study of the prevailing genre in the gospel of John, Ashton concludes that 'reflecting on the gospel genre and comparing it with the apocalyptic patterns studied in the previous chapter, one can hardly fail to be struck by the formal resemblances' (p. 334). Therefore, on this premise, there is a compelling need to ask whether the author of John was a Jew or a Greek. Christian tradition suggests that the gospel was written by John the son of Zebedee (Barrett 1978:4). This is after all proceeding from overwhelming results gotten from internal and external evidences of Johannine study. Even though 'the evidence that the gospel was written, as tradition affirms, by John the son of Zebedee, seems overwhelming...it is very unsatisfactory' (Barrett 1978:4).⁸ It has also in fact been argued that the gospel was authored by John the Elder whom 'Christian apologists often conflated with John the Apostle the son of Zebedee' (Audlin 2015:4–5). Citing 'a letter written by Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, to Victor, Bishop of Rome, written toward the end of the second century', which reads in part 'ἔτι δὲ καὶ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος τοῦ Κυρίου ἀνάπεσων, ὃς ἐγενήθη ἱερεὺς τὸ πέταλον πεφορεχῶς καὶ μάρτυς καὶ διδάσκαλος: οὗτός ἐν Ἐφέσῳ κεκοιμηται', Audlin dismissed the phrase 'ὁ ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος τοῦ Κυρίου ἀνάπεσων' [who reclined at the master's bosom] as not original to the letter. His argument is that this letter is a clear example of conflation of John the Elder⁹ with John Zebedee by ancient apologists. Perhaps Audlin was right by seeing a conflation between the two Johns. It is also possible that John Zebedee was the same John who was referred to as a priest (see Kolawole 2021:5).

Reading the text of John 17:11 closely, the prayer of Jesus can be categorised into two parts: *action* and *implication*. Jesus informed the Father of his completed assignment and soon departure to return home to the Father. This *action* implies that those whom he was leaving behind need protection from the spirit of discord in order to remain an indivisible entity. The action was demonstrated by John in its full rhetoric with a contrasting effect by applying an adversative use of καί. The strong contrast between the first phrase, οὐκέτι εἰμι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ and the latter αὐτοὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰσὶν was successful,

8. It seems that the mention of the beloved disciple in John 21:24 concretises evidence that John the son of Zebedee wrote the book and from an eye-witness perspective, but different schools of thought have arisen to strongly question this assertion. See Ridderbos (1997:481–484). A.H. Hunter, for example, rejected Johannine authorship on the following reasons 'the use of the Synoptists by the author of this Gospel, the difference in style between this and the other three Gospels and the improbability that the Apostle John would have called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved"' (see Morris 1995:29).

9. Some theories on this subject have identified John the Elder as John Mark, the black priest and in fact the author of the gospel according to John. The foremost proponent of this theory is Randall Gray in his several unpublished articles. Gray's theory that John Mark or John the Elder was African shares affinity with Oden's (2011) work (Oliver 2016:4) but differs from it in that Oden sees the writer of the Gospel of John, as not John the Elder but another John (Oliver 2016:3).

grammatically, based on this contrast. John clearly demonstrates that ‘contrast is an even more important factor in small closed grammatical classes like the class of conjunctions’ (Poythress 1984:313). The *action* contained in the prayer of Jesus has a simple theological interpretation, namely Jesus’ union with the Father – and by extension with the Spirit – while on earth has served as a model for these disciples until his departure. No wonder he speaks of unity among the disciples καθὼς [exactly as] it is with the Father and the Son. Invariably ‘the unity of the Trinity is understood as a prototype of the unity already instilled in the church by the Trinity themselves, towards which the church should work’ (Peters 2021:2). It is clear from the passage that the context of the oneness (ἐν) that Jesus prayed for his disciples is oneness of unity. This is not necessarily confessional or structural unity, but the kind of unity that Peters called *henotic* unity (see Peters 2021). According to Peters, ‘*Henotic* unity is not a visible unity, which suggests unionism, but unity of the spirit amongst individual Christians, who are the church’ (Peters 2021:3). This is, in short, agreement in the spirit towards one Christian service and one holy baptism. In John 17:11, the *action* and the *implication* work in such harmony, as pieced together by καὶ so that there was no room for *asyndeton*. Clearly, John was moved by his quest for oneness that it regulated even his style of writing in the text.

The cardinal numeral ἐν, as it appears in the text, is *one* when ‘opposed to a division into parts’ (see <https://biblehub.com/greek/1520.htm>). This means that, while Jesus did not expect those he left behind to form a union, he nevertheless expected them to be united in spirit.

There is a textual problem in the text that needs to be addressed. It revolves around the controversy of ‘the name’. Four major variants have been recorded and backed by four readings:

- Πάτερ ἄγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς (Holy Father, keep them in your Name to which you have given Me that they may be one as we are).
- Πάτερ ἄγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς (Holy Father, keep them in your Name to which you have given me that they may be one as we are).
- Πάτερ ἄγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, ᾧ ἔδεδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς (Holy Father, keep them in your Name to which you had given me that they may be one as we are).
- Πάτερ ἄγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου, οὓς δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς (Holy Father, keep them in your Name those whom you have given me that they may be one as we are).

The major disparity in these four readings is the different relative pronouns found in them. We observe that reading *a*, which is read by f^{60} A B C Δ Θ Ψ 0141 f^{3} , suggests, by the presence of the dative ᾧ, that Jesus pleads with the Father to keep the disciples safe *through* the name of him (the Father)

that he has given Jesus. Reading *b*, which is read by D* 157 1424 l 184^{1/2}, suggests the same this time around by focusing on *the name* as the subject of his discussion. Here, the pronoun takes an accusative case ὃ unlike the dative in reading *a*. Reading *c*, which is read by $\text{f}^{66\text{vid}}$ & L W, did not present its controversy in the relative pronoun, but by presenting the verb διδῶμι in an aorist form. Here unlike the first two readings, Jesus implies that the case of the name given is already settled and irreversible. The last reading, which is read by D¹ (N* ov for οὓς) 205 1505, veers off from the first three by deemphasising on the name but on *those οὓς* [whom] were given Jesus. Metzger (2002:213) insists that ‘The reading that best accounts for the origin of the others has also the strongest attestation’. According to him, the reading of ᾧ is difficult, which prompted copyists to replace it with ὃ or the plural οὓς. By Metzger’s opinion then, the first reading is the most authentic reading. By manuscript support and according to Metzger, one looks favourably with reading *a*, Clarke (2022) supports the belief in this reading by asserting a theological point when he said:

By the *name*, here, it is evident that the *doctrine* or *knowledge* of the true God is intended as if our Lord had said, ‘Keep them in that *doctrine* WHICH thou hast given me, that they may be one. (n.d.)

In fact, a thorough study of this text shows that indeed, the original language is quite ambiguous and no final conclusion may yet be reached on the matter.

Summarily, the text of John 17:11 shows Jesus’ passionate plea with the Father to protect those whom he was leaving behind either by making them all be baptised in the Father’s name in order to remain in one body or through partaking in the one right doctrine according to Clarke (2022). However, the bottom line is that Christ expressed concern for disunity and prayed against it.¹⁰

Assemblies of God in perspective

The history of Assemblies of God church in Nigeria has been thoroughly researched by Peters (2020) who used both eyewitness reports and interview methods to gather quite a succinct history of that denomination. Peters adumbratively recounted that ‘Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria poses as the mother of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, and such a claim has been backed by a solid history’ (p. 7). He claims to ‘possess first-hand information about the history of AGN from one of its founding fathers, late Papa George Nnorom Alioha’ (p. 7). In his study, Peters also stated that the story of Papa Alioha perfectly agrees with the research of Mbamalu (2016), which makes Mbamalu’s history impeccable. Therefore, a summary of the history of AGN is that the church was started by Pa Ehurie Nwogu after he was born again in 1930 in Port Harcourt, present Rivers State, Nigeria. He succeeded in converting a few of his kinsmen, including Papa Nnorom Alioha (Peters 2020:7). They formed a congregation called ‘the Church of Jesus Christ’ (Mbamalu 2016:1).

10. Malan (2011:1) denies that John 17:11 encourages ‘confessional or structural unity of the church’. He, however, admits that the text ‘legitimises the unity of the separatist Johannine Community’.

These men, who were young in both age and faith, needed the mentorship of stronger born-again Christians, but unfortunately, at that time such 'stronger' people were living abroad. Through contacts in numerous gospel tracts published by the Assemblies of God, USA, which was also the channel of their Holy Ghost baptism, they invited white men, who arrived Old Umuahia, to mentor and incorporate the Church of Jesus Christ, thoroughly populated by the Igbo men into AGN. (Peters 2020:7)

This story corroborates Blumhofer's account. According to Blumhofer (1989):

In 1939, Everett and Dorothy Phillips accepted missionary appointment to Nigeria, where the circulation of literature like copies of the *Pentecostal Evangel* had produced a strong nucleus of believers before missionaries arrived. Over the years, through the dedicated efforts of missionaries like the Phillipses, Nigeria became the foremost Assemblies of God field in Africa. Shortly after his arrival, Everett Phillips launched Central Bible Institute of Nigeria, a timely project that developed into the largest Assemblies of God ministerial school overseas. (p. 307)

Another mention of the labour of Phillips is found in the work of Nmah (2017:101). He stated that:

In 1940, E. L. Phillips arrived in Port Harcourt in company of his wife and son Donald. All efforts by Phillips to secure land space to establish his headquarters and Bible school in Port Harcourt were thwarted by the British officers who were allegedly protecting their country's Anglican (CMS) from the ongoing missionaries' scramble for sphere of influence in Igboland. Then, Phillips resorted to Old Umuahia where he started a miniature Bible school in the mud church building on the land donated by Abel Nwoji. Later, he transferred the school to the present site situated behind Afoibeji market on a high land nearly surrounded by valley, a feature that has earned it the popular name 'Holy Hill'. (Nmah 2017:101)

Nmah's story opines that the American missionaries sent to help build Assemblies of God in Nigeria had their base in Port Harcourt where the abroad members of the Church of Jesus Christ (as AGN was formerly known) worshipped. While oral tradition only mentions that Nwogu became born again while living in Port Harcourt it seems according to Nmah that there was a congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ in Port Harcourt also. Nmah goes ahead to state that the missionaries 'spotted CJC in a worship session' in Port Harcourt where 'the leadership of the Church led by Nwogu and Alioha discussed terms of union with their visitors' (pp. 100–101). However, Alioha himself, while he was alive stated that Ehurie Nwogu wrote a letter to these missionaries requesting their presence to train them as young Christians. Alioha's version has been affirmed by Mbamalu (2016:1). Whatever the true situation of things is, what is however, clear is that AGN was originally known as the Church of Jesus Christ, started by Ehurie Nwogu and his kinsmen from Old Umuahia. Their 'lack of confidence' (Mbamalu 2015:1) led them to invite the American missionaries of Assemblies of God extraction to guide them properly, leading to the loss of indigenusness and the original name of the church. However, the church experienced a radical growth within a

very short period, and they succeeded in planting so many churches within the said time (Lewis 2014:201).

Governance in Assemblies of God Nigeria

The AGN is governed by two major instruments: the Bible and the AG Nigeria Constitution. Both are assumed to be sacrosanct and are not to be toyed with by any pastor or leader within the denomination. These two documents have been sources of guidance for the church for over 80 years. The AGN constitution was drafted to show no partiality or preference to any person(s) or office or position. When any provision of the constitution is violated, the prescribed disciplinary action was expected to be applied to the person(s) involved. It is the discipline stemming from compliance to the constitution that has kept the denomination moving forward all these years. All the leaders in elective positions both past and present were brought into office by elections which is an instrument made available by the constitution. However, in course of its growth, the church faced many administrative and leadership problems. It should not be forgotten that the kind of ecclesiological system that AGN runs is Presbyterianism; however, they have a unique Presbyterian system in that elders of both the clergy and the laity ruled. Power was not unitary on the General Superintendent and so, his orders are subject to serious scrutiny. The primary data gathered for this research came from correspondence from General Council minutes, person-to-person interviews and telephone interviews. Therefore, the respondents shall be called interviewees.

Crises in Assemblies of God Nigeria

There are four major crises that took place in the General Council of Assemblies of God, Nigeria between 1973 and 2022. The first was Revs. E.K. Ebere, D. Ayim, S. Ebere versus Southern Igboland district (1973–1975). The second was Rev. J. Ukpai versus Rev. J. N. Nwakanma (1986–1991). The Third was Rev. P. Emeka versus the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Nigeria (2013–2014). The fourth was Rev. C.A. Okorafor versus the General Council of the AGN (2019–2020).

Revs. E.K. Ebere, D. Ayim, S. Ebere versus Southern Igboland district (1973–1975)

According to Odion (2009), the crisis came up after the Nigeria civil war between 1973 and 1975. About this crisis, Odion (2009) states:

Five years later, some brethren in the southern Igbo land district seceded from [G]eneral [C]ouncil as a result of their agitation for a separate district that was not granted by the executive committee. After many attempts made to resolve the matter failed, the agitators pulled out of the church. Therefore...the splinter group adopted a new name, declaring themselves The True Assemblies of God Church. (p. 109)

The group of agitators was from Ngwa land who believed that people from Umuahia dominated top positions in AGN

(Interviewee 7). This made these Ngwa ministers to feel seriously marginalised and undervalued (Interviewee 7). Having pulled out of AGN, they had their own church, Bible school and large followership although some of their followers returned back to AGN with time (Interviewee 2). In an interview with Eberendu (Interviewee 2), he was of the opinion that the action of Ngwa people regarding this matter was ungodly. They masterminded several failed attempted murders that were condemnable he concluded. However, Rev. Charles Osueke, upon assumption of office as the General Superintendent, made a move to reconcile the warring parties in the church. The document containing the welcome address of Rev. Osueke during the 75th anniversary of the church states:

In the 75 years of existence as a church AGN has experienced one split which took place immediately after the war in the then southern Igbo-land district which gave birth to the defunct True Assemblies of God, now known as Christ the Ark of Salvation. I am delighted to announce that formal reconciliation with this vibrant church which has remained true to our tenets of faith through the years, is being consummated today. (Assemblies of God Nigeria 2009:16)

In an interview with Onuoha (Interviewee 1), he opines that late Rev. Franklin Ukoma, the then Assistant General Superintendent being an Ngwa man, started the reconciliation immediately after the secession. He, in fact, had the support of Revs. E.K. Eber and S. Eber who were arrow heads of the crisis, but they had an obstacle when their followers vehemently refused to comply. Though there was reconciliation, but AGN did not mandate them to change the name of their church. They were rather seen as an offshoot of AGN. Currently, they still bear the name *Christ the Ark of Salvation* and still identify with AGN in all ramifications (Interviewee 1).

Rev. J. Ukpai versus Rev. J. N. Nwakanma (1986–1991)

The second crisis was between Rev. John I. Ukpai and late Rev. Dr. J. N. Nwakanma of the then Southern Igboland district (now Aba district). According to interviewee 3, the problem was that Rev. John I. Ukpai who was one of the ministers under Rev. Dr. J. N. Nwakanma (the then Southern Igboland district Superintendent and the Assistant General Superintendent of the church) wrote a memorandum containing 50 points on administrative practices that neither has biblical supports or in tandem with AGN constitution. He went on to accuse his boss, Rev. Nwakanma of adopting an Episcopalian system of church government as against Presbyterianism that AGN is known for. He also accused Rev. Nwakanma of being autocratic in his administration. Instances of those practices were that Rev. Nwakanma on many occasions carried out disciplinary actions on erring pastors on his own instead of bringing the matter to the presbytery for judgement. He also demoted unmarried pastors because of their unmarried status. When the matter escalated, some members of the church supported Rev. Nwakanma leading to the creation of two factions. When the

General Council scolded him for his highhandedness in leadership, it was alleged that he threatened to secede from AGN and rule over Southern Igboland in an Episcopal manner. This led to a serious crisis at the time. It was later discovered that he never threatened to secede from AGN, rather his detractors gave his statements this interpretation (Interviewee 1). Because of the fact that the Southern Igboland District was the richest district in AGN at the time, the General Council was afraid of losing such a district to one man whether he made the threat of secession or not. So, they decided to strip him of the two offices he held at the time. He vacated office in the year 1986 (Burial Programme 2013:8).

However, an online Facebook profile reported on this issue thus:

A crisis bursted[sic] in southern Igboland District of Assemblies of God in 1982 that resulted to[sic] the removal of Rev Dr. Nwakanma as the [D]istrict [S]uperintendent. The Gen[eral]. Council under the leadership of Rev Dr. Ezeigbo who also happened to be his in-law divided the district into two districts, Eastern Igboland District and Southern Igboland District. Rev Dr Ukoma who was a lecturer in AGDSN was appointed the chairman of Southern Igboland District later changed to Aba District while Rev Clement Onuoha, also a lecturer in AGDSN was appointed the Chairman of Eastern Igboland District later changed to Umuahia District. These two men grew to become amazing great leaders in AG even though they came into leadership as a result of crisis. Rev Nwakanma didn't accept his removal so he went to court to challenge the decision of the Church and was in court till 1990-91. (see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2677575932570037>)

Though the above Facebook account reported that Rev. Nwakanma went to court as a result of the case, however, an interview with Ephraim (Interviewee 10) and Grant (Interviewee 8) noted that Rev. Nwakanma did not take the matter to court. Mbah (Interviewee 11) and Eberendu (Interviewee 2) agreed with interviewees 8 and 10. Mbah (Interviewee 11) said that it was not Nwakanma that took the matter to court, but Nwakanma's children did as their father was old at the time. This explains that most of his actions were conceived by his children. Eberendu reports that though the matter was reported at the court, the judge advised them to settle the matter in the church. However, when late Rev. Dr. Charles O. Osueke assumed the position of the General Superintendent in 1988, he instituted a reconciliation team. The reconciliation team resolved to pay late Rev. Nwakanma all his entitlements as a District Superintendent and Assistant General Superintendent, within a few months after the reconciliation and asked him to proceed on retirement, which he accepted in good faith. One outstanding result of this crisis was that the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Nigeria passed a resolution on the retirement age of its ministers. Seventy years became the compulsory retirement age. Also, while the General Council was dealing with the case of Rev. Dr. J. N. Nwakanma, Rev. John I. Ukpai seceded from Assemblies of God church and started a church known today as *Christ the Hope of the Nation*.

Rev. P. Emeka versus the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Nigeria (2013–2014)

The third crisis in the General Council of Assemblies of God, Nigeria, is considered by some as the most tragic in the history of the church. Most tragic because a sitting General Superintendent was accused of abandoning the constitution that brought him into office. Note that Rev. Prof. Paul Emeka had served as a local church pastor, Bible School Teacher, District Secretary, District Superintendent, Executive Committee (EC) member, Assistant General Superintendent in Assemblies of God, Nigeria, before he was elected into office as the General Superintendent of the church, on Wednesday 24 November 2010, during the 34th General Council Meeting of the church with a total vote of 4078, out of 5057 votes cast.¹¹ He was supposed to remain in office for 4 years (a tenure) before another election but was dismissed as a minister and suspended as a member after he served for 3 years and 3 months by the same people that voted him into office because he was accused of having taken AGN to court. This accusation was sequel to the accusation of his inability to abide by the constitution and biblical principles of the church.

Rev. C.A. Okorafor versus the General Council of the Assemblies of God Nigeria (2019–2020)

The crisis between Rev. Dr. Chidi A. Okorafor and the General Council of the AGN took place in 2019 when there was a rumour accusing Rev. Okorafor of adultery. Rumour had it that he impregnated a lady in the USA and sponsored her to abort the baby. Unfortunately, the act leaked and circulated on social media via WhatsApp. When the matter was reported to the EC members, they initially dismissed the rumours as it was based on photos, screenshots and videos all of which could be fabricated by anyone with a good knowledge of photo and video editing. However, some top officers in AGN were not satisfied with the dismissal of the evidences; this prompted the EC members to revisit the matter. A panel of investigation was set up and when the panel submitted its reports, the EC moved to dismiss Rev. Dr. Chidi A. Okorafor as a minister and suspend him as a member. Rev. Dr. Chidi A. Okorafor appealed to the General Committee (being the highest decision-making body of the church), the General Committee conveyed on 06 March 2020 and upheld the decision of the EC members.

Rev. Dr. Chidi A. Okorafor's response to the suspension

He accepted the suspension on the ground that he does not want the church to pass through a similar crisis with Rev. Prof. Paul Emeka versus General Council. He served the suspension and probation from 06 March 2020 to 06 March 2020 and was reconstituted as a minister and member of Assemblies of God church. However, he lost all the positions he held before he was suspended. Presently, he has left the

¹¹35th General Council Meeting Booklet, 2014, *Assemblies of God, Nigeria*, Assemblies of God Printing Press, Aba (28–30 October) p. 20.

administrative unit of the church and focuses on his personal ministry, which has existed for over 40 years. Though he is no longer in the administrative unit of the church, he still retains his membership with the General Council of AGN.

Summary of crises in Assemblies of God Nigeria

There are four major crises that have taken place in the General Council of Assemblies of God, Nigeria between 1973 and 2020. Factors responsible for these crises include leadership tussles and bigotry. Some of these crises led to several secession moves that also led to the formation of new denominations, untimely death of some members and ministers, destruction of church properties and inflicting different kinds of injury on members. However, in all the crises that AGN has had, late Rev. Osueke played great roles to quell the fire even though his newly formed Ambassadors contributed negatively to the latest crises.

Recommendations

- The study recommends that AGN leaders should go back to the foundation laid by the founding fathers. They should re-imbibe spirituality, holiness and the spirit of brotherhood instead of overindulging in church politics.
- As AGN now exists in two factions, the study suggests that both groups should sheath their swords and adopt the no victor, no vanquished slogan. A fresh peace talk should be initiated between the two factions after several failed peace talks. This will be the forum where Rev. Paul Emeka should either be allowed to complete his tenure or be properly retired with his full benefits. Also, the Ambassadors should be dissolved in order to check its interference in church leadership.
- The study suggests that the General Council of AGN should retire all the Executive Officers and EC members that worked with Rev. Prof. Paul Emeka during his tenure as General Superintendent.
- The study recommends also that the General Council should compensate some of Rev. Prof. Paul Emeka's faction members by electing them into General Council positions.

Conclusion

An analysis of the crises in AGN was made in this study. A pattern of reconciliatory unity designed after Jesus' prayer in John 17:11 was suggested. Primary and secondary sources were used to gather data for the study. The study came to the conclusion that the two major problems AGN faces are leadership tussles and bigotry. The study believes that if the constitution of the church is reexamined in light of the crises the church has had, it would go a long way to deliver the church from further crises. The study, therefore, made recommendations that are able to give AGN a fresh start and serve as a model to other Pentecostal groups in Nigeria.

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Authors' contributions

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