



Faith, Illusion and the Church: A Theological Evaluation of Selected Churches in Delta Central Senatorial District

MARY JEMEGBE, JOSEPH ENUWOSA
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Abstract. The study examines faith, illusion and the church: a theological evaluation in the context of selected churches in Delta Central Senatorial District. Religion has been termed illusion because it is used to becloud the mind and make them to believe what does not really exist. If it is an illusion, then any scripture penned by a human is just an illusion. The question is that, how does one engage persons who base their arguments on the claim that religion is just an illusion? The study examines the concept of illusion, faith and the church and brings to bare the inconsequential argument on religion as mere illusion. The study adopted sociological, phenomenological and hermeneutical interpretation of the phenomenon within the context of the Pentecostals with the aim of establishing the correlation between faith and illusion in the context of the church. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the Africentric understanding of the phenomenon of faith from the teachings of Archbishop Benson Andrew Idahosa (1938-1998), who believed the literal text of Heb. 11:1 “Now faith is the substance of things hope for, evidence of things not seen” from a practical dimension. The study argues that faith is the basis of clear thinking therefore, every man has the choice to make; longing for an encounter is the basis for religion. The study concludes that Pentecostal Faith has been criticized and commonly considered as a mixed grill of faith and occult practice, yet there are many things here worshipers who have turned from criticism that people may put forward as a front against Pentecostal exercise of faith and practice. That the Bible is explicit in its teachings when it established that without faith it is impossible to please God, all who live without failure for around the Pentecostal churches should not live to complain rather they should seek to address their background and examine that level of commitment as to the teaching or begin nomination as the basis for a fledgling Christian life and finally that the Apostles of faith from the scriptures and those living examples among us, were all evidence of faith with testimonies and miracles to their record.

Keywords: Illusion, Faith, Church and Theology.

1. Introduction

In an attempt to discredit religion, some have termed it to an illusion. The claim is that religion is used to becloud the mind of men and make them to believe what does not really exist. On the other hand, proponents of religion averred that a person can know God personally through a reciprocal relationship. This kind of response can be termed as an illusion. Which means that one is creating an experience whether he or she realizes it or not. This illusion argument also serves as a foundation for many other atheistic arguments. Because if it is an illusion, then any scripture penned by a human is just an illusion. The question is that, how does one engage persons who base their arguments on the claim that religion is just an illusion?

The problem with talking to people who claim that religion is just an illusion is that before engaging in discussion with such people, one should first establish reasonable ground rules for such discussion. Simply saying that religion is just an illusion does not constitute an argument and much less proof of anything. Such a person is simply giving his personal opinion and assumes that his own experience is universal and applies to all other living beings in the universe. Probably, it should be said that first, such persons, are creating the experience that is the real illusion per se. Such persons may choose to believe that their own experience is illusory, however on what grounds can they impose their view on someone else's experience?

If there is no God, it is very likely that there is no omniscient being. If no one is omniscient, no one knows everything. Therefore, no one knows if there is a God or not. That is one of the main problems with atheism, it necessarily contradicts itself. The atheist claims to know what, in principle, only a God could know, namely everything. Before entering into serious discussion with another

person, it is strongly advised to ascertain whether one is dealing with open-minded reasonable persons. If not, then one will be wasting his or her valuable time. For instance, a dogmatically inclined person who claims to know everything, as if that person were God, is not a promising discussion partner. However, an illusion is part and parcel to innate perceptual interpretation system. It is universal and all humans experience them; they are inescapable. Not all humans however, fall sway to the God delusion, as Richard Dawkins correctly termed it in the title of his famous book (cited in Omotoye, 2010). Wathey (cited in Adams & Bezner, 2000) purposely contrasts his title, describing the feeling of the presence of God as an illusion, which a theist will argue to be an obvious mistake.

The study adopted sociological, phenomenological and hermeneutical interpretation of the phenomenon within the context of the Pentecostals with the aim of establishing the correlation between faith and illusion in the context of the church. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the Africentric understanding of the phenomenon of faith from the teachings of Archbishop Benson Andrew Idahosa (1938-1998), who believed the literal text of Heb. 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hope for, evidence of things not seen" from a practical dimension.

2. Concept of Faith

Faith is the unwavering strong conviction that something is wholly true. According to Migliore (2004), faith can also be a belief in someone considered as being supreme and possessing supernatural ability and qualities. Faith is a concept that is central in most world religions. This is because their beliefs are founded in certain religious teachers whose teachings are considered as the absolute truth to them that possess that faith. There is also the belief in an all-powerful, all knowing being in these religions whose ability is never questioned but people professing the faith seek to obey this being without failing. On the other hand, there are those who think that such beliefs which are not founded on reality but on what one is persuaded is the reality is illogical and lacking any validity and hence choose not to believe in any religious teachings or existence of a supreme being because faith and reasoning do not agree.

According to Migliore (2004), the most common type of faith in the world is the religious faith. There are many different religions professing different faiths. What each religion believes in causes a major disparity among the different religions or even among members of the same

religion. For example, both Christians and Muslims believe in Jesus but there is a great discrepancy in their belief. The greatest difference that exists to date is the belief of the Christians that Jesus is God but came in form of a man to atone for the sins of men through His death on the cross and resurrection (Migliore, 2004). This belief is strongly refuted by Muslims, who believe that Jesus was sent by God as a prophet to the Israelites and that he was not crucified and did resurrect after his death. Within the same religious group, there can also be differing views about the faith they profess. This is one of the reasons why there are many denominations within some religious groups for example the Christians. In regard to the Holy Books, the Muslims see the Koran as the absolute truth and being God's unchanging word to the human race. The Christians view the Bible as the God-inspired word which can never be altered. Other religions too have what they consider Holy Scriptures for example, is the Bhagavad Gita for Hindus.

Newman (1998) saw faith as a phenomenon with a wide range of meanings, ranging from a general religious attitude to personal acceptance of a specific set of beliefs. Despite this, Christians' lives are still dominated by their beliefs. For Hellwig (1990), faith is a difficult concept to define. It has a different meaning for each person. Faith is widely seen as a deeply personal experience that should be kept private. Faith is an extremely significant construct, even if it is most typically seen in religious terms (Lee, 1990). Faith, which is defined as a general religious attitude or an accepted set of particular beliefs, was not present in the ancient Greek and Roman empires. Rather, the Hebrew Scriptures are the sole and direct source of the concept of faith (Hellwig, 1990). Hellwig follows the development of faith from the New Testament to the Church Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Modern Era. Faith has always been a part of religion, and it has been studied by scholars from a variety of fields (Hellwig, 1990).

Migliore (2004) argument on the phenomenon of faith as virtue found in certain religions has little or no basis here. Every religious belief, being an atheist, also involves certain level of faith expression of not exercising belief in anything but the Bible defined faith as a practical arena hence, Hellwig (1990) assumption of the faith as a difficult concept is bereft of the biblical claims about faith expression. He left off in a hurry to assert that in the Ancient Greco-Roman world, faith was not expressed until the New Testament otherwise, the Hebrew scripture. Abraham in Gen 12, was moved by faith, his action was guided by practical departure from his home land on a journey with God. Hence, Fowler (1981) assertion that faith

is the most universal and profound aspect of man in germane; it reveals the independence and dependent nature of man on God; the Ultimate Reality. The research, thus aligns with the biblical claims as expressed by Fowler.

The act of faith, according to Aquinas (1920), consists primarily of knowledge. Faith is an intellectual act with the goal of discovering the truth. As a result, it has a subjective as well as an objective aspect. It is the mind's assent to what is not seen from the subject's perspective: faith is the proof of things that do not appear (Hebrews 11:1). Furthermore, as an act of volition, this assent can be meritorious for the believer, even if it always needs God's grace. Furthermore, faith can be a virtue because it is a good habit that leads to good deeds. When one assents to truth in faith, however, he or she does so based on the evidence of another. From the standpoint of what is believed, Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, distinguished between "preambles of faith," which are based on intellectual principles, and "articles of faith," which are based only on divine evidence.

Locke (cited in Jolley, 2007) lived during a period when the old mediaeval concept of a coherent body of intelligible wisdom looked implausible. Nonetheless, he adhered to the underlying mediaeval concept of faith as acceptance of specific propositions based on God's authority. Unlike Aquinas, however, he claimed that faith is a type of opinion rather than a state between knowledge and opinion (*doxa*). But he devised a form of Christian apologia: an appeal to revelation rather than excitement or inspiration. His goal was to show that Christianity is "logical." Despite the fact that faith and reason have "strict" separate provinces, faith must be consistent with reason. Faith cannot persuade us of something that opposes or contradicts our knowledge. If a revealed notion contradicts our plain intuitive understanding, we cannot assent to it. Faith propositions, on the other hand, are regarded to be "above reason."

3. Illusion

When it comes to spiritual development, it is practically hard to avoid mentioning James Fowler's work and the impact he had on the field. Fowler not only defined faith and distinguished it from religion, but he also developed a stage theory to describe how people grow into loyal people. As a result of his work's influence, many people have criticized, modified, and debated his theory's applicability to other groups. Despite the fact that Fowler's faith development model is not classified as a Christian theory, it is quite applicable to Christians and can be studied in the context of Christian theology of faith. Fowler (1981)

articulated his understanding of faith and laid out the elements of his faith development theory in his *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Here, faith is described as "a generic trait of the human quest to acquire and retain meaning," according to him, and should not be considered synonymous with religion (Fowler, 1981, p. 91).

However, according to Fowler, meaning does not have to be sought through religion. People's questions about faith include, among other things, what gives their lives meaning and purpose, as well as what their hopes are for themselves and their loved ones (Fowler, 1981). These concerns are answered through faith, and because Fowler defined religion as "a human universal" (Fowler, 1981, p. xiii), he believed all people capable of thinking on them throughout their lives. It is worth noting that Fowler believed that faith enabled people to comprehend what he termed the "ultimate environment," (Fowler, 1981, p. 24) the imagined worlds that people create in their heads that impact how they understand and live in the real world. Differences in belief, faith, and religion, according to Fowler, are linked to the ultimate environment because people's beliefs allow them to communicate their ideas about it.

Religion is both a technique of faith and a way of thinking about the environment. Individuals' interactions and experiences in the different components that make up their lives culminate in faith, which connects these components so that they can feel their lives are "whole" (Fowler, 1981, p. 25). Fowler was influenced by the work of many renowned theorists, including Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget, in developing his theory of faith development, which is divided into six stages that occur throughout a person's life (Fowler, 1986a). Fowler's perspective of how people grow religion was affected by the stage theories proposed by each theorist, as were his interviews with people of all ages about their faith ideas. The pre-stage, infancy, and undifferentiated faith, according to Fowler (1981), begins throughout infancy and is defined by babies' knowledge that they are independent entities from their parents and rely fully on them to supply their needs.

As a result, as humans begin to develop a sense of confidence in others, Fowler (1981) argued that the "initial pre-images of God have their origins" in this period (p. 121). Individuals aged seven to ten are capable of narrating stories that they understand in literal terms in stage two, mythic-literal religion. As a result, descriptions of God are based on the images of Him that they have seen. During this stage, Fowler (1981) also explained that the

concept of fairness is used to distinguish between right and incorrect activities. Puberty and teenagers' development of self-images based on how they think others see them impact stage three, synthetic-conventional faith. According to Fowler (1986b) a person has an 'ideology,' a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified it for study and, in a sense, is unconscious of having it. People in this stage have formed faith beliefs based on a variety of factors, but they do not engage in active personal thought on what these beliefs entail.

Individuals can either stay in stage three or progress to individuated-reflective faith, which is the fourth stage of faith formation in which people might accept new value systems as a result of exposure to diverse ways of living, according to Fowler (1981). As a result of these encounters, they begin to question the faith concepts that had previously been imposed on them. Though it is most common in people's twenties, a period marked by significant upheaval for many, it can also happen later in life. They are able to combine concepts that previously appeared to be at odds with one another without fear of jeopardizing their own belief systems, and this stage usually occurs throughout middle life.

Finally, individuals in stage six, universalizing faith, differ from those in stage five in that they are willing to sacrifice the self and risk the partial justice of the present order for the sake of a more inclusive justice and the realization of love (Fowler, 1981), whereas those in stage five simply recognize justice without committing themselves to challenging the existing order to ensure it is a reality for all. Fowler (1981) cited Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi as examples of people who have progressed to the sixth stage of faith development, which only a few people achieve. Many scholars have also challenged Fowler's idea for being founded on Western Christian beliefs (Keeley, 2010). Indeed, according to Broughton (1986), over 80% of the people Fowler examined and based his argument on were Christians. This is another cultural constraint of his thesis, in that it may not be appropriate for non-Christians or Christians who do not reside in Western countries. Taking these two cultural constraints into account, Fowler's theory most closely applies to Christians living in highly developed Western countries (Clare & Fitzgerald, 2002). However, it is important to note that, while Fowler initially claimed that his theory was universal, he eventually stopped doing so due to criticisms of this aspect of his theory.

The relationship between psychotherapy and religion has historically been strained, because it

has been dominated by psychoanalytic theory and has turned on that field's conceptualization of illusion until recently. Psychotherapy has traditionally regarded religion as an illusion in a strictly pejorative sense, owing to the psychobiological origins of psychoanalytic theory. Many psychotherapists have only recently realized that illusion is a psychological need, and that, like any other need, it can be healthy enjoyed in a socially beneficial way or distorted into pathology. Religion has reacted defensively to psychoanalysis' largely negative assessment of it by campaigning against it, ignoring it entirely, or incorporating its theory prematurely. Religion, understandably, has resisted being labeled as merely illusory, because such a label denies the reality of religious experience. Often, psychoanalytic consideration of religious material has used a methodology based on nineteenth-century physical science, which makes study of religious experience impossible due to its own assumptions. Psychoanalysis' scientific origins (some would say aspirations) have enabled the field to claim objectivity, which requires it to dismiss religious experience as illusory. Fortunately, there has been some beneficial advancement in the psychotherapy-religion relationship: Religion has begun to appreciate the psychological and cultural role of psychotherapy, and psychotherapy has begun to use religion more appropriately and less defensively. The main characteristics of this developing relationship are examined in this current study.

Freud views religion to be an illusion in a number of works, but none more clearly than *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). He claims that religion arose from early humanity's (and continues to arise from the child's) primal worries and yearning for assistance. The psyche's projection onto the universe of immature, unconscious yearning for omnipotence and protection, an attempt to regulate the cosmos' impersonal harshness by personalizing it as a father-God, is the concept of God. As a result, God is merely a psychological phenomenon, the result of wishful thinking in other words, an illusion. For Freud, illusion is a derogatory term, an adaptation that should be avoided if at all feasible in favour of confronting reality without illusion. Despite Freud's distinction between delusion and illusion (the former clearly a false belief and the latter a belief that, whether true or false, is reached independently of rational means), religion is false because it is not real, according to the strictures of the nineteenth-century scientific paradigm that Freud employed.

Fromm, Frankel, and Erikson are three other psychoanalytic theorists who should be addressed in a discussion of psychotherapy and religion. The first two are included not because they made a

significant contribution to the development of psychoanalytic theory, nor because they advanced psychoanalytic understanding of illusion, but because they took religion seriously on its own terms, breaking away from Freud's reductionist methodology in studying religion. As a representative of the first group of psychoanalytic theorists already stated, Fromm regarded religion's worth from a wide cultural perspective, whereas Frankl saw religion's psychological purpose in supporting the individual's search for meaning. In the psychoanalytic investigation of religion, Erikson's work must also be addressed. Erikson, who is most known for his research into the "identity crisis," founded the field of psychohistory. Erikson investigated what he called *homo* religious in young human that is, the individual whose nature and historical circumstance compel a religious existence a way of life, Erikson claimed, that can be psychologically healthy. Both Luther and Gandhi's religious aspirations are treated with respect, humanity, and compassion by Erikson. Even two decades ago, it would have been unthinkable for an analyst of Erikson's repute to psychoanalyze a religious icon without turning him into a psychopathology case study.

Jung's denial of the standard psychoanalytic link between religion and illusion explains theology's kinship with Jungian theory. Jung's concept of the psychological fact encapsulates the Jungian perspective on illusion: Jung claims that all psychic products, including visions, dreams, and hallucinations, are facts with the same grounding in reality as other facts, including physical facts. As a result, in Jungian psychology theory, there is essentially no such thing as illusion. It is a psychology that's practically devoid of illusions. Although Jung was a reductionist, his reductionism differed from Freud's reduction of religion. Jung was able to understand religion more clearly on its own terms as a human activity that, while frequently tainted by social hypocrisy or personal pathology, could yet be based on a reality of experience that was inextricably linked to other unconscious drives using psychological methods. It is not the business of psychology to prove or reject the presence of God, says Jung. He claimed that while psychology can examine the psychological effects of the God-image and its mythic antecedents, it can't debate God's existence outside of the human psyche. Jung maintained his belief in the reality and significance of religious experience till the end of his life. Jung placed a high value on religion. This was due in part to his personal past. His father, as well as several of his uncles, was clergymen. However, it was also a result of his work as a psychotherapist. Among all my patients in the second half of life that is, beyond thirty-five there has not been one whose difficulty in the end

resort was not that of establishing a religious outlook on life, he wrote in "Psychotherapy or the Clergy." Of course, this has nothing to do with a particular creed or membership in a religion, he continued (Jung, 1967).

Jungian theory advancements have broadened the discourse between psychotherapy and religion beyond customary boundaries. Archetypal psychology is a Jungian theory schism that is rather formally arranged. It is led by James Hillman and focuses nearly entirely on the archetypes of the collective unconscious. This group investigates polytheism. A second trend can be seen in certain Jungians' growing interest in the Goddess. They contend that modern consciousness, including modern religion in particular, is patriarchal. A number of Jungian analysts and writers have concentrated on past Goddess religions, and have occasionally advocated for a return to religious concentration on the Goddess in modern people's lives. Although neither is strictly about the Goddess, two phenomena in popular culture mirror these notions. *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, written by Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes in 1992, contended that women's wholeness depended on reengaging their repressed instinctual nature, while Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, released in 2003, stated that the sacred feminine is on the increase.

Many people have noticed that organized religion has a fundamental conflict. An organized religion must continue to promote its own beliefs in order to survive, which is sometimes at odds with individual religious experiences. As a result, the mystic tradition is marginalized in many religions. Individual experience, on the other hand, is at the centre of religion (as contrasted to religious organization). This disparity has led many people to believe that organized religions are oppressive and restrictive. This impression, however, is not without flaws. Interestingly, established religions such as Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, which use external standards to judge individual religious experiences, are losing members in the United States, while newer religious organizations, particularly fundamentalism, which also use external standards, are thriving. Disillusioned with established religion, some people have started to practice or develop spiritual activities on their own; others have resorted to unorthodox sources, such as psychotherapists who incorporate spirituality into their treatments. These practitioners come from a variety of theoretical backgrounds and use a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques, such as meditation, yoga, and chanting none of which would have been regarded proper in psychotherapy even fifteen years ago. Although spirituality in

psychotherapy is not widely practiced, there is reason to anticipate that it will grow in popularity and eventually alter the field.

4. Faith in the New Testament

According to Brown (1979), the most evocative description of faith in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 11:1, where faith is heralded as the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Here, the word for faith is the Greek *pistis*, which denotes the act of giving one's trust. The New Testament conception of faith involves amplification and an alteration of the older, Hebrew idea of faith as that quality of stability and trust that informs the living relationship between two beings (Brand, Draper & England, 1998). For the New Testament writers, faith has found its center in the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ. But the New Testament idea of faith goes beyond that of the Hebrew Scriptures in its addition of the concept of "belief in" or "belief that." Hence, Christian theology has traditionally distinguished between the "subjective" element in faith, which involves the supernatural action of God upon the human soul, and faith's "objective" component, which is characterized as adherence to a body of truth found in creeds, in definitions of church councils, and especially in the Bible.

In a similar vein, the 19th-century Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard (cited in Tillich, 1957/2001) felt that a chasm separates human reason from faith, and that the would-be believer must make a "leap of faith" across this abyss in order to find salvation. In general, modern Protestant theologians have emphasized, as Kierkegaard did, the subjective or individualistic aspect of faith and have concentrated on the risk and moral effort involved in attempting to lead the life of faith, rather than on the acceptance of creeds as an expression of faith.

5. Presentation and Discussion of Data on Faith and Illusion

- (i) To ascertain the impact of faith on man's ability to think and to act rightly or rendered powerless due to the influence of religious faith, 68 respondents with 17% , agreed that man is powerless once faith-based issues are involved. However, 305 respondents with 76.25% disagreed with the opinion, that faith suppresses man's thinking ability, thus making him powerless. They averred that faith is the basis of clear thinking therefore, every man has the choice to make. 21 respondents having 5.25% were not sure of what entry to make

while 6 respondents, having 1.5% made no answers to the item in question. They possibly do not understand the question as to make and entry. The overwhelming response with 'No' shows that man has the freedom to make choices. It is thus commonly acclaimed that religion is the opium of the people according to Karl Marx however, this cannot be said about the principle and application of faith as a vehicle for the suppression of man, rendering him powerless. Umukoro (Personal communication, 2023), averred that the submission of man through religion is an act of worship and should not be considered as impotency.

- (ii) Religion is an illusion, it's only a man's thinking that is capable of creating reality

56 respondents with 14 % were of the opinion that indeed, religion is an illusion borne out of man's imagination. However, 321 respondents with 80.25% disagreed with this opinion. They posited that the longing for an encounter is the basis for religion.

Amagiya (Personal communication, 2023) was of the view that the claim was said to be true way back then. He added that it cannot be true today because it was believed then about the function of religion that it was used for the undoing of the masses. Today, with enlightenment, religion cannot be said to be the only weapon of keeping the people poor rather, neo forms of slavery are worse than religion. Isiorhovoja et al (2011) noted that inasmuch as religion cannot be separated from man, the psyche in religion among adherents is a phenomenon that cannot be explained away by mere wishes. It is based on the longing of the soul for an encounter with the other which is usually higher and superior. Enuwosa (2005) thus considered it as the search by man for God. Religion as illusion has resonated since the time of the Marxist theory of religion being the opiate of the people became popular across the globe. In the snappily

titled Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, he famously called religion "the opium of the people," in that religion was not only used by those in power to oppress the workers, but it also made them feel better about being oppressed when they couldn't afford real opium. 18 respondents were not sure about the claim having 4.5% while 5 respondents made no answers to this item in the questionnaire. The No Answer had 1.25%

(iii) To ascertain the claims of religious experience being an illusion that is capable of creating false belief, 56 respondents with 14% as in Table 2, were of the opinion that religious experience is an illusion that is capable of creating false belief. 324 respondents with 81% disagreed with the statement that religious experience is an illusion. Overah (Personal communication, 2023) in support of the above claim, noted that we respond to God's invitation through the experiences and encounters that we have and not because we are frustrated or delusion. Those with illusion experiences are either over ambitious or were never drawn to the point of submission and encounter. Religion experiences are the colourful roses that sustain the souls longing and continuous fellowship with the divine. 12 respondents with 3.0% were not certain about the question while 8 respondents made no entry to the question here with 2.0%.

(iv) The absence of faith can cause delusion in a man's heart. This question had overwhelming response among other items. A total of 352 respondents with 88% agreed that disillusionment in a man's heart can be caused by the absence of faith which is the stronghold for religious encounter and fulfilment; for without it, man cannot both please and encounter God. Arigbe (personal Communication, 2023) posited that not only in Christianity, the principle is applicable in every area of human endeavours. The possibility of disillusionment sets in as a man becomes desperate to come into the presence of the divine. With 8.0%, 32

respondents disagreed that the absence of faith can cause disillusionment in a man's heart. Failure for any man to live and walk by faith is tantamount to illusion because there is no foot hold. 12 respondents were not certain about the phenomenon as to make decision while 4 respondents, having 1.0% made no answer at all. Abushe (personal communication, 2023) noted that a life void of faith is an illusion by itself, a path to aimless living, wandering through the wilderness of life.

(v) Testimonies about faith-based experiences if it could conquer illusion and delusion among members. Showed that a total of 308 respondents with 77% agreed with this item while 71 respondents with 17.75% disagreed arguing that sometimes, some of the miracles declared are not real rather, mere situations of make belief aimed at cajoling others to boost membership and followership as the case may be. Eruteyan (personal communication, 2023), noted that some testimonies and miracles are arranged especially by unknown guest ministers who profess miracles and fulfilment of prophecy above God. This phenomenon has made it laughable sometimes when testimonies are shared. Ohre (personal communication, 2023), noted that testimonies are the wings upon which the Christian message is spread abroad, building faith and conquering fears. 15 respondents were undecided, since they were not very certain as to agree or disagree with the item. 6 respondents having 1.5% made no answer at all to the item.

(vi) If the knowability of God results in loss of personal identity and ability resulting in strong faith issue revealed that 88% of the respondents representing 352 persons were affirmative. They agreed that knowing God requires the loss of personal will that leads to stronger demonstration of faith. Onotu (Personal communication, 2023) stated that knowing and experiencing God is an act of acknowledgement of His supreme will over the individuals.

Though the process may seem dreary and dark yet, the experience is usually great. Those whose choice is No, 26 respondents with 6.5% claimed it will result in illusion. Ottutu (Personal communication, 2023) posited that in the absence of persistence, patience and piety, the individual may be totally lost otherwise, a great faith is the end result of it. Those who were not sure had 17 respondents with 4.25%. Ogboru (personal communication, 2023) noted that unless a man had a religious encounter, the whole exercise appears vague and seemingly obscure. The response low response explained the perceptions of the populace who have had no experience of the divine as Martin Buba called it the “*I and Thou*.” 5 respondents made no entry at all to this very item in the questionnaire. They have 1.25% in all.

- (vii) To examine the claim about Pentecostal practices, whether it is actually a mixed grill, having faith and illusion, a total of 73 respondents with 18.25% agreed. Eghwubare (personal communication, 2023) said that there cannot be pure practices among Pentecostals. He added that some of the practices are shrouded in mysticism that goes beyond the ordinary eyes. While some are genuine, others go by the way of medium, the path of Saul to Endor (1Sam. 28:3-25). But 302 respondents having 75.5% objected to the Yes response above. Omena (personal communication, 2023) stated that the Bible is replete with promises which the believers in Christ can rely on to soar like eagles. He contended that faith is the only passport to achieving all that we ever needed as a child of God in a world so full of opportunities. He added that the seeming mixed grill are the reflection from few bad eggs who otherwise like the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:14), that window shopped in to the realm of the divine. They were however disgraced, a pointer to the ultimate end of the sons of perdition. Those who objected were 302 with 75.5%. Onoru (personal communication, 2023) averred that the teachings and demonstration of faith taught by

Christ is enough to live victoriously. There are no points calling the practice of faith among Pentecostals mixed grill. There is power in the spoken word as practiced among the bloc, healings, miracles, deliverance and breakthroughs and the blessings which the individuals can claim through faith Onosakponome (personal communication, 2023) said that once faith is absent, once the individual begins to trivialise the spoken Word, illusion has been given a foothold. The basis of blessings and upliftment is then destroyed. Consequently, such person goes with the mantra of being deceived by the church or defrauded as the case may be. Isiorhovoja (personal communication, 2023) added that the new move of the Holy Spirit as evidenced then among Pentecostals has become the symbol and the seal of the church. Unless anyone believes in it, the refrain and chant will not change. The phenomenon is not unique only to our generation, even in the time of Christ, among the Apostles, early church Fathers and the present-day church. 21 respondents were not sure of this phenomenon among the Pentecostals. They represent 5.25% while 4 respondents representing 1% did not respond to the item at all.

- (viii) The phenomenon of faith and its expression across the churches prove to be interesting. This is shown in the closeness of the percentage of responses and the number of respondents to this item in the questionnaire. A total of 188 respondents with 47% were affirmative, they answered ‘Yes.’ Kokoricha (personal communication, 2023) was ambivalent. He said the response could be ‘Yes’ and ‘No.’ This he attributed to the mind-set of the individual involved, the state of being of those involved too. Idugun (personal communication, 2023), Many who come to the churches are definitely seeking for solution(s) to their problems. However, 192 respondents with 48% were of the opinion that ‘No’, it can be void of the delusion. Ovigie (personal communication, 2023) noted that it can be void of delusion because there

are sincere members who come genuinely with faith seeking God. This category of persons cannot be said to be driven by problem alone. There were 15 respondents who were not sure as to pitch tents with either 'Yes' or 'No' ; 5 respondents made no entry at all.

- (ix) The absence of the object of faith is illusion Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. This is the substance, an anchor upon which faith rests. A total of 233 persons with 58.25% agreed that the absence of faith implies illusion. The manifestation of faith is the ability to look beyond the present hopefully, not giving in to the present situation of things around. Okotete (personal communication, 2023) agreed that the object of faith which is your expectation of the heart, as the reality. 152 respondents to this item with 38% answered 'No', the object of faith does not matter. They noted that sometimes it could occur miraculously without any form of pre-arrangements. Obubu (personal communication, 2023) posited that God cannot be predicted, He moves in a mysterious way. This statement showed that the object of faith cannot be taken as a must and should not be seen as illusion. Hence, illusion should be seen as a deception if ever the person or persons were promised a particular thing such as: Miracles, healings, cars, wealth and they were not given. Oyibo (personal communication, 2023) added that God cannot be pre-empted as to His operation. 8 respondents with a total of 2% were not sure of either position as to approve of the statement or disapprove of it. 7 respondents did not address the item in the questionnaire. Akpodaire (personal communication, 2023) argued that we cannot say 'Yes, No, or Not Answer' to this item because some persons are too superficial when it comes to the issue of object of faith. He left the entry blank as personal encounter matters so much.
- (x) On the inseparable nature of faith and illusion among Pentecostals, A total of 164 respondents agreed that faith and illusion cannot be separated

among Pentecostals. They have a total of 41%. However, 213 respondents answered 'No', that faith can be separated from illusion. Umude (personal communication, 2023) disagreed with those who answered 'Yes', she noted that one could lead to the other especially, illusion leading to faith among members. Sometimes, out of desperation and confusion, someone could stumble into faith and reality. This is not impossible with the issues of faith. Erakpowerin (personal communication, 2023) was in support of the views shared by Umude, he added that faith is different from illusion, the later has no substance or object while the former has. Hence, talking about the possibilities of separation is yet another illusion in itself. Eriomala (personal communication, 2023), argued that the converse is also true when the individual is frustrated in faith. He added that when perceived brothers suddenly become enemies, throwing in the towel amidst frustration remained an option. 4 Respondents did not make entry while 19 respondents having 4.75% were again not sure.

- (xi) The evidence of faith is the substance lacking in illusion, the item of faith substance has 363 respondents with 90.75%. This is about the highest percentage of response in the whole items under treatment. The high percentage showed the difference between faith and illusion. Faith is real while illusion could be deceptive and or deception. Ikakiri (personal communication, 2023) said that faith has an envisaged object in view that the individual could see with the eyes of faith, he /she hoped for it but illusion has no such hope in place, just groping in the dark,
- (xii) The expression of faith with miracles among Pentecostals makes it real based on the interview, it showed that faith expressed with miracles make real the experience. 375 respondents with the overwhelming percentage of 93.73% agreed, they answered 'Yes' to this particular item. Ijessa (personal communication, 2023) argued that seeing is the practical knowledge of

that which has been conceived in the mind, moving from abstract to reality. Orugboh (personal communication, 2023) added that miracles dispel the shade of dark created by illusion. A total of 16 respondents disagreed with the overwhelming number that answered 'Yes', Oghotomo (personal communication, 2023) stated that miracles could be faked or planned by a group of persons or individuals as to create the scene, making it appear real. A total of 3 respondents were not sure while 6 persons made no entry at all.

(xiii) Faith and illusion correlates negatively, they are direct opposite of each other since they are opposite. 68% of the respondents with 272 respondents answered yes. The large number of response could probably have been influenced by the level of commitment of members of the churches interview. Okoroh (personal communication, 2023) however, differ in opinion. He noted that faith can either be positive or negative hence, becomes illusion. In support of 'No' with 102 respondents having 25.5% . 26 respondents did not address the item. This came as a surprise to the researcher with 6.5%. Onoru (personal communication, 2023) was of the opinion that the high number could have been a sign of displeasure or disapproval.

(xiv) Through religious spirituality, encounter and devotion, illusion and delusion are readily overcome illusion and delusion, 302 respondents with 75.5% affirmed that the individual (s) could move from illusion to faith. The act of disbelief is not new to our context as it made its way into the New Testament in the life Thomas. He however, moved from delusion to reality and practical demonstration of the lifestyle of a believer. No was the response made by 89 respondents who felt that religiosity is not enough. Akpona (personal communication, 2023) reasoned that the level of atrocity within the church today has no respect for the rank and file of the church especially in times like this. He added that deception has crept into the church so much that the hood does not make a priest. 4 respondents with

a percentage were not sure while 7 respondents were unable to make entry.

(xv) Faith is based on the Word of God while illusion is mere feelings, there is the need for clarifications between faith and illusion by way of tracing their substance. 324 respondents agreed to this taxonomy of the foundation between faith and illusion. Aluya (personal communication, 2023) noted that faith is rooted on the Word of God while illusion is mere feelings. Akpobasa (personal communication, 2023) similarly supported Aluya, adding that the Word of God is the foundation of faith in the life of the individual(s). 65 respondents differ in opinion, with 16.25%, 4 respondents were not sure while 7 respondents with 1.75 % made no response to this very item.

6. Findings based on the Data

Based on the calculated percentage of response to the questionnaire, it is observed among the Pentecostals they are do there appear to be relationship between faith and illusion most respondents debunk the idea of faith as practiced among the Pentecostals being a mixture of illusion and delusion.

The common views among members based on the questionnaire review that faith is never handled with levity rather it is accorded his rightful place as it creates the atmosphere for the encounter in what ship and other forms of religious observance among members hence receive religious experiences and never considered as solution for the miracles teachings and Bible expositions are real based on the testimonies that are shared among members across the churches interviewed.

The absence of faith therefore is an indication that the individual has not come to terms with the basis, otherwise he or she may not have been converted genuinely. Such persons who experience delusions in the course of fellowshiping with others within the same household of faith this is not enough to conclude that faith can cause illusion in a man's heart rather, a genuinely converted individual would seek to grow his faith from the various experiences and groups, Bible studies, camp meetings and other opportunities of fanning his faith into flame.

In the Book of Revelation, the Bible speaks about the overcoming of the believers through the power

of testimonies, premised on life experiences otherwise known as miracles that have taken place within their lives that are shared. Such testimonies therefore, serves as the basis for eradicating illusion and delusion among members. This is not to say that the person who has not shared testimonies is leaving with illusion or delusion as some persons are known to be shy and not outspoken. Such person should be encouraged.

There's no one person who claim to live a life of faith who would rather seek to maintain his self-identity outside of Christ. This is why the knowledge of God and about him becomes the leeway to total surrender unto Christ for daily leadership, as a sheep before the Shepherd. Like the clay in the hands of the Potter, the act of submission unto God by the believers is a voluntary surrender of one's will unto that that individual accepted the ultimate knowledge about God (Aforngughe, personal communication, 2023).

Although some critique the Pentecostal practices as a mixed grill of fate and illusion premised on daily observance and currencies from and across the society, it is not enough to conclude therefore that Pentecostal practice of faith is not devoid of necromancy and other forms of occult practices. The individuals who practice such should not be termed as Pentecostal members rather they should be seen as the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-20), who desire the act of faith but we're not believers hence, they called on the name of God that Paul mentioned in their act of deliverance before the madman. The result shows the basics of their faith even though they claim to have a little knowledge of who Christ is and physically knowing I'm meeting with Apostle Paul, they have not accepted him as their Saviour (Onoriode, personal communication, 2023).

The act of expression of faith and more Pentecostal therefore should be classified between the believers and those who window-shopped in to the faith. Apostle Paul in his admonition to Timothy encourage him to find his gift into flame, this is the basis for overcoming illusion as one runs the rays of life. Paul did not mince words when he said to Timothy, fan your gifts into flame. Remember the laying on of hands which is the commission that Timothy received from Paul as a mentor who truly pass through the process of being disciplined. The Pentecostal are far from the experience of delusion Andalusian which son closely described as being deceived.

No one receive anything of the Father except he or she is a child. The absence of the object of faith that some have argued to be an illusion is borne out of the convention that these categories of persons

could not be called the sons of God among the members. For the believers there are unique experiences which Jesus Christ has promised that will Mark and characterize the believers through signs and wonders otherwise not present with those followers who failed to believe doubt is a practical way of seeing and witnessing to a live void of testimonies miracles progress and breakthroughs. Since God moves in a mysterious way no one formula can be applied on him like the errors of the sons of Sceva, who instead of listening to Apostle Paul, decided to jump into practice without being disabled while others decided to offer money for the same gift of operation erroneously.

Faith and illusion sometimes appear to be inseparable among Pentecostal. This has become part of the common sayings among some members even within Pentecostal bloc yet from the respondents, it is quite obvious that faith and illusion which are direct opposite cannot go together. A man whose life is filled with illusion has no faith in him, he dabbles into everything through trials and errors, peradventure one my work for him. From the definition of faith as the object of things not seen, the man of faith cannot walk by sight but, the man of illusion works primarily through sight. However, since they all constitute the congregations, sharing different testimonies based on their personal convictions, it is common for onlookers among others, to generalize that faith and illusion are inseparable among Pentecostal as the claim maybe (Christopher, personal communication, 2023).

What a word of encouragement that is lacking in the life of a man who lives his life daily based on feelings. Item 15 from the respondents' show that the Word of God is the foundation of faith and all forms of exploration such as: miracles among others are deeply rooted on the Word of God, alive that sincerely desire the milk of the word according to Apostle Peter. However, James the Apostle also made it clear about illusion at a man who lacks faith, it's like a one that is talked to and fro never been settled in the course of life. This finding shows that the life of a believer especially among Pentecostal and a date Christians is premised on the Word of God as the basis pledges through sharing of testimonies and matured through constant fellowshiping with one another yep by dispelling fears growing stronger daily in faith.

7. Conclusion

Pentecostal Faith has been criticized and commonly considered as a mixed grill of faith and occult practice, yet there are many things here worshipers who have turned from criticism that people may put forward as a front against Pentecostal exercise of

faith and practice. This is the reason why the spread of Pentecostals churches across the senatorial district has actually serve as a springboard for advancing the gospel message without hindrance to testimonies and miracles

Fathers of faith like at Bishop Benson Idahosa Oyedepo and Adegboye among others have proven beyond illusion and delusion, the power of the spoken word that heals, delivers and brings answers to many across the globe. To achieve the dimension of faith as practiced among the early church fathers of the Pentecostal Faith fervency of spirit Faith devotion and constant study of God's word are sine qua non. All who expressed disbelief live within the ambit of selfish 1 disciples and unheeded life onto the master. This is why the concept of faith as practice among believers remained enigmatic to the ordinary man who hitherto has not come in contacts having the life experience of what the power encounter is.

The Bible is explicit in his teachings when it established that without faith it is impossible to please God, all who live without failure for around the Pentecostal churches should not live to complain rather they should seek to address their background and examine that level of commitment as to the teaching or begin nomination as the basis for a fledgling Christian life.

The Apostles of faith from the scriptures and those living examples among us, were all evidence of faith with testimonies and miracles to their record. This should remain the springboard for the constant propagation of the faith among Pentecostals and indeed all Christians because without faith, it is impossible to please God and all who by virtue of not, did not think that the scriptures can be handled with carnal knowledge will not experience their live of fulfilment, because the text are leaving and they are acceptable through the medium of faith.

References

- Brand, C., Draper, C. and England, A. (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers
- Broughton, J. (1986). Political Psychology of Faith Development Theory. In C. Dykstra & S. Parks. (Eds.), *Faith Development and Fowler* (pp. 90-114). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education.
- Brown, C. (Eed.) (1979). *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Clore, V, & Fitzgerald, J. (2002). Intentional faith: An alternative view of faith development. *Journal of Adult Development*, 9(2), 97-107.
- Hellwig, M.K. (1990). A history of the concept of faith. In M. Lee (Ed.), *Handbook of faith* (pp. 3-23). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- Fowler, J.W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Jolley, N. (2007). Locke on faith and reason. In In Lex Newman (Ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Locke's essay concerning human understanding* (pp. 436-455.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Keeley, R. (2010). Faith development and faith formation: More than just ages and stages. *Lifelong Faith*, 20-27.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1846/1968). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lee, M. (Ed.), (1990). *Handbook of faith*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.
- Migliore, D.L. (2004). *Faith seeking understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans.
- Milne, B.G. (1982). *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*. London: Macmillan
- Tillich, P. (2001). *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: HarperCollins.

Personal Communication

S/N	Name	Occupation	Age	Date	Place
1	ABUSHE, B. D	Nurse	46	23/12/2023	Warri
2	ABEDNEGO, H.T	Clergy	63	23/12/2023	Effurun
3	AMAGIYA, P. S	Businessman	59	23/12/2023	Mosogar
4	OKPAKO, D	Trader	42	23/12/2023	Amukpe
5	OYIBO, M	Civil servant	56	23/12/2023	Mosogar
6	EMUOBOSA, R.A	Businesswoman	46	23/12/2023	Abraka
7	OMAMURHOMU, K	Teacher	54	23/12/2023	Oorerokpe
8	UMUKORO, L.	Church worker	53	23/12/2023	Abraka
9	OVERAH, H.P	Public servant	51	23/12/2023	Sapele
10	ARIGBE, O	Applicant	43	23/12/2023	Effurun
11	ERUTEYAN, M.F	leader	63	29/12/2023	Urhuovie
12	OHRE, P.T	Clergy	54	29/12/2023	Osubi
13	ONOTU, G.O	Businessman	51	29/12/2023	Effurun
14	OGBORU, P	trader	46	29/12/2023	Ugono
15	ONOTU, S.P.E	Engineer	53	29/12/2023	Warri
16	EGHWUBARE, h	Leader	64	29/12/2023	Oghara
17	OMENA,O	Engineer	48	29/12/2023	Agbarho
18	ONORUONOSAKPONOMA	Missionary	47	29/12/2023	Agbarho
19	KOKORICHA	pensioners	65	03/01/2023	Okpara
20	IDIGUN	Civil servant	46	03/01/2023	Kokori
21	OVIQUE	missionary	50	03/01/2023	Abraka
22	OKOTETE	Deacon	67	03/01/2023	Otujeremi
23	OBUBU	Teacher	54	03/01/2023	Ogbu-Udu
24	AKPODAIRE	Musician	38	03/01/2023	Eku
25	AKPONA	Businessman	46	03/01/2023	Eku
26	UMUDE	Nurse	51	03/01/2023	Abraka
27	ERAKPOWERIN	Evangelist	55	03/01/2023	Abraka
28	IKAKIRI	Businessman	38	03/01/2023	Okpara
29	IJESSA	Banker	49	03/01/2023	Orogun
30	OGHOTOMO	Engineer	40	03/01/2023	Effurun
31	ORUGBOH	Civil servant	48	08/01/2023	Abraka
32	ISIORHOVOJA, A	businessman	43	03/01/2023	Eku
33	ALUYA	Clergy	56	03/01/2023	Jesse
34	AKPOBASA	Builder	53	03/01/2023	Eku
35	OKOROH	Community Leader	68	03/01/2023	Jesse
36	EMUDIAGA, S	Organist	42	03/01/2023	Eku
37	CHRISTOPHER J.A	Mechanic	46	03/01/2023	Effurun
38	ONORIODE, Z. A	Fashion Designer	41	03/01/2023	Sapale
39	REHOBOTH, J	Web Designer	45	03/01/2023	Abraka
40	Afornughe, G	Architect	48	03/01/2023	Effurun