



## FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MAL-EVANGELIZATION IN ST. PATRICK PARISH AKWANGA, LAFIA DIOCESE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Mal-evangelization and evangelization have been perennial issues of concern within the Roman Catholic Church. This study aimed at establishing how mal-evangelization has led the Catholic faithful to syncretism in St. Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria. The study specific objectives sought to assess the prevalence of syncretism; to examine the factors responsible for mal-evangelization; to investigate the effects of mal-evangelization among the Christian; and lastly to identify possible models of evangelization to reduce syncretic practices in St. Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria. This study utilized descriptive survey. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data while semi-structured interview guides were used to gather qualitative data. Quantitative data was gathered from the parishioners of St. Patrick's Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese while Qualitative data was gathered from the Key informants in St. Patrick's Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used to select Roman Catholic Christians while purposive sampling method was used to select 391 respondents who participated in the study while 7 key informants were interviewed. Quantitative data was coded, entered, edited, and cleaned by the researcher using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS version 23) while content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative information from the interviews. Majority of the respondents had experienced mal-evangelization, which can encourage syncretism through Catechism and clarification between harmful and good African beliefs; conducting more teaching even after catechism; Re-integration and recombination of good African beliefs with Christianity. The preceding information summarizes mal-evangelization and syncretism as per the area of this study. The parish was recommended to have an ongoing faith formation programs, to discourage Christian converts who may from time to time have the strong desire to go back to their former religion and form more Small Christian Communities so as to reach Christians at grass root level.

**Key words:** *Mal-Evangelization, syncretism, Christians, Catholic church, Christians*

### 1.1 Study background

The Greek word "*evangelium*" which denotes "Gospel" or "Good News," is where the word "evangelization" originates. The gospel is the spreading to people the wonderful news of salvation. It states that Jesus Christ, who has risen from the dead, is the Son of God and the world's Savior (McBride, 2022). It announces the coming of God's heavenly kingdom on earth. Thus in order to address syncretism in the church, proper evangelization needs to be done by priests and religious persons and laity among others through compassion, fellowship and intense teaching of the word of God. From the early twentieth century until the present, the Christian population in China has grown significantly. Chinese Protestants numbered about 200,000 in 1912, according to Catholic theologian Peter C. Phan. The population increased to 620 000 in 1936, 1 million in 1949, 17 million in the 1980s, and ultimately at least 40 million in 2010. Additionally, there have been increases in the number of Catholics in China from three million in 1949 to five million in 2006 and subsequently to almost twelve million in 2010 (Phan, 2010). Furthermore, it should be noted that in rural China, Christianity frequently coexists alongside a variety of native cultures. By blending their Catholic faith with pagan festival, the rhythm of indigenous commemorations, Chinese rural Catholics, for example, often celebrate the same holidays as their non-Catholic neighbors. This was noted by the socialist Richard Madsen. In that region, it turns Catholicism into a rural conservative's religion (Madsen, 2019). Such characteristic suggests that despite having sizable Chinese followers, Christianity appears to be a susceptible religion in contemporary China.

African Christianity has a distinctive combination as a result of being raised on customs, western civilization, and biblical doctrine. Traditional cultures have had a considerable influence upon the three major religions that compete for followers in Africa: African Religions, Christianity, and Islam. The Pew study also found that many Africans practice African religions, including those that deal with ancestors' rituals, evil spirits, sorcery, reincarnation, traditional religious healers, and traditional religious herbalists, to name a few (Pew Research Center, 2011). According to a research conducted in South Africa by Denis (2006), there is still a lot of animosity between African Religion and Christianity. He underlines that African religion was widely practiced, if covertly, in South Africa throughout the Apartheid era.

In Tanzania, Africanization of Christianity evolved from 'adaptation' to 'inculturation'. Inspired by Joseph Blomjous, one-time Bishop of the (Catholic) Diocese of Mwanza and initiator of the Africanization of Christianity in East Africa (Blomjous, 1980), and with the help of the St. Cecilia Group, David Clément, a White Father and the parish priest of Bujora Parish, started to 'adapt' the Catholic Liturgy to the culture of the Sukuma people in Bujora, 18 kilometers East of Mwanza city, in 1954. Initially, the aim was to translate the existing Catholic hymns and chants into the local language using local melodies and rhythms. Soon new songs were being composed. Later this led to the composition of biblical plays in the African manner.

From the performance of these plays it became apparent that music is not the only medium that can be used in the Africanization of Christianity. In 1961 some members of the St. Cecilia Group, under the guidance of Father Clément and his religious superior Father Jan Hendriks, formed the 'Sukuma Research Committee' (Clément, 1977). Its members started to collect information about herbs and healing methods used in local medicine. Later they began collecting articles used by chiefs and local healers. What had started from a pure religious interest developed into an exercise that embraced all aspects of the Sukuma culture. This is how the 'Sukuma Museum' started, which is according to Hudson (1987: 192-194) one of the 'Museums of influence' in the world. "The primary aim of the centre has been, and still is, first to adapt Christian liturgy to the culture and traditions of Tanzanians; second, to help to develop people's own natural resources for human development" (Lupande, 1995: 15).

The Presidential Commission on Devil Worship was headed by His Grace Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri on October 20, 1994, at the request of the then President of Kenya. The

commission conducted a detailed investigation on idolatry of the devil. The president instructed that the information be kept secret from the public since it was so puzzling and terrible (Wachege, 2000). According to the research, occultism and devil worship permeate both secular and religious domains of existence, with some spiritual healers, clergymen, evangelists, priests, sister nuns, students, school children, high government officials, and ordinary folks (Citizens) being involved. Extremely devout Christians are gravitating toward occultism, double as magicians and wonder workers.

This could be undertaken for popularity, wealth, or as a means of alleviating poverty. Christian crusades, that are currently commonplace in Kenya, are said to have resulted in restoration and salvation, as seen by the numerous instances of persons springing from wheelchairs, abandoning crutches, and having their blind eyes and deaf ears opened in public. Such events have sparked a great deal of controversy. When medical verifications were sought to back up the healing, the results were more scandalous than they had been confirming of the Holy Spirit's work. There have been instances where healthy individuals in wheelchairs or crutches have been inserted into gatherings with the explicit directive to move forward and leave their wheelchairs or crutches at the key moment of "healing" (Kigame, 2000).

Since the fifteenth century, when Christianity was initially introduced in Nigeria, it has continued to make enormous achievements in conversion and expansion. Gwamma (2014) has broken down this growth into five phases, including the introduction of Latin Christianity in the 15th and 16th centuries, denominationalism and missionary activity in the 19th century beginning in 1842, the development of independent churches, the emergence of indigenous African churches, and the emergence of Charismatic and Evangelical Churches. Numerous Christians in Nigeria have accepted unbiblical cultural practices in the guise of enculturation. Kanu (2019) posit that, several clergy men and women and laity are concerned that what is harmlessly referred to as enculturation could develop out to be another form of what fetish priests, shamans, and soothsayers perform in African Traditional Religion. Christians consult witchdoctors with great ease. They frequently even wear charms and participate in pagan ceremonies.

St. Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia diocese is located in the City of Akwanga in the Ecclesiastical province of Abuja in Nigeria. The Catholic Church draws its members from Akwanga town and other satellite towns within Akwanga Local Government Area Council. Due to diversity in the background of the Christian adherents, cases of syncretism have been reported among the church with members consulting native healers and seers while still professing Christianity. The church has however tried to counter such practices with preaching the revealed word of God, teaching of the Catechism and evangelizing the members through compassion. There are however, scanty documented studies on syncretism and evangelization in St. Patrick parish Akwanga. This is what informs this study to be carried out.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The will of God (Yahweh) is to have His people totally devoted and dedicated to Him. In the book of Deuteronomy 6:5, the Bible records "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might". The Bible is also reminding us that, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). This is a war that is affecting most of the church members and making them to have dual allegiance to Christ and also to the evil one. True Christians are full time adherents of the ways of Jesus Christ. From the time Jesus Christ founded Christianity, ritual syncretism, an emotive issue, has seeped into the faith. When it came to key concepts like the Mosaic Law, the day of worship, compassion, devotion, and forgiveness as well as mingling with sinners, dissidents, the ill and the impoverished, the teaching of Jesus Christ differed from traditional Hebrew views. The disadvantaged, such as the ill, poor, tax collectors, ex-offenders, and prostitutes, were devoted primarily to Christ's bold teachings and they embraced him with amazing devotion. In the study area, prevalence of social problems has pressed people to turn in to diverse ways

of finding solution to their problems. These problems include poverty, health challenges, family and relationship problems, tragedies and accidents, unemployment, among others. The vulnerability of church members has resulted to others take advantage of the faithful with promise that their problems would be solved. The present church has however wandered away from the teaching of Jesus Christ which included shunning idolatry and consulting mediums for answers to their problems. Numerous Christians profess Christianity but their attitude seem to betray this profession of their Christian faith. The way Christ is presented and nurtured to Christianity in the study area needs to be examined. Many Catholic Christians have ended up joining other religious groups or even stopped attending the church. If something is not done in relation to this, there is a likelihood of stagnated or retardation of church growth in Lafia diocese.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine factors responsible for mal-evangelization in St Patrick Parish Lafia Diocese, Nigeria

### 1.4 Literature review

#### *Theoretical review*

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used faith development theory as authored by James Fowler to evaluate the stages of faith of those Christians who are engaged in syncretism. The theory offers explanations as to why people engage in to mixtures of faiths, and in this case, Christianity and African Religion. Fowler described faith “as an evolving sense of spirit and relatedness to others that provides meaning and coherence and allows participation in “an ultimate environment” (James, 2010, p. 231). Thus, faith development is key in human life because it “gives coherence and direction to life, links people to each other and to a larger frame of reference, enables them to deal with the limit conditions inherent to human life” (James, 2010, p. 231). Faith describes the underlying meaning making process used by all people regardless of their beliefs (Coyle, 2011). In a nutshell, one’s faith determines one’s beliefs, practices and images that one expresses. Therefore, faith is very paramount in determining the way one acts or behaves. More so, Fowler talked about the stages of faith which determines a lot of things about an individual. Fowler’s faith development theory has six stages (and one prestage) which are: *undifferentiated/primal (infancy)*, *intuitive-projective (early childhood/preschool)*, *mythic/literal (school age)*, *synthetic-conventional (adolescence)*, *individual-reflective (young adulthood)*, *conjunctive (mid-adulthood and later)*, and *universalizing* (James, 2010).

#### *Empirical review*

#### **Factors Responsible for Mal-evangelization**

According to Stambach and Kwayu (2020), in their article; “God’s Faith-Healing Entrepreneur”, they defined evangelization as, the introduction of Christ to people who do not know him by exhortation, catechesis, immersion, and the presentation of the sacraments. They argued that, a life of faith and generosity with a close connection with God at its core produces effective evangelism. Because, it spills from leading happy, joyful lives and letting the faith radiate through our compassion and love for those who surround us. For them, each effort and action related to evangelization should be built upon this ground. In this way, evangelization should be viewed as a calling inherent to the Church whereby she fulfills her innermost essence.

They continue saying that, evangelization is the responsibility Christ gave to his disciples to preach the gospel to everyone in order to bring about transformation (Mk 4:23, 9:3). Bringing the message of hope of the gospel to every person who is yearning for the gospel of life-giving faith in Jesus Christ is the fundamental vocation of the Church. Numerous Christians, according to Stambach and Kwayu, are not entirely devoted to the Church since they feel that Christianity is an issue of the person's heart and that the concept of God has indeed been forced

onto them. To the new converts, Christ should meet their immediate needs and if He does not, then, the option might be a sure bet. That's why during evangelization and catechism, Christians should be introduced to the true principles of prayer and waiting to hear from God. He might delay in answering but this does not mean He is denying to answer.

Williams (2017) undertook a study on the Prosperity gospel's effect in Missions: An African perspective in South Africa. He used desk top review method on relevant literature on the subject matter. He asserts that, though not a method of missions per se, it certainly influences many of the practices of missions. Its effect has been felt far and wide, with many people in impoverished nations being drawn to its message of health and wealth, with churches being established around the world that further proliferate and spread the prosperity message. Though generally considered an issue separate from mainline churches, its message has been adopted within traditionally evangelical, protestant and reformed churches, with some of them even sending out or supporting missionaries who hold to prosperity teaching. The problem though is that the prosperity gospel has had very little, if any, positive effect in Africa, with more and more people being deceived and poverty increasing. From his research, it can be realized that, currently, a new wave of mal-evangelization has dawned in Africa where the main objective is to milk dry the new converts. When they discover this, there are higher chances of backsliding to their former practices. This research was based in Nigeria and in the Catholic diocese of Lafia. The author of the above work looked more in to evangelical and protestant churches in South Africa. This research looked more in to sediments of prosperity gospel in the Catholic Church.

For Young (2021), clinging onto prosperity gospel hinders Christian adherents from accepting and living the word of God as enshrined in the Bible. Prosperity gospel gives quick fixes to problems Christians faced without allowing them to grow and be nurtured in their faith. He defines "prosperity gospel" as a body of doctrine that frequently emphasizes the fundamental ideas of good health, money, and fortune that Christians with sufficient faith are entitled to as a result of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Prosperity teaching crosses denominational lines to varied degrees. Faith and giving are viewed as crucial resources that mobilize spiritual force and attract a variety of divine rewards into believers' lives.

Achievement according to prosperity preachers includes all facets of life, but the focus is primarily on money and good health. In those communities, it is generally believed and preached, that Christians should not only anticipate physical restoration through their faith, however most significantly fill their lives with material wealth. As a result, countless of Christians believe that they have a right to expect or even demand from God certain things like riches, health, and auspiciousness. The Prosperity Movement's advocates read and apply selected Bible verses like Deuteronomy 28, Isaiah 53, 60, and 61, John 10:10, as well as other scriptures, and then turn to their own physical bodies and purses for confirmation of the God's power a working in their circumstances.

The prosperity preachers' focus is that believers must be prosperous and successful, as well as healthy, barring medical issues. Such a scenario prevents Christians from getting to know and hold on to the truth of the word of God. The study is relevant regarding the misrepresentation of the gospel by prosperity preachers. Jesus frequently stresses the importance of weighing the cost of following him in his teachings on being a disciple. He clearly indicates that it could be expensive to follow him. One of the crucial passages for comprehending Jesus' teaching on what it means to follow him is Luke 14:25-33.

Earley (2019), carried out a study to identify how Ineffective pastoral care has hindered the church from reaching out to the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The study used non-probability snowball sampling and a semi-structured interview in a qualitative method of research. The study pointed out that, the migration of God's people away from the Bible as the source of truth is perhaps the most tragic development that has coincided with the growth of leadership studies in the twenty-first century. As a result, it is now challenging for God's people to resist the dominant, worldly ideas about leadership. This finally resulted in the people of God adopting the fundamental beliefs of secular leadership and using them in the church. In contrast to God's Word,

the corporate world is praised as the definitive source of knowledge regarding leadership. The issue is that the Church is stealing ideas from the nonreligious sector, rather than looking up to Jesus the perfect example of a priest and leader. His apparent affection for his followers was one of the cornerstones of his ministry and a defining characteristic. Love for the Shepherd, who gave his life to save them is the foundation of love for the sheep.

Jesus questioned Peter three times prior to actually giving him the order to tend his sheep. The query was pertinent, insightful, and relevant to this study. Christian leaders cannot love their congregation when they do not embrace Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Christian leaders who lack love are unable to reflect Christ, the compassionate Shepherd. This presents a gap on whether, embracing Christ leadership style or lack of it thereof leads to mal-evangelism in St Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria.

Kang-Ewala et al. (2020), in their research article titled: "The Migration of Christian Youth to Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in Ghana: Implications for Mission Work" (2020). Stated that, without love for those we serve, Christianity turns into a burden. They cited several examples in the Gospels that Jesus cherished his followers. He had a soft spot for those who were wounded and without hope. He was devastated by the multitudes when he saw them (Matt. 9:36). Jesus, the perfect shepherd, never stopped caring for his flock.

According to this research, Jesus showed love, not animosity, even while he was contemplating his sacrificial death as the Passover Lamb and the plots that Satan was hatching to have Judas betray him. The only thing that can soften a cold heart, heal a broken heart, and melt a frozen one is love. Thus without love, it is practically impossible to evangelize and share with the world the love of Jesus Christ. All people, even sinners, must experience this love. Jesus was exceptional in that he had compassion for sinners. Jesus cherished time spent with the lost. The gospels show that Jesus preferred spending time with seekers over religious authorities. He attended their gatherings and was referred to as their "friend of sinners" (Luke 7:34). Leadership in the church should be characterized by unwavering love that would not let go until a sinner is saved. The article notes, that the most under-utilized strategy for building a church is to love as Jesus did. Church leaders should follow Jesus' example of unconditional love in order to draw more people to the church. This presents a gap on whether the love demonstrated to Catholic adherents in St Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria aids in promoting the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ or not.

Osborne, (2018) carried his research on "The Strategy of the Lead Pastor". He affirmed that, persuasion is something that leadership has on others. He thinks that, great leaders are helpers who have the power to influence others. Additionally, he contends that, a leader's influence is the pervasive effect that a person has on those that God uses to convert unbelievers into Disciples of Christ. Any transformation process makes leadership more obvious because resistance will surface during these periods and it will be easier for a leader to persuade others in the organization.

A successful pastor-leader, in Osborne's opinion, "gets to know how to pursue God's leadership and instructs his or her flock how to be successful followers too. The person who comprehends leadership in regards to influence is the one who motivates others to emulate. A key component of leadership is the capacity for influencing people. Understanding leadership as influence is a key concept pastoral leaders need to grasp and start incorporating into their work as church planters. Rising churches' leaders understand that a leader could only inspire others to the degree to which they are influenced by them. The church may continue to ascend to greater demographic and spiritual heights under the leadership of those with authority. This presents a gap on whether pastoral authority exerted by the pastoral agents of St Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria promotes numerical growth of the church through evangelization.

Gakuna, et al. (2019), carried a research on "Assessing the challenges facing the laity in their participation in evangelization in Njoro, Parish of Nakuru County, Kenya". This study aimed at assessing the challenges facing the laity in their participation in evangelization. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The

target population included the Catholic faithful and the priests. 181 people participated in the research and purposive sampling method was used. The study findings show that, the laity needs strengthening and that collaborative ministry is necessary for goal of evangelization to be realized. The results also showed that, some of the Christians are passive mainly due to lack of training and reluctance of the laity and the clergy to involve them in evangelization process.

According to the research, Christian communities place too much focus on the clergy and ordained ministers while ignoring the contributions and the role of the laity in evangelism. Consequently, such communities generally become inert, inactive, and relatively subservient in respect to the temporal aspects of social, pastoral, and economic activities of life, both within and without their own borders. Despite the laity's significant representation in the Church's hierarchical formations, including the parish, diocese, and pastoral councils, as well as synod, the research asserts that the highest-ranking member of the Church leadership is the final decision-maker. This research examined how mal-evangelization leads to syncretism in the diocese of Lafia in Nigeria where different cultural practices are thought to influence the laity and evangelization contrary to what is happening in the Kenyan context.

In line with the foregoing, these leadership decisions have an impact on mal-evangelization, hence, syncretism in terms of provision of guidance that is to say, proper leadership discourages these practices (mal-evangelization and syncretism -MES). Moreover, some scholars like Ayiemba *et al.*, (2019), have argued that on matters of evangelization, the laity can encourage bible discussion in their parishes by proclaiming the gospel with each other and by visiting the houses of their fellow church members or calling, them also visiting those who are sick and hospitalized.

Godfrey (2018) investigated on the initiatives of the laity in Enugu, Nigeria. He noted that the laity engage in a variety of apostolic activities such as caring for the ill, assisting the needy, feeding the hungry, praying with one another, studying the Bible collectively, reflecting on it, and discussing it. They also manage the parish's various operations, such as flower arrangements, cleaning, and maintenance of the Church, as well as help finance for the parish through initiatives designed to assist priests monetarily. This presents a gap on whether lack of involvement of laity in St Patrick Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria hinders evangelization in the area.

A study was carried out by Mwiti, et, al (2018) to establish the Christian strategies that confront syncretic practices in the church a case of selected mainline Methodist and Pentecostal churches in Kenya. The objectives of the study were; to identify the forms of syncretism practiced by Christian churches in Kenya, to find out the reasons why Christians still practice syncretism in Kenya and to evaluate Christian strategies that confront syncretic practices in the churches in Kenya. The target population for this study was all the pastors and members in Pentecostal and Methodist churches in Abogeta division. The study established that; the majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the beliefs and practices of the church, an indication that some of the church members still visit diviners. Believe in astrology and fortune telling, modified versions of the gospel by some Church members involvement of church members in traditional religious practices and many other anti-Christian practices are prevalent

Furthermore, The study established that; the preachers did teach against syncretism using familiar accounts from the Bible, the church leaders did teach the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and the church leaders should teach and apply salvation by grace through faith, to confront syncretic practices. The study conclude that spiritual dissatisfaction, preachers not meeting the spiritual needs of the members of the congregation, the Christians did not feel protected by the gospel and the insecurity that led to Christians resulting to witchdoctors. The study recommended that; the preachers should adhere to the actual content of the bible, and lead the Christians to the way of true Christianity, through spiritual nurturing and growth by the preachers. This is very relevant to the present study as regard the factors responsible for syncretic practices, but differs as regard the location and target population.

Dyikuk, (2022) carried out an assessment study of religious syncretism in Jos, Nigeria, Africa. According to the research, there are many factors responsible for mal evangelization which includes the desire for fame, riches and position, which lead people to involve themselves in devil worship, occultism, use of charms and also patronize African Traditional Priests for protection against malevolent powers. The study examined the reasons behind mal-evangelization and the demand in determining the role of syncretism in African Churches. The study was qualitative in nature based on both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The current study adopted mixed methods. Unlike the study, the present study intends to focus only on the roman catholic Christians of St Patrick parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria. This helped to fill in gaps in literature.

Ike (2022) found out that a number of factors are responsible for Mal-evangelization. Some of these factors are but not limited to geographical, economic and linguistic. He stated that cosmopolitan cities or business centers could breed syncretism. He cited a vivid example of the city of Alexandria, which favoured cultural contacts, language dissemination and the interchange of gods. Furthermore, he found out that another factor responsible for Mal-evangelization was the policy of religious tolerance as an attempt to plug all the gaps of human needs in a single religion. Furthermore, they asserted that another reason for syncretism is the lack of innovations in Christianity to provide for some spiritual needs that the traditional rituals perform. He argued that the African Independent Church Movement is fast growing because it provides traditional needs for spontaneous prayer, exorcism and faith healing, which is lacking in the mainstream churches. This study is relevant to the present study as it showed the factors that lead to mal-evangelization. Therefore, the present study differs as regard the location, and the participants, that are strictly parishioners of St Patrick parish Akwanga, lafia diocese.

### **1.5 Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design was used in this study. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data while semi-structured interview guides were used to gather qualitative data. Quantitative data was gathered from Roman Catholic Christians in St. Patrick's Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese while Qualitative data was gathered from the Key informants (Roman Catholic priests) in St. Patrick's Parish Akwanga, Lafia Diocese. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used to select Roman Catholic Christians while purposive sampling method was used to select Key informants. 391 respondents successfully participated in the study while 7 key informants were interviewed. Quantitative data was coded, entered, edited, and cleaned by the researcher using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS version 23) while content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative information from the interviews.

### **1.6 Findings**

#### ***Response rate***

Data was collected in St Patrick Akwanga, Lafia Diocese, Nigeria. 391 Roman Catholic Christians successfully participated in this study representing 100% response rate. Further, 7 key informants were successfully interviewed representing 70% response rate. The missing 3 Key informant got engaged with work related activities and could not avail themselves for interviews during the time of data collection. Mugenda and Mugenda 2003 assert that the response rate is adequate if it is 50% or more. Therefore, 100% and 70% response rate for this study was deemed very good for commencement of analysis and reporting of study findings.



### ***Becoming a Catholic***

Respondents were asked to state how they became a Catholic and various responses were expressed as shown in figure 1 below;

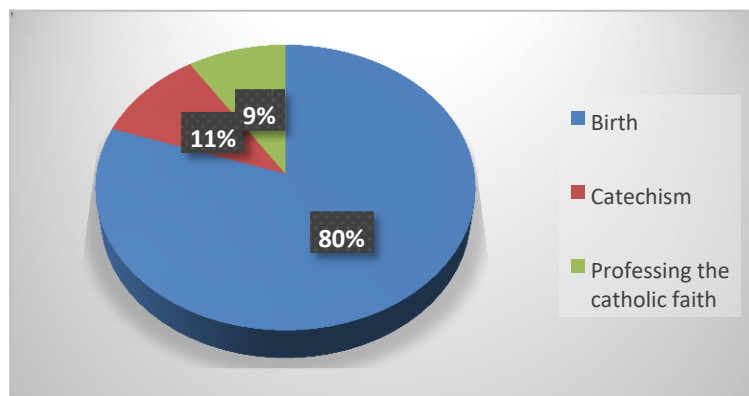


Figure 1: *How I became a Catholic*

As displayed in the figure above, the distribution on how study participants became Catholics was not fair. 80% became Catholics by birth, 11% through Catechism and the rest (9%) by professing the Catholic faith. This implies that majority of respondents had become Catholics by birth hence they are original Catholics who started practicing Catholic beliefs since they were young. This study implies that majority of Catholic believers in St Patrick Parish Akwanga are Catholics by birth with a significantly small population who converts to Catholics. An interview with Key informants revealed that those who were born in families which are deep rooted in Christianity are most likely to continue being Catholics because they have grown up in practicing Christianity. However, it was further indicated that those who were born in traditional families even though they convert to Christianity they find it difficult and time to time they might go back to their old ways.

### ***Evangelization methods commonly applied in church***

For those who agreed to be still evangelizing in their church, the researcher sought to understand the commonly applied evangelization methods. Respondents were as shown in table 1 below;

Table 1: *Commonly applied methods at church*

Methods	Frequency	Percent
Giving alms to the poor	83	21.2
Membership of groups in the church	4	1.0
Small Christian communities	109	27.9
Through spreading the word of God	113	28.9
Through the Radio and Social media	8	2.0
Visitation (door to door)	70	17.9

Source: *Field data, 2023*

As displayed in table 1 above, the most common used evangelization methods among most of the respondents' churches were through spreading the word of God (28.9%); through small Christian communities (27.9%); Giving alms to the poor (21.2%) and door to door visitations (17.9%). The least used methods were membership

of groups in church (1%). Findings from Key informants showed that they commonly use Small Christian Communities so as to take evangelization at the grass root. This helps by preventing people at the villages from being brainwashed into traditional worshippers.

*“Some people are far away from the church. The traditionalists mostly raise their flags so that people can easily trace them. So we form Small Christian Communities at grass root level so as to reach every person. If Small Christian Communities are not formed at grass root level to reach people, they will easily be brainwashed into traditions way of worship” (KI.05)*

### **Sacrament/s received by respondents in the church**

Additionally, the researcher sought to investigate the Sacrament/s which study participants received from the church. Gathered and analyzed data was presented in table 2.

**Table 2: Sacrament/s received in the church**

Sacrament type	Frequency	Percent
Baptism	238	61.7
Confirmation	231	59.0
Eucharist	157	36.8
Reconciliation;	96	24.4
Anointment of the sick	16	4.0
Marriage	62	15.8
Ordination	48	12.1

Source: *Field data, 2023*

Findings displayed in table 2 above reveals that respondents received a number of Sacrament/s majority being baptism (61.7%) and Confirmation (58%).The least received Sacrament was anointment of the sick. The findings implies that baptism and Confirmation are the most received Sacraments with others like anointment of the sick, marriage and ordination being received by minority.

### **Factors responsible for mal-evangelization in St Patrick Parish**

Thematic findings of the study were discussed in this section.

#### **Reasons for Syncretism Practice**

Likert scale was used to establish the level of agreement variables related to mal-evangelization and syncretism in St. Patrick.

**Table 3: Reasons for Syncretism Practice**

**Key - Likert scale. Strongly Agree(5); Agree(4) Neutral(3) Disagree(2) Strongly Disagree (1)**

Reason for Syncretism practice	Likert Scale				
	Total Disagreement			Total agreement	
	SD	D	N	A	SA
Syncretic practice is as a result of barrenness	14.8%	20.5%	22.3%	20.5%	22.0%
Syncretic practice is as a result of attack	8.4%	20.2%	19.7%	30.4%	21.2%
Syncretic practice is as a result of position	5.4%	18.2%	25.3%	28.6%	22.5%
Syncretic practice is as a result of sickness	9.2%	18.7%	26.1%	24.8%	21.2%
Syncretic practice is as a result of wealth	10.5%	15.6%	21.5%	22.8%	29.7%
Syncretic practice is as a result of power	8.2%	13.6%	18.2%	31.5%	28.6%
Syncretic practice is as a result of protection	7.4%	12.5%	14.6%	27.9%	37.6%

Source: *Field data, 2023*

Findings depicted in table 3 above indicates that respondents had total agreement on the following items; syncretic practice is as a result of barrenness (42.5%); syncretic practice is as a result of attack (51.6%); Syncretic practice is as a result of position (51.1%); Syncretic practice is as a result of wealth (52.5%); Syncretic practice is as a result of power (60.1%); and 65.5% indicated Syncretic practice is as a result of protection. This showed that majority of respondents desired using syncretic practices for power and protection. Bareness was the least driving factor for one to practice syncretic. These findings were strongly supported by qualitative data which showed that syncretism was due to fear of unknown; some other time lack of patience with God hence when people fail to get immediate solution to their problem, they go to traditional ways of worshipping; also, syncretism is deeply rooted in the community because most people comes from traditional families and no matter the kind of evangelization done, most people will still perform rituals. In discussion with Key informants, they had the following comments;

*“...there is discussion between St. Augustine of Hippo and a church member, who came to him and said father no matter what you tell us, where we started was a traditional religion. So am telling you that the traditional worship is deeply rooted for some of them do rituals. No matter what you tell them, they will still lean on traditions. They believe the benefit they get in the traditions they cannot get in the church.” (KI.01).*  
*“...traditions make people to access help faster and this affects Christianity in a way that people get tempted into joining traditions where they are seeing help coming faster. For example some people marry in church and fail to get a child, but those who went to traditions got a child, they would say if so and so did it and got a child may be if I do as he did I will get a child too.” (KI.04).*

The findings coincide with Olanrewaju (2019) who carried out a study on exploration of the factors influencing syncretism among the laity of Oyo diocese in Nigeria. The research objectives explored the common religious syncretic practices among the laity. The research findings showed that, poverty, sickness, barrenness, seeking for power, position and quick wealth were chiefly the factors influencing syncretic practices among the laity of Oyo Diocese, Nigeria

In his assessment carried out in Jos, Nigeria, Dyikuk, (2022) found that there are many factors responsible for mal evangelization which includes the desire for fame, riches and position, which lead people to involve themselves in devil worship, occultism, use of charms and also patronize African Traditional Priests for protection against malevolent powers.

#### ***Reasons behind many Catholic Christians still practicing Traditional way of life in spite conversion***

Respondents were asked to state the reasons behind many Catholic Christians still practicing the African Traditional way of life in spite conversion. According to the findings, the reasons why people were still in connection with traditional way of life was because they had strong link with the ancestors; they viewed it as their own heritage therefore they could not disengage with it and its services were cheap and available. Other related reasons raised were that accessing the services was not complicated; other believed it was not a sin to practice it; others believed they are central to their health, wealth and protection; others would not able to let go when things happen to them; Fear and Lack of trust in Christian God; Many are yet to know the true power of God and many don't know their authority as believers and lastly many hardly read and understand the Holy Bible.

The findings corroborates with a study carried out by Mwit, et, al (2018) to establish the Christian strategies that confront syncretic practices in the church a case of selected mainline Methodist and Pentecostal churches in Kenya. The study established that; the majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the beliefs and practices of the church, an indication that some of the church members still visited diviners. Believe in astrology and fortune telling, modified versions of the gospel by some Church members involvement of church members in traditional religious practices and many other anti-Christian practices are prevalent

Ndhlovu (2020), in a study carried out to establish the strategy of responding to syncretism practices in the church argues that, syncretism poses a significant challenge to the Christian witness in Soshanguve Township in South Africa. The study revealed that some of the members visit diviners, some of the preachers preached a modified version of the gospel, and some of the members are involved in African religious practice. Some of the members do not understand the gospel and they resulted into syncretic practices.

### ***Pearson Correlation-Satisfaction and Evangelization***

Pearson Correlation was conducted to ascertain the relation between Christian participation in evangelization and still practicing syncretism. Findings were summarized and presented in table below;

**Table 4: Pearson Correlation-Satisfaction and Evangelization**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Evangelization</b>
<b>Satisfaction</b>	1	-0.022
<b>Evangelization</b>	-0.022	1

**Source: Field data, 2023**

Results displayed in table 4 above indicate that the Pearson Correlation was -0.022 implying very weak negative correlation. Therefore, there were no relationship at all between Christian's participation in evangelization and syncretism at same time. This implied that Christian's participation into syncretism was independent from Christianity and the two variables are not dependent to each other implying that being an active Christian does not mean that an individual will not participate in syncretism.

*"It has been difficult for some people to let the traditions go. They even come into morning mass. Some want to test what is this in church...The real problem is not evangelization but some people are deep rooted so no matter how good your presentation to them is, they will still go...there is a time priests at the parish could not eat together because they suspected one another for their troubles in life" (KI.01)*

### **1.7 Conclusions**

From this study, it was concluded that, majority of the respondents became Catholics by birth. Those who were born in families which are deep rooted in Christianity are most likely to continue being Catholics because they have grown up in Christianity practice where else those who were born in traditional families even though they convert to Christianity they found it difficult and time to time they would go back to their old ways. The most common used evangelization methods among most of the respondents' churches were through spreading the word of God; through small Christian communities; through giving alms to the poor and door to door visitations. Baptism and Confirmation are the most received Sacraments with others like anointment of the sick, marriage and ordination being received by minority. Visiting African Traditional Religion Priests was the highest and common practiced syncretism among respondents. It was concluded that that an increase of Christian's participation in evangelization may not necessarily reduce participation in Fetishism, Charm usage, Consultation with oracles, Consulting with seers, Witchcraft and going to African Traditional Religion Priests.

It was also concluded that, a relationship existed between mal-evangelization and syncretism. Mixed religion affected participation of the laity in the parish; parish priest delegated responsibilities to others and supported them; parish administration worked hand in hand with laity and consulted them before any decision concerning them; and lastly the parish should have seminars for pre-adolescents and adolescents. Language was not considered a great barrier to people's participation in evangelization; Christians were not regretful of the positions and responsibilities they play in church and given another chance they can retake the responsibilities;

the parish administration facilitated participation of the laity in evangelization; the parish administration included the laity in decision making and gender was not a barrier to evangelization.

### 1.8 Recommendations

After conducting data analysis, the following recommendations were drawn:

**Know Your Faith Program:** The parish was recommended to have an ongoing faith formation programs, to discourage Christian converts who may from time to time have the strong desire to go back to their former religion, because knowledge they said, is power. Knowing our faith makes us more capable. Knowledge fulfills our faith. This will help them to understand the faith of the Catholic Church, how activities are conducted in the church and Dos and Don'ts as Christians. It will also help them to strengthen their faith and confidence with the church.

**Form more Small Christian Communities in their residential areas:** The parish was recommended to form Smaller Christian Communities. Many Small Christian Communities will ensure that evangelization goes up to the grassroots. Therefore those who are far away from the church will also feel part and parcel of the church. They will also have confidence when they have challenge to speak out and share with fellow Christians and Clergy for assistance instead of seeking help from the African traditional priests.

**Employ local people:** The parish is recommended to employ Catechists and other evangelization team players who can speak local language. This will make it easier to pass the message to people across all ages (old and young).

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