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Prayer Camping and Convention Programmes as Faith-Based Recreation and Religious Tourism Activities among Redeemed Christian Church of God Faithful in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study critically examined if prayer camping and convention programmes could be regarded as faith-based recreation and religious tourism activities. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. Prayer Camping and Convention as Recreation and Religious Tourism Activities Questionnaire (PCCRRTAQ), structured and developed by the researchers, was used for data collection. The study involved 650 RCCG youth participants, made up of 316 (48.6%) males and 334 (51.4%) females. The pilot study was carried out, using 10 Anglican Church fellowship members in Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos State and reliability of the instrument was established with Cronbach's alpha and test-re-test after an interval of two weeks. The reliability coefficients based on Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was PCCRRTAQ ($r=0.75$). The data collected was entered into Microsoft Excel 2010 Software and later exported to SPSS 18.0 statistical packages for data analysis. The results of linear regression analysis used for testing the hypothesis revealed a significant r -value= 0.0017 ($t=1.014$; $P<0.05$) obtained at <0.05 confidence level, which made the hypothesis to be rejected. This implies that the respondents saw prayer camping/convention programmes as recreation/religious tourism activities and also, a good way to enjoy recreation. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others that the pastoral hierarchy of Redeemed Christian Church of God should strive more to put in place standard motivating recreation and religious tourism facilities at the Redemption Camp so that the camping and convention participants would not only have spiritual benefits but also to have the very best faith-based recreation and tourism experiences.

Keywords: Redeemed Christian Church of God, prayer camping, convention, recreation, religious tourism

INTRODUCTION

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a Pentecostal mega church and denomination founded in Lagos, Nigeria. According to Wariboko (2014), Marshall (2009), The RCCG was founded in 1952 by Rev. Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi (1909-1980) as a result of his ministry involvements in other churches. Rev. Akindayomi chose Enoch Adejare Adeboye, who was a lecturer of mathematics at the University of Lagos, as the next General Overseer of the church in 1973. As at that time, Adeboye was initially one of the interpreters translating Akindayomi's sermons from Yoruba to English. Adeboye was ordained as a pastor of the church in 1975, and in 1981, his appointment as general overseer was formalized by the posthumous reading of Akindayomi's sealed pronouncement (Laurent & Andre, 2005).

Rice (2009) describes the RCCG as "one of the Africa's most vigorous expansionary religious movements, a home-grown Pentecostal denomination that is crusading to become a global faith." The international church is organised in different areas throughout the world (Donald, Kimon & Richard, 2013). The local churches are grouped into regions, with 25 Regions in Nigeria. RCCG has also been structured throughout most parts of the world. Notable special spiritual programmes are the Holy Ghost Service (prayer camping), which holds on the first Friday of every month in Nigeria. The annual Holy Ghost Convention holds in August, while the Holy Ghost Congress holds in December, in Nigeria (Donald, Kimon & Richard, 2013).

The monthly Holy Ghost Service, the annual Holy Ghost Convention, and the special Holy Ghost Congress massively attract people from all over the world, including Nigerians to travel far and near to the Redeemed Christian Church of God's Redemption camp to reverently celebrate God, offer praise

and worship, listen to spiritual sermons from different pastors and the General Overseer, engage in lengthy prayers, offer thanksgiving, and finally share pleasantries. These prayer camping and convention programmes in most cases are characterised by spiritual fasting (self-denial), covering days of weeks or months invoking the power of God. The programmes are always faith-based prayer and praise-worship sessions also impacted by many testimonial miracles.

Prayer signifies a spiritual discipline used by Christians all over the world to seek the face and divine interventions of God on daily basis. It is an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy God, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers. According to Adalbert (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/prayer>), prayer is found in all religions at all times; hence it is a corporate or personal act utilising various methods and techniques to seek the face of God. By definition, it has been defined as *"a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession"* (South & McDowell, 2018). Similarly, Adalbert (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/prayer>) posits that prayer in its sublimity, is an intimate friendship, a frequent conversation held alone with the God. However the act of sojourning from home, state and country to another to participate in the act of praying and worshiping God is referred to as recreation and religion tourism.

Recreation is a voluntary involvement in leisure activities, free from obligation and for the purpose of pleasure. Recreation is also an amusement of diversion, an activity that refreshes and improves one's health and spirit by enjoyment and relaxation. It could also be understood as those activities in which a person participates in during hours other than work periods. From a contemporary point of view, Mull, Bayless and Jamieson (2005) define recreation as a voluntary activity that creates a diversion from routine work. It is a reenergizing, socially acceptable use of leisure time. However, Setonji (2013) sees recreation as an activity for the refreshment of the body and mind through engagement undertaken during one's leisure period. This is optimally imperative because the human body and mind have to be maintained on daily basis if individuals are to function efficiently while they last. It is an activity that diverts or amuses or stimulates the individual; an activity that refreshes and recreates; an activity that renews one's health and spirits by enjoyment and relaxation. Therefore, anyone observing prayer, praising, worshipping and celebrating God either in the public or private gathering is performing recreation activities.

Prayer and praise worship activities are performed during leisure hours. According to Setonji (2013), leisure refers to the time spent for participating in activities of personal interest. It is the leisure time that allows an individual or a group of people the opportunity to choose to participate in an activity that ideally is positive, constructive and spiritual, which otherwise refers to recreation. Similarly, Veal (2004) sees *"recreation as an emotional condition within an individual human being that flows from a feeling of well-being and satisfaction."* It is characterised by feelings of mastery, achievement, exhilaration, acceptance, success, personal worth and pleasure, reinforcing a positive self-image. Recreation is a response to aesthetic experience, achievement of a person's goals, or positive feedback from others. It is independent of activity, leisure or social acceptance. Riding on this, there is no doubt that faith-based recreation activities in the form of prayer and conventional retreats have been traditionally applied to address the mission of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. One of the mission statements of RCCG is that *"In every household, there will be at least one member of Redeemed Christian Church of God in the whole world"* (Stephen, 2016).

Prayer camping and convention retreats as Christian religious faith-based tourism activities cannot be overestimated. Travel occupies an important aspect of the human life. In modern times, Christian touristic travel has served as an avenue to nourish the spiritual longings of the individual person. To nourish the spiritual needs of Christian religious tourists today is an important part of every church's responsibility in her pastoral concerns for tourists (Joseph, 2018). This is basically achieved when the church organisation communicates the faith in various ways to religious travellers, and prominent in such pastoral care of religious tourists is the constant planning and organising of faith-based crusade and prayer programmes for them.

Religious tourism has been in existence since the era of Christianity. According to Emeka (2015), religious tourism is one of the earliest forms of tourism that was practiced with Christian religious people travelling to visit holy places or shrines. This form of tourism could be traced back to the dawn of humanity. Biblically, sacred religious places or sites, according to Emeka (2015), were visited by people who shared the same faith and fellowship while exploring the holy sites. However, the concept of religious tourism may be understood based on consensus of many authors as a mixed combination of both religious pilgrimage and secular tourism. According to Joseph (2018), *"religious tourism is not necessarily limited to the desire to visit shrine and religious sites for the sole purpose of participating in religious acts."* As

much as the travelling destinations are concerned, there may also be historical and cultural dimensions that attract the attention of many secular travellers who want to be part of the original experience connected with those religious camps (Ars, 1995). Similarly, in the study "Religious tourism in Christian sanctuaries: the implications of mixed interests for the communication of the faith," Wisniewski (2018) reports that the number of people and groups who visit a Christian shrine or camp but do not consider themselves pilgrims are in astronomical increase daily; and at the same time, they accept to participate in some forms of worship as a part of their tourist visit of the shrine.

Traditionally, religious tourism has been referred to as a physical sojourn in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy (Dallen & Olsen, 2006). It is where people are drawn to sacred or holy places "*where divine power has suddenly burst forth*" as a result of their spiritual magnetism (Badone & Roseman, 2004). This search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy site motivate people to travel to sacrosanct camps that have been ritually separated from the profane space of everyday life.

The dearth of studies in prayer camping and convention programmes as recreation and religious tourism activities might be peradventure responsible for the minimal literature; hence it is important that the current study is empirically prosecuted. Also, studies in Holy Ghost Service (prayer camping), the annual Holy Ghost Convention and the Holy Ghost Congress as recreation and religious tourism activities have not been carried out in Nigeria. It is against this background that the current study aims to ascertain if the monthly organised Holy Ghost Service, annual Holy Ghost Convention and Holy Ghost Congress programmes could be regarded as recreation and religious tourism activities among the RCCG faithful in Nigeria.

HYPOTHESIS

Prayer camping and convention programmes will not significantly be regarded as faith-based recreation and religious tourism activities among the Redeemed Christian Church of God faithful in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study involved 650 participants, comprising 334 male and 316 female youth and adults. Purposeful sampling technique was used for selection of the volunteered youth and adult participants, drawn from Redemption Camp. Quantitative approach was used for data collection. Prayer Camping and Convention as Recreation and Religious Tourism Activities Questionnaire (PCCRRTA) structured and developed by the researchers was used. This instrument was designed to elicit information from the sampled participants on the prayer camping and convention programmes as recreation and tourism activities. The instrument consisted of 11 questionnaire items, coded 1 – 11. All participants purposefully selected from Redemption Camp completed the questionnaire. The instrument was based on a 5 point Likert's scale statements, which include Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Undecided (UN) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Procedure

The pilot testing of the instrument provided the basis for adjusting the items and also for the development of the final version of the instrument. Face validity was established by the researchers and leisure and recreation sports management experts. Reliability of the instrument was established by test-re-test after an interval of two weeks. The reliability coefficient based on Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was PCCRRTA ($r = 0.75$). The validated questionnaire was administered on the volunteered participants. The researchers, along with 10 trained research assistants, administered the questionnaire. The questionnaire papers were administered on the volunteered RCCG participants, who attended a week long annual Holy Ghost Convention in December, 2021. Before the field work, the researchers applied for ethical approval from the hierarchy of the Redeemed Christian Church of God National Headquarters, 1-9, Redemption Way, Ebute-Meta, Lagos, Nigeria before proceeding with the study. Consent forms were distributed to all the participants 2 days before the meeting to read and make their decision about participating. On the day of data collection, a briefing was given to inform the participants about the purpose of the study before administering the instrument. It took 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The participants were debriefed about the completed questionnaire and finally a vote of thanks was given by one of the researchers. It took 5 days to complete collection of data from the Redeemed Convention participants. The quantitative data collected was entered into Microsoft Excel 2010 Software and later exported to SPSS 18.0 statistical packages for data analysis. Analysis of information

emanating from open-ended questions was completed using frequencies. Linear regression statistical analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis was pitched at 0.05 confidence level.

RESULTS

Table 1A: Frequency and percentage of respondents by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	316	48.6
Female	334	51.4
Total	650	100

In table 1A, it could be observed that out of 650 respondents that participated in the study, 48.6% of them were males while 51.4% of them were females. However, it was discovered that the gender of the respondents influenced results of the current study.

Table 2A: Frequency and percentage of respondents by age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	118	18.2
21-25	157	24.2
26-30	140	21.5
31-35	130	20.0
36-40	105	16.2

In table 2A, it could be observed that 18.2% of the respondents were between 16 and 20 years of age; 24.2% of them were between 21 and 25 years of age; 21.5% of them were between 26 and 30 years of age; 20.0% of them were between 31 and 35 years of age; while 16.2% of them were between 36 and 40 years of age. However, it was discovered that the age of respondents significantly influenced findings of the study.

Table 3a: Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by work types in the church

Work type in the church	Frequency	Percentage
Worker in the church	418	64.3
Member	232	35.7
Total	650	100

In table 3, it shows that a huge 64.3% of the total respondents were workers in the camp, while 35.7% of the respondents were members.

Table 4b: Mean and standard deviation of prayer camping and convention programmes as recreation and religious tourism activities

Components	Mean	Std. dev.	Analysis N
B1. Prayer camping and convention are full of clapping, praising and worshipping God.	3.55	1.475	650
B2. Prayer convention is necessary once a year in Christian life.	3.77	1.299	650
B3. Prayer camping as monthly activity is to develop spiritually.	3.76	1.361	650
B4. Annual prayer convention signifies Christians travelling far and near to seek God interventions in their lives.	3.76	1.368	650
B5. Recreation and religious tourism activities can be conceived as prayer camping and convention activities.	3.50	1.439	650
B6. The act of offering praise-worship to God is a recreation activity.	3.90	1.263	650
B7. Christians travelling to camping and convention venues is the act of religious tourism.	4.07	1.195	650

Components	Mean	Std. dev.	Analysis N
B8. Travelling from one country to another to camping site is Christian religious tourism.	4.06	1.175	650
B9. Prayer camping and convention are seriously recreation and religious tourism activities.	4.30	.918	650
B10. Moving, walking, praising and worshiping God are recreation activities in nature.	4.26	.914	650
B11. Fasting and prayer are recreation activities in nature.	4.00	1.162	650

The descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation in table 4B presents the summary results of data obtained from respondents on prayer camping and convention programmes being perceived as recreation and tourism activities. The findings of this study reveal that all prayer camping and convention programmes, recreation and religious tourism items were rated high by the respondents with a clear picture indicating that prayer camping and convention programmes were significantly regarded as recreation and religious tourism activities.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

To ascertain whether prayer camping and convention programmes are considered as recreation and religious tourism activities or not, the Linear regression statistical analysis was employed to test the hypothesis established in the study, which says that: "Camping and convention programmes will not be significantly seen as faith-based recreation and tourism activities among Redeemed Christian Church of God faithful in Nigeria.

Table 5B: Correlation coefficient analysis on prayer camping/convention and Recreation/religious tourism activities

Variables	Mean	S.D.	r – value	t - value	P-value	Remark
Camping/convention	22.84	1.81	0.0017	1.041	<0.001	Significant
Recreation/tourism	22.74	1.82				

$P=0.05$

In view of the result presented in table 5B above, it could be observed that a significant r-value=0.0017 ($t = 1.014$; $P < 0.05$) was obtained at < 0.05 confidence level; hence the hypothesis stated above is hereby rejected. This implies that camping /convention programmes are regarded as faith-based recreation and religious tourism activities among RCCG faithful in Nigeria because the respondents see prayer camping/convention programmes as recreation/religious tourism and a good way to enjoy recreation.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to ascertain if prayer camping and convention programmes could be regarded as faith-based recreation and religious tourism activities among Redeemed Christian Church of God faithful in Nigeria. The RCCG has been described as one of the Africa's most vigorous expansionary religious movements, a home-grown Pentecostal denomination that is crusading to become a global faith. Indeed, the RCCG has established three special spiritual programmes such as the Holy Ghost Service, the annual Holy Ghost Convention, and the Holy Ghost Congress to spread its evangelisation tentacles throughout the world. The three spiritual programmes are packed faith-based prayers and praise-worships impactful with testimonial miracles.

The descriptive analysis of mean and standard deviation in table 4B presents the summary results of data obtained from respondents on prayer camping and convention programmes being regarded as recreation and religious tourism activities. The mean result provides information about the balance point of the distribution, while standard deviation result adds information about how the values in the data are spread in the study. The result shows that the respondents' agreement towards prayer camping and convention programmes being regarded as recreation and religious tourism activities are significantly high. The respondents gave highest response for item B9 in the questionnaire, depicting that "prayer camping and convention programmes are seriously considered to be recreation and religious tourism activities" with the mean of 4.30. The lowest mean of 3.50 was recorded for B5 which depicts that "recreation and religious tourism activities can be equated to prayer camping and convention activities". The highest standard deviation of 1.475 was given to B1 which indicates that "prayer camping and convention

programmes are full of clapping, dancing, praising and worshipping God". Again, the findings of this study reveal that all prayer camping and convention programmes, recreation and religious tourism items were rated high by the respondents with a clear picture indicating that prayer camping and convention programmes are significantly considered as recreation and religious tourism activities.

In prosecuting the study further, the hypothesis which states that "*Prayer camping and convention programmes will not significantly be regarded as recreation and religious tourism activities was subjected to testing.*" However, the results of linear regression analysis used for testing the hypothesis revealed a significant r -value=0.0017 ($t=1.014$; $P<0.05$) obtained at <0.05 confidence level. This indicates that the stated hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the respondents saw prayer camping/convention programmes as recreation/ religious tourism activities and also, a good way to enjoy recreation.

The findings of this study have demonstrated that these three evangelization programmes have been considered most seriously by the RCCG faithful as recreation and religious tourism activities. One of the findings reveals that the acts of praying, worshipping and giving praises to God during prayer camping and convention programmes are recreation activities. This finding corroborates the report of Veal (2004) who describes recreation as an emotional condition within an individual human being that flows from a feeling of well-being and satisfaction. It is characterised by feelings of mastery, achievement, exhilaration, acceptance, success, personal worth and pleasure, reinforcing a positive self-image. Recreation is a response to aesthetic experience, achievement of a person's goals, or positive feedback from others. It is independent of activity, leisure or social acceptance. Also, in support of the finding, Setonji (2013) posits that recreation is an activity for the refreshment of body and mind through engagement undertaken during one's leisure period. This is optimally imperative because the human body and mind have to be maintained on daily basis if individuals are to function efficiently while they last. It is an activity that diverts or amuses or stimulates the individual; an activity that refreshes and recreates; an activity that renews one's health and spirits by enjoyment and relaxation. Therefore, if anyone is observing, participating in prayer, praising and worshipping God either in the public or private gathering is equally performing recreation activities.

Another finding of the study also, reveals that Holy Ghost Service, the annual Holy Ghost Convention, and Holy Ghost Congress programmes are faith-based religious tourism activities. The finding is in support of Dallen and Olsen, 2006 who report that religious tourism is a physical movement in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy. It is where people are drawn to sacred or holy places "where divine power has suddenly burst forth" as a result of their spiritual magnetism (Badone & Roseman, 2004). This search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy site motivates people to travel to sacrosanct camps that have been ritually separated from the profane space of everyday life. In the service rendered to tourists in the church or prayer camp today, the pastoral attention is called to address the whole generations of people from all over the world who might be ignorant of religious subjects and no longer feel that religion could form a meaningful part of their lives. A possible response to this situation according to Joseph (2018) is to find appropriate ways to attract the religious tourists' attention.

In furtherance support of prayer camping and convention programmes as recreation and religious tourism activities, Joseph (2018) cites L'impiego (1960) by reporting that since the 1950s, the church all over the world has focused with attention and courage on the tourist phenomenon being closely associated with the use of recreation and leisure time. This development of the Church has initiated a re-organisation process that allows bringing about the consequences of an ethical equilibrium and of spirituality in tourism. Joseph (2018), in his *Religious tourism and the new evangelization: theory and best practice in the pastoral promotion of the Church's cultural heritage*, identifies the historical-cultural context of the Church's concern for mass tourism, in a general perspective, as a 'res nova' in the wake of the industrial revolution that has provided labourers the possibility to have time for themselves. This granting of free time became an opportunity for leisure connected with religious tourism activities. This, according to Joseph (2018), has become an important idea for humanity in terms of rest and recreation; and more significantly, it offers a sense of cultural value to humanity. Furthermore, the use of man's leisure and free time helps to bring about a vision of humanity that is in accordance to the Christian tradition.

CONCLUSION

This study synthesised prayer camping and convention programmes as faith-based recreation and religious tourism activities among Redeemed Christian Church of God faithful. The leadership of General Overseer of Redeemed Christian Church of God has introduced powerful Holy Ghost Service, the annual Holy Ghost Convention, and Holy Ghost Congress programmes to massively expand the evange-

lisation mission of the church to touch most parts of the world. As a result, Christian religious people travel from different parts of the world, including Nigeria to regularly participate in these organised faith-based programmes celebrating God, giving praise worships to God, listening to gospel of God and engaging in fervent interceding prayers for one thing or the other to be perfected by God in their life.

To justify prayer camping and convention programmes as recreation and religious tourism activities, the study established that praise worship and prayer activities during prayer meetings are convincingly recreation activities being participated in by Christian religious people because those religious activities are performed during leisure hours. On religious tourism, the study revealed that people who travel from their home grounds or cities or countries to visit holy or sacred places, churches, shrines, chapels, etc. to worship God and pray for God interventions in their lives are religious tourists, and therefore, such Christian religious tourists perform faith-based tourism activities.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the pastoral hierarchy of Redeemed Christian Church of God should strive more to put in place standard motivating recreation and religious tourism facilities at the Redemption Camp so that the camping and convention participants would not only have spiritual benefits but also to have the very best faith-based recreation and tourism experiences.

The study also recommends that reliable security arrangements be available always in- and out of Redemption Camp environs to strengthen a long lasting security confidence among the participated religious tourists.

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