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Naming the Sacred Spaces: A Pragmatic Analysis on Metaphors in Pentecostal Church Naming Strategies

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Abuja, Nigeria, has often been attributed to urbanisation. The names given to these churches are striking and far from arbitrary; rather, they are deliberate and creative coinages. Church founders employ a wide range of metaphors in naming their churches. These metaphors function not merely as labels but as communicative strategies through which identity is constructed, spiritual emphasis is indexed, and potential congregants are attracted. Although existing scholarship on church names has largely focused on classification, patterns, structure, and stylistic features, comparatively little attention has been paid to the metaphors underlying Pentecostal church naming practices. This paper therefore examines the metaphors embedded in Pentecostal church naming conventions. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Levinson's (1983) theory of indexicality in pragmatics, the study analyses forty Pentecostal church names in Abuja, Nigeria. These names were obtained online from a directory of Pentecostal churches in Abuja. The findings reveal several recurring metaphorical themes, including metaphors of God, Christians, warfare, power, the church, nature, and transformation. These metaphors encapsulate doctrinal foundations, mission, and vision, while also serving as indicators of spiritual emphasis, ideology, and religious identity. In addition, they function as branding strategies for places of worship and as tools for persuasion, group cohesion, and socio-religious positioning. The

study demonstrates that Pentecostal naming practices constitute a form of religious pragmatics in which metaphor operates as a powerful resource for encoding theology, shaping communal identity, and transforming physical spaces into linguistically "sacred" symbols.

Keywords: Metaphors, Pragmatics, Church names, Pentecostalism, Religious discourse

Introduction

Language is a tool for communicating beliefs, ideology, intentions, and for describing people and places through names. Naming is one of the most basic actions of language (Majola, 2022). Names are words by which a person, place, or entity is known. In a religious context, names are not just descriptive but also metaphoric. Metaphors are figures of speech, but they do more than compare one thing to something usually used for another. Metaphors also offer insights into how certain expressions are comprehended. According to Shumsky (2016:127), Metaphor is not a matter of "mere language." Much of "our social world is understood in metaphorical terms," and "our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical." Lakoff and Johnson (2003:159-160) assert that metaphor "plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us". In Pentecostal Christianity, where experiential faith and verbal expressiveness are key, metaphor plays an especially vital role.

The vibrant discourse of Pentecostalism is expressed through sermons, songs, testimonies, and names. Names are used in Pentecostal churches to designate a place of worship. These names rely heavily on figurative language to translate abstract theological concepts into relatable, experiential terms. Pentecostal Churches are Christian denominations that emphasise spirituality, performative worship, and linguistic creativity in naming their places of worship. Pentecostal church names are far from being neutral labels as they encapsulate complex networks of belief,

experience, and ideology. According to Uhunmwangho (2000), Christian religious discourse "employs a deliberate, evocative use of terminologies and phraseology which we must be alert to appraise the primary purpose and meaning of the language".

Church leaders concretise titles given to their places of worship through figurative expressions. This makes metaphor an indispensable linguistic resource in the naming practices of Pentecostal churches. Charteris- Black (2004) notes in this regard that, "Since very few people would claim to have direct personal knowledge of a divine being, metaphors are a natural means for exploring the possible forms that such a divinity might take and for expressing religious experiences".

The prevalence of metaphoric expressions in Christian religious discourse (Charteris Black 2004; Okpeh 2017, Okpeh & Ibileye 2022) makes understanding its function in church names necessary for participating in the discourse. Studies on metaphor in Christian religious discourse have focused largely on the rhetorical essence of metaphor, ideological potency of metaphoric expressions and connotative meanings (See Serrano, 2006; Abioye, 2011; Okafor, 2014; Okpeh & Ibileye, 2022). Studies on church names have also been on their patterns (Awukuvi & Israel, 2018), classifications, generic and specific terms found in the names (Zelinsky, 2002), linguistic landscape of church names (Tunliu, Nenotek & Benu, 2022), and denotative and connotative meanings of church names (Omasaja & Njoroye, 2014). These studies have not looked at the metaphoric underpinning of Pentecostal church names.

When the foregoing is viewed against the backdrop of the fact that Nigerian Pentecostal clerics deploy a preponderant number of metaphors in names coined for their place of worship, it becomes imperative to identify and discuss the function of metaphors in this domain. This is even more so as metaphorical expressions in Pentecostal Church names go beyond the desire to accomplish a

goal in rhetoric. They function pragmatically as acts of meaning-making, transforming ordinary linguistic signs into symbolic markers of sacred space. Metaphorical utterances in this domain serve as the linguistic tools through which the Pentecostal clergy unconsciously articulate their identity, spiritual emphasis, ideological, and also a strategy in attracting potential church members.

Therefore, this study examines the use of metaphor in forty Pentecostal church names in Abuja, Nigeria from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on how naming practices function as acts of meaning-making and communicative strategy within religious discourse. The objective of this study is to identify metaphors embedded in Pentecostal church names and the functions they perform in that context.

Pentecostal Churches in Abuja, Nigeria

Pentecostalism derives from the Greek word "Pentecostal" which means the fiftieth day (Joseph, 2024). Ukeh (2003) defines it as that movement within Christianity that emphasises personal relationship with the Holy Spirit as the mainstay of authentic Christianity. It is a form of Christianity that buttresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the importance of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and healing.

In recent times, there has been a significant increase in Pentecostal churches in Abuja, Nigeria. Abuja is the capital city of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The rapid growth of Pentecostal churches is attributed to rapid urbanisation and population increase in Abuja, making it a fertile ground for the expansion of Pentecostalism. McCauley (2013) and Rotimi et al (2016) both highlight the role of Pentecostalism in providing social services and a sense of hope in the face of poverty and economic challenges. Obadare (2016) affirms that the rise of Pentecostalism has triggered a response in the form of a charismatic Islam, indicating a complex interplay

between religious movements in the region. Joseph (2024) reveals how Pentecostalism has evolved from a purely religious phenomenon to a significant economic force driven by entrepreneurial religion.

The aforementioned studies collectively point to the diverse nature of the rise of Pentecostalism in Abuja. As such, Pentecostal churches in Abuja, have a compelling need to announce and advertise the presence of the individual church to set it apart from its multitudinous competitors. Thus the practice of the founders of these Pentecostal churches is to coin catchy and creative names that make them stand out. These names are increasingly metaphorical other than merely descriptors. In agreement with, Okpeh & Ibileye (2022) Pentecostal discourse refers to the text and talk emanating from the Pentecostal community and the discourse of Pentecostalism are sermons, admonitions, gospel programme advertorials, testimonies, and prayers that are rendered in a Pentecostal setting. This study attempts to demonstrate that Pentecostal church names are also part of the discourse of Pentecostalism. They do not only emanate in Pentecostal community but also reveal another aspect of Pentecostalism.

Metaphor in Christian Discourse

Fritz (2004) demonstrates the essence of metaphor in Christian religions discourse by evaluating how Jesus masterfully communicated truth in a creative way using many objects as analogies to clarify, entertain, and stimulate interest in a variety of occasions. Using Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory, Fritz explains how Jesus taught by moving from familiar objects to what is unfamiliar. Buttrick (2005) analyses the significance of metaphor in pulpit discourse. The study notes that people live their lives in metaphor systems termed as "models made from congruent metaphors". Metaphor systems, according to the study, are not mere rhetorical ornamentation; they unveil the frameworks that

shape our cognition and determine our patterns of behavioural in accordance with power.

Okafor (2014) investigates the use of metaphor as a rhetorical device in selected Roman Catholic Bishops' pastoral letters in Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province of Nigeria. Using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, he found that the metaphors of journey, building, light, food, body parts, health, plant, among others, are predominant in Catholic discourse. Of these metaphors, the plant metaphor has the highest frequency of occurrence (77), followed immediately by the journey metaphor, which along with the others, the study concludes, is rhetorically significant in Catholic discourse.

Using Vodney's metaphor of the church as "people of the bread" and Beale's metaphor of the Church as "The Temple", Serrano (2018) explores various biblical metaphors of the church and the implications those metaphors have for ecclesial life, health, and growth metrics. The findings of his study reveals that Metaphors such as the temple, body and people have deep implications for organizational design, praxis, and growth metrics within the church.

Okpeh & Ibileye (2022) analyse metaphorical expressions within the context of Nigerian Pentecostalism with the goal of unveiling the ideologies enshrined therein. Using van Dijk's (2009) Socio-cognitive Framework to Critical Discourse Analysis and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, they analysed forty- six metaphorical expressions in the sermons of three Nigerian Pentecostal clerics: Daniel Olukoya, David Oyedepo and Chris Oyakhilome. Their findings reveal that four ideologies are associated with Nigerian Pentecostal Christian discourse: materialistic ideology, militarist ideology, retributive ideology, and the ideology of rebirth.

The above studies are significant as contributions to extant literature on metaphor research in Christian discourse. There is however a gap in previous studies. Pentecostal Christian discourse has not be given sufficient scholarly attention. The metaphors as meaning making devices in terms used to name Pentecostal churches have not investigated.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in two linguistic theories: Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Levinson's (1983) theory on indexicality in Pragmatics. These theories are integrated to analyse the data. The first of these theories is the conceptual metaphor theory which states that metaphors are not mere literal utterances. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) argue that the bulk of our everyday utterances are structured and understood primarily by metaphorical terms. According to them, metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a cognitive mechanism through which humans conceptualize and understand abstract domains of experience. In this framework, metaphors map source domains (concrete, familiar experiences) onto target domains (abstract or less familiar concepts). Okpeh & Ibileye (2022) explain that as humans, we conceptualize the world with a set of ordinary metaphoric concepts, known as conceptual metaphors. It is these metaphoric concepts that structure what we think, how we relate to our world and socialize with other people.

Thus, conceptual metaphor theory, is the understanding of one domain of human experience, usually the target domain, in terms of another domain of human experience, known as the source domain, through a process of ontological correspondences known as "mapping". Although conceptual metaphors and their mapping processes reside in man's cognitive consciousness, they manifest as linguistic metaphoric expressions (also known as lexical metaphors) which are pervasive in the language behaviour of people. The theory provides a theoretical basis for the current

study to classify conceptual metaphors with their corresponding linguistic metaphors.

Levinson's (1983) theory on indexicality showcases how within Pragmatics, certain words and expressions derive some part of their referential meaning from indexicality. For example, 'I' indexically refers to the entity that is speaking; 'now' indexically refers to a time frame including the moment at which the word is spoken; and 'here' indexically refers to a locational frame including the place where the word is spoken. Levinson (2006:97) subsumes deixis under indexicals in his distinction of the two. He states that "indexicality is used to label the broader phenomena of contextual dependency and deixis the narrower linguistically relevant aspects of indexicality". His theory of indexicality highlights the role of context in the interpretations of metaphorical terms used in naming Pentecostal churches.

Methodology

The data for this study are names of Pentecostal churches in Abuja obtained online from the directory of churches in Abuja. Through purposive sampling, forty (40) Pentecostal church names are analysed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Levinson's (1983) indexicality theory. Religious language is particularly rich in theological concepts such as faith, grace, salvation, miracles which are inherently abstract, as such metaphor provides the cognitive scaffolding through which believers grasp divine realities (Lakoff and Turner, 1989 and Kövecses, 2010). In Pentecostal discourse, metaphors not only reflect cognition but also serve pragmatic purposes: they persuade, inspire, and evangelize. Below is a list of the selected Pentecostal churches:

1. *Christ Victory Assembly for all Nations,*
2. *Victory Christian Church,*
3. *Victorious Army Ministries*
4. *Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries*
5. *The Commonwealth of Zion Assembly*

6. *Assemblies of God*
7. *The Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival Church*
8. *City of Kings Church*
9. *Sons of Life Family, Abuja*
10. *Dominion Chapel International Churches*
11. *Dunamis International Gospel Centre*
12. *Word of Faith Christian Church*
13. *Faith Miracle Centre.*
14. *Shepherd's House*
15. *The Father's House*
16. *Potter's House Church*
17. *Majestic House Church*
18. *The Rock International church*
19. *Pentecostal Power Revival Ministry*
20. *Household of Love Church*
21. *Grace House Church*
22. *Realm of Glory International Church*
23. *Saints community Church*
24. *World Harvest Ministries Inc*
25. *Harvest House Christian Centre*
26. *Highflyer Heroes Outreach Ministry*
27. *Salvation Ministries*
28. *Gospel Light Redemption Church*
29. *Redeemed Christian Church of God*
30. *New Kingdom Church*
31. *Revival House of Glory International Church*
32. *Encounter Jesus Ministries*
33. *Rhema Chapel International Churches*
34. *House on the Rock*
35. *Rainfall Pentecostal Church Ministry*
36. *Holy Hill International Church, Abuja*
37. *The Fountain of Life Church*
38. *The Lighthouse Church*
39. Seed *of Life Prayer Ministry*
40. *Divine Hand of God Prophetic Ministries*

Discussion and Findings

Pentecostal churches employ a variety of metaphors in naming their places of worship. These metaphors reflect the churches' underlying ideology, identity, mission, and branding, and they serve to advertise or highlight the spiritual emphasis of each congregation. Presented below are the metaphors reflected in the selected Pentecostal church names.

Metaphor of Warfare

Church names such as *Christ Victory Assembly for all Nations, Victory Christian Church, Victorious Army Ministries* and *Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries* instantiate the conceptual metaphor, *spiritual life is warfare*. The lexical choices (*victory, victorious, fire*) evoke images of conflict and triumph. This reflects the Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual warfare against evil forces. These metaphors portray the church as a place of empowerment and victory. And a divine battleground where believers win through faith.

Metaphor of God

There are specific lexical choices in church names that refer to the divine. For example, church names such as *Shepherd's House*, *The Father's House*, *Potter's House Church*, and *The Rock International Church* employ terms that evoke divine attributes. The words *shepherd*, *father*, *potter*, and *rock* encode conceptual metaphors about God. The metaphors instantiated include *God is a shepherd*, *God is a father*, *God is a potter*, and *God is a rock*.

The metaphor *God is a shepherd* implicitly promises members a spiritual environment in which they will be cared for, guided, and protected. It frames the church as a relational and nurturing community. Pragmatically, this metaphor reflects the founder's intention to build solidarity with congregants. It also portrays the church as a place of guidance and emotional support, serving as a reassurance strategy that reduces uncertainty for potential members.

The metaphor *God is a father* draws on the culturally valued concept of the father figure in Nigeria as a provider, authority figure, and protector. This metaphor constructs the church as a familial space, a place of belonging and a source of emotional and spiritual security. It also reflects the founder's intention to strengthen cohesion within the church and to reduce psychological barriers to membership.

The metaphor, God is a potter is an allusion derived from the Bible (Jeremiah 18). It depicts God as a skilled potter who shapes human lives. This metaphor pragmatically depicts the church as a place for transformation, renewal, mor**al and spiritual reformation**. The implied message is that the church serves as a "workshop" where broken lives are moulded and restored. This title projects the church as a therapeutic space, intended in attracting individuals who may be seeking healing or change. It also depicts the mission of the church as based on personal development and spiritual craftsmanship.

The metaphor, God is a rock depicts stability, safety, dependability and spiritual endurance. This frames the church as a reliable foundation in the midst of life's instability. Pragmatically, the metaphor depicts the church's ethos as that of firmness and doctrinal stability. The church name appeals to individuals facing difficulties who need "solid ground."

The metaphors of God in Pentecostal church names depict what a church offers: care, family, transformation, or stability. Each metaphor represents a specific doctrinal emphasis (care, fatherhood, transformation, stability). The analysis reveals that church names function as advertisements in attracting and reassuring potential members in religious competition. Familiar cultural frames such as kinship terms, craftsmanship, and nature imagery make abstract spiritual concepts relatable. The metaphors construct relational identities: shepherd–flock, father–children,

potter–clay, rock–house. These metaphors thus play a crucial role in meaning making, identity formation, and church branding.

Metaphor of People of God

There are lexical choices found in church names that reflect the metaphor of "people of God". This metaphor is often portrayed as a spiritual "body", "city", "assembly", "church" emphasizing collective identity, purpose and divine habitation. This is evident in church names: *The Commonwealth of Zion Assembly, Assemblies of God, The Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival Church, City of Kings Church, Sons of Life Family, Abuja*. These names use terms such as: *Commonwealth, Zion, Assembly, Chosen, Kings, sons, City* and *Church* which signifies belonging to God's special people.

The term *commonwealth* refers to a community constituted as God's holy people, while *Zion* is derived from biblical conceptions of a spiritual nation belonging to God. The terms *assemblies* and *church* are directly translated as *gatherings*, emphasizing the collective body of believers called by God. *Chosen* highlights a group specially selected by God for a divine purpose, thereby forming a distinct community. The term *city* signifies a holy community of believers, while *king* symbolizes the children of God. In this sense, God is understood as a king, and His children are likewise regarded as kings. The term *sons* is a kinship expression used to refer to the children of God.

The term "saints" in the church name, *Saints Community Church Abuja* is predominantly used in the plural in the Bible as a collective designation for all believers in a given locality. The church name emphasizes this corporate, unified identity of all its members as one body in Christ, regardless of their background or status. The metaphors highlighted in the church names focus on the collective nature of the congregation, rather than just the physical

structure. Thus they are strategic as they serve as pointers in helping potential members identify a Pentecostal place of worship.

Metaphor for Power/Dominion/Authority

Pentecostal churches are widely known for their vibrant and dynamic themes, which are often reflected in the terms used to name their places of worship. Words such as *power*, *dominion*, *dunamis*, and *word of faith* frequently appear in church names. These lexical choices highlight recurring metaphorical patterns in Pentecostal church naming, as seen in names such as *Pentecostal Power Revival Ministry*, *Dominion Chapel International Churches*, *Dunamis International Gospel Centre*, *Word of Faith Christian Church*, and *Faith Miracle Centre*.

Across these churches, metaphors associated with *power* and *force* are prominent, emphasizing divine strength, victory, authority, and control. Such metaphors present the church as empowering and solution-oriented. They are highly persuasive in religious branding and function as strategic tools for attracting members by promising empowerment, miracles, and solutions to personal and spiritual challenges.

These metaphors also serve to differentiate churches doctrinally. For instance, the name *Word of Faith Christian Church* signals a doctrinal emphasis on biblical teaching and faith-based theology. Additionally, the lexical choice of *power* in church names highlights what believers expect to experience within these worship spaces—such as miracles, revival, and powerful spiritual encounters. In this sense, these terms function as mini-sermons, succinctly summarising the identity, mission, and spiritual focus of the church.

Metaphor of Dwelling

The word "house" also cuts across many Pentecostal church names. For instance, "house" in the church name, *Grace House*

Church, portrays the place of worship as a refuge where grace dwells. The word "grace" is framed as spatial, accessible and available in abundance. This church name function as a pastoral assurance and invites weary or guilty members.

In the church name, *Shepherd House Assembly*, the metaphor, "house" and "shepherd" implies "house of the shepherd" which evokes a safe fold for the flock. It **p**resents the church as a protective enclosure. It signals strong leadership and guidance of the church (i.e. the shepherd cares for the flock). The church name, *Majestic House Church,* uses a metaphor that combines two biblical concepts: the majesty of God and the church as the household of God. The term *Majestic* emphasizes the supremacy, greatness, and glory of God. The term, *House Church* refers to the early Christian practice of gathering for worship and fellowship in private homes, emphasizing intimacy, community, and the idea that the church is the "household of God" or the family of believers. The metaphor "Household" in the church name*, Household of Love Church,* portrays the church as a family unit bound by affection. The metaphor "household" portrays members as "relatives" joined by love rather than blood. This suggests the spiritual focus of the church is based on acceptance, inclusion, and relational closeness of its members. In the church name, *The Resting Place,* the title **p**resents the church as a refuge from stress or hardship. This name frames the church as a haven where spiritual rest is experienced. The name reveals the underlying intention of the church is in attracting those seeking emotional or physical relief especially in high-pressure urban contexts like Abuja, Nigeria.

The church name, *House on the Rock,* is an allusion to the biblical wise man who builds his house on a rock (Matthew 7:24–25). This portrays the church stands on unshakable biblical truth. The word "realm" in *Realm of Glory International Church* depicts a sphere, dimension or territory. It frames spirituality as spatial as such the

church is positioned as access to a higher spiritual plane. This portrays the place of worship as a place for supernatural manifestations, divine presence, and encounters. Across the names, the metaphors of dwelling frames the church as a family, home, or community implying a reduction in social distance. Each metaphor depicted in the church names also market the church identity and positions it uniquely as loving, powerful, stable, supernatural, or protective.

Metaphor of Evangelism

One of the missions of Pentecostalism is evangelism. This spiritual focus is reflected in Pentecostal church names. There are various metaphors used to capture different facets of the mission of evangelism including the urgency, the goal and the approach. For instance in the church names: *World Harvest Ministries Inc., Harvest House Christian Centre, Highflyer Heroes Outreach Ministry, Salvation Ministries, Gospel Light Redemption Church,* lexical choices such as *harvest, outreach, salvation, gospel light* are metaphorical. The word "Harvest" in *World Harvest Ministries Inc.* and *Harvest House Christian Centre,* is rooted in the biblical concept that the number of people to be gathered into God's Kingdom (the "harvest") is great, but the labourer are few. It portrays evangelism as a process of planting, cultivating, and gathering people, much like a farmer gathers a crop. In the church name, *World Harvest Ministries Inc,* the phrase "world harvest" emphasizes the urgency and scale of the evangelistic task, which is in winning souls for Christ on a global ("World") scale.

The metaphor, "outreach" in *Highflyer Heroes Outreach Ministry,* refers to the act of extending the church's activities beyond its walls to engage with the broader community, with the goal of presenting the gospel. The metaphor "Salvation" in *Salvation Ministries,* portrays the focus of the church on evangelism, which means offering humanity the "good news" of being saved from sin and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. The name highlights

the *result* of the ministry's work: people receiving eternal salvation. The term reflects the essential proclamation of the gospel message and the intention of the church in persuading people to make a decision for Christ. The metaphor "Gospel Light" in *Gospel Light Redemption Church,* represent the gospel as light, truth, hope, and guidance. This portrays the church as a beacon in the community, illuminating the path to God. The metaphor of evangelism as highlighted in the names portray the mission, belief and doctrine of Pentecostal churches.

Metaphor of Nature /Natural elements

There are terms in Church names that reveal a rich tapestry of metaphors of nature. These names resonate with powerful, universally understood images from nature that have deep spiritual significance in Christian faith. For instance, “Mountain” as seen in the church name, *Mountain of fire and miracles Ministries,* signifies a place of spiritual high ground, victory, and a unique vantage point to be "above every power of darkness". It implies a place of retreat for prayer, a position of authority, and a site where God's power is uniquely manifested, much like the biblical Mount of Transfiguration or Mount Sinai. Within Pentecostal Christianity, “fire” conceptualize divine presence in terms of tangible forces. It also connotes "spiritual warfare" against worldliness and spiritual forces of darkness. As such these terms highlights the spiritual emphasis of the ministry as committed to being at a vantage point against spiritual forces of darkness.

The lexical choice, “rock” in *House on the Rock* and *The Rock International Church,* is rooted in the biblical description of God. It is a foundational metaphor in Christian theology, used to represent God's unwavering strength, security, and faithfulness. It signifies an unshakeable, permanent, and solid foundation. The term "rock” directly reference Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:24-25, where the wise person builds their life (or the church builds its community) on a solid foundation that can withstand life's

inevitable storms, floods, and winds. Thus, this term portray the identity of these Pentecostal churches as a place of stability, resilience, and where the emphasis is on building one's faith and life upon the unchanging truth of Jesus Christ.

The term "rainfall" in the church name *Rainfall Pentecostal Church Ministries* is metaphorical. It connotes divine provision, refreshment, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It suggests a church where the emphasis is on God's blessings.

This name "hill" in *Holy Hill International Church, Abuja,* combines the idea of holiness with a natural elevation, similar to the "Mountain" metaphor but with a slightly different emphasis. A "hill," like a mountain, is an elevated place, often associated with proximity to God and a place of worship or encounter. The addition of "Holy" emphasizes the sanctity of the place and the call for believers to live a sanctified life, set apart for God's purposes. It evokes images of Jerusalem as the "holy hill" of Zion, a focal point of God's presence and kingdom.

This term "fountain" in *The Fountain of Life Church* is a dynamic water metaphor that is central to the concept of spiritual vitality. The metaphor of "living water" is often used in the Bible to depict the unending spiritual sustenance, salvation, and eternal life that Jesus Christ offers. A "fountain" suggests an abundant, flowing, and accessible source of this spiritual nourishment. The term as used in the church name implies a church that is a source of spiritual refreshment, a place where believers can access life-giving truths and be spiritually satisfied.

The "Lighthouse" in the church name, *The Lighthouse Church* is a metaphor of an enduring image of guidance, safety, and hope in a dark world. A Lighthouse is a constructed building and its function is entirely tied to the natural world of the sea and light. In the context of its usage in naming the place of worship, it symbolizes

the church as a beacon of truth, guiding people safely through the storms and darkness of life's "sea" to the secure harbor of salvation in Christ. It highlights the church's mission to be a source of direction, warning of dangers, and offering hope and safety to those who are lost. The metaphor of nature/natural elements portrays the spiritual emphasis of Pentecostal churches.

Metaphor of Transformation/Rebirth/Awakening

Pentecostal church names such as *Redeemed Christian Church of God*, *New Kingdom Church*, *Revival House of Glory International Church*, *Encounter Jesus Ministries*, and *Rhema Chapel International Churches* exemplify the metaphor *"salvation is rebirth."* The lexical choice *redeemed* in *Redeemed Christian Church of God* conveys complete rescue from bondage such as sin and worldly influences and restoration to God's favour. It implies a dramatic transition from being lost to being found, and from enslavement to freedom, thereby emphasizing God's redemptive power.

Similarly, the term *revival* in *Revival House of Glory International Church* suggests a space where spiritual life is rekindled and infused with God's radiant presence, or *glory*. It portrays the transformation of dormant faith into renewed passion, highlighting the theme of spiritual renewal and transformation.

"New Kingdom" in church name, *New Kingdom Church* depicts transitioning from an earthly, temporary kingdom to God's eternal, Kingdom. This name signifies a change in allegiance. The term "encounter" in Encounter Jesus Ministries suggests a metaphor for personal revelation and intimacy. This signifies transformation through direct, personal meeting and experience with Jesus, moving from knowing *about* Him to knowing *Him*, changing perspectives and lives through His presence. The term **"**Rhema" in Rhema Chapel International Churches depicts a metaphor for divine word and illumination. "Rhema" means the "spoken word of God", which signifies God's timely, powerful word breaking

through, bringing clarity, direction, and life, transforming confusion into understanding, and weakness into divine strength.

The metaphors of restoration**,** new identity**,** divine encounter**,** and spiritual awakening, symbolizes a profound shift from a former state (sin, darkness) to a renewed, glorious life in Christ, focusing on personal change (Redeemed, Encounter), new spiritual reality (New Kingdom, Rhema), and glorious experience (Revival House, Glory). These metaphors link spiritual change to physical birth, emphasizing regeneration and transformation. These terms are deliberately used in church names as an evangelistic tool in Pentecostalism. It is used in appealing to potential members by promising renewal and liberation from past failures.

Metaphor of Agriculture

The agricultural metaphor is another prominent feature reflected in some church names. For instance, the metaphor of *seed* in the church name *Seed of Life Prayer Ministry* draws on biblical imagery associated with growth, faith, and potential. The term *life* reinforces themes of vitality and spiritual regeneration, while *prayer* highlights a central religious practice. Taken together, the name presents the church as a space of spiritual fruitfulness. It emphasizes prayer as a foundational practice, metaphorically portrayed as a seed that yields divine results.

Metaphor of Body Parts

In some instances, church names incorporate references to parts of the body, as seen in *Divine Hand of God Prophetic Ministries*. The *hand of God* is a biblical symbol of power, guidance, and divine intervention. The inclusion of *prophetic* explicitly aligns the church with spiritual gifts and revelation, while the plural form *ministries* broadens the church's scope by implying multiple spiritual functions. Overall, the name asserts that the church's spiritual emphasis is on supernatural authority and spiritual legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study investigates the use of metaphor in forty selected Pentecostal church names in Abuja, Nigeria. The analysis identifies nine recurring metaphorical themes, including metaphors related to God, Christians, warfare, power, dwelling, nature, evangelism, transformation, agriculture, and body parts. The study concludes that the metaphors characteristic of the selected Pentecostal church names predominantly refer to people (such as God and Christians) and religious concepts, including fire, light, mountains, hills, rocks, miracles, harvest, outreach, seed, hand, prayer, revival, rebirth, and house. These metaphorical expressions draw on familiar and concrete entities to convey theological doctrines, mission statements, visions, ideologies, identities, and spiritual emphases of Pentecostal places of worship. Rather than being mere coinages, these metaphors serve pragmatic functions such as reassuring, inviting, informing, unifying, expressing beliefs, advertising, and branding the churches. Overall, the study demonstrates that Pentecostal church names encapsulate core Pentecostal themes and function as a form of religious pragmatics, in which metaphor operates as a strategic tool for encoding theology, shaping communal identity, and transforming physical worship spaces into linguistically "sacred" symbols.

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