

THE 95 THESES OF MARTIN LUTHER: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR MODERN CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

The ethical motifs entrenched in the 95 theses of Martin Luther has left some lasting implications on modern Christianity; the historic rot in the 16th century Catholic Church which undermined the very heart of Christianity and the core Christian values, paved way for immorality Simony and abuse of office threw the Church into centuries of bleakness and prolonged darkness. Godliness became a means of financial gain as Tetzels sold indulgence in the name of salvation. Today prosperity messengers, miracle-seed merchants and money doublers brazenly display their skills on “sacred” altars. Witchdoctors now disguise as ‘prophets’ and ‘powerful men of God misleading many into heresy and apostasy. Syncretism and obscurantism are common while ritualism have taken public space in media hyping. More than ever before, Christianity is mingled with paganism, superstitious beliefs; compromise, apostasy, pride, arrogance, worldliness and impurity have replaced the humility and simplicity of Christ and his followers. This paper adopts the multidimensional approach, drawing insights from the historical and theological methods. Findings show that the same case scenario which Luther’s 95 theses addressed is prevalent in the Church today. The paper therefore, recommends a reformation that would rid the church of these worrisome vices that have bedeviled Christianity.

Key Words: Simony; Prosperity; Bleakness; Reformation; Syncretism

Introduction

History reckoned the era of the Middle Ages as lasting from the fall of Rome in 410 AD to the discovery of America in 1492 AD, a period of 1100 years and that its first six centuries was a stormy period full of challenges and unrest often described as the Dark Ages otherwise called the era of Medieval Church History. The period is divisible into two major parts namely: the era of the rise of papacy from Gregory 1 – VII and the era of

absolute papacy from Gregory VII to Boniface VIII (1050-1294). Steal and Campbell (1934) summed up what transpired in Roman Empire of this period thus:

During the Dark Ages, the empire crumbled away. But the name Rome continued in its greatness and by the end of the dark ages, it had won a second empire. This time, however, it was a spiritual empire. Rome was now the seat of the Popes, who claimed a Caesar-like supremacy over the whole Church. There was no institution, ecclesiastical or civil, as powerful as the papacy.

The fall of the Roman Empire opened the gateway for tremendous growth of Christianity with entry into the courts and palaces of kings, converting kings, noblemen, barbarians and soldiers including Frankish kings and Charlemagne into the Catholic faith. Unfortunately, this tremendous growth and massive conversion brought no real gain to the Church. According to Schmitt (1987), it was merely another forward step in secularization of the Catholic Church which began centuries earlier under Constantine. Catholicism was now to be further glutted with large numbers of unconverted and heathenish people who would actually bring with them into Catholicism a dark cloud of demonic oppression and demon spirit activities which would yet cause its decline into Dark Ages. These masses of nominal “converts” simply transferred their paganism onto Christian symbols. In the place of their pagan gods, they now venerated images and relics, “the mother of God,” Angels, Martyrs, and Saints. Furthermore, genuine worship of God was grossly abused as elaborated by Schmit (1987) that the Apostolic practice of praying for the saints degenerated into praying to the saints. Pagan fetishism was replaced by the worship of relics: bones of martyrs, their clothes, and the instruments of their martyrdom.... Pagan idolatry found its counterpart in the veneration of images and pictures of Christ, Mary, the apostles and the saints. So great and alarming was this abuse that it eventually became the source of yet another controversy and division between the Greek and the Latin Churches, the Iconoclastic controversy, as images and pictures were kissed, candles were lit before them, and people prostrated themselves before them, worshipping not the divine and abstract reality but the very image itself. To the Christianized pagan mentality, the Lord’s Supper was to be viewed no longer as merely a sacrament, but now as a “sacrifice” Elaborate basilicas, in replacement of pagan temples, flourished.... Robed Catholic priests replaced the orders of robed pagan priest in keeping of these temples; and so it was not difficult for a pagan, whether Roman or Greek or barbarian to make the transfer from paganism to Catholicism. Often nothing changed but the semantics. The practices were virtually the same.

Christianity mingled with paganism, superstitious beliefs, use of relics, compromise, apostasy, human theories and tradition plagued Roman Catholicism as pride, arrogance, pomp and pageantry of the pagan priests, rulers and the nobles replaced the humility and simplicity of Christ and his followers. Worldliness and impurity engulfed the Church and forced some to seek relief and retreat in the seclusion of monasticism which aided the spread of the errors of the Medieval Church. The history of the rise of Roman bishops and their claims to world supremacy was one of bitter struggles and bloodletting, first for supremacy within Christendom over the Greek patriarchs and then over national rulers as the Holy Roman Empire. The papacy reached the zenith of its power during the reign of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). He crowned himself “vicar of Christ” on earth and had other national rulers under his control. This absolute power of the papacy continued until the era of Boniface VIII (1294-1303). He made a blasphemous decree to the effect that every human creature on earth being subject to Rome was absolute necessity for salvation.

The intellectual and spiritual rebirth in Europe produced curious, fearless men who questioned the authoritarian claims of medieval papacy. Thus, the renaissance era ran parallel to the growing demand for the reformation of the Church. The most tragic step was the misadventure of Pope Gregory VII in embarking on the Crusades. Geographical exploration sparked commerce, industry and rise of new class of merchants, bankers, craftsmen and strong national governments. The teachings on purgatory; the Church’s claim to power to remit all temporal penalties by the merits of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints by means of indulgence. The decay in the Church made earnest men strive for reforms from the 9th century A.D. Voices of descent were heard in opposition of the hierarchical Church system, the corruption, arrogance and dominance of the clergy, the spurious extra-biblical Catholicism and demanded a return to the New Testament purity and simplicity. These movements were termed heresies and were brutally crushed. This deplorable state of the Church remained the status quo when the reformation of the 15th Century began. The unrestricted sale of indulgence by professional “pardoners” like Tetzel became a great scandal and serious stain on the Church that emboldened and propelled people like Martin Luther to action

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)

Luther was a German priest, theologian, author, professor and Augustinian monk. He is regarded as one of the most influential personalities in Western Christian history. He was ordained priest in 1507 but later questioned and rejected the Catholic teachings especially on indulgences. In the quest for truth and peace for his troubled soul, Luther searched through the scriptures, especially the books of Romans and Galatians as well as the works of Paul and Augustine. He experienced divine peace and was exposed to see even more

clearly that the just shall live by faith and not by works of righteousness as opposed to salvation by indulgence. At Rome, Luther witnessed first-hand iniquitous calamity, debauchery, repulsive indecency and awful profanity rather than sanctity among all classes of the clergy. Against the profane and blasphemous sale of indulgence, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses titled “Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum”, on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany on All Saints Day, October 31, 1517 as the agenda and basis for debate. He proposed to amicably resolve the issues. In 1520, Pope Leo X demanded that Luther renounce his writings and when he refused, was declared a heretic and excommunicated in 1521. In that same year at the Diet of Worms, Emperor Charles V condemned Martin Luther as an outlaw.

Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, guaranteed Martin Luther safety against the sentence of Diet of Worms and took him away to the Castle of Warburg from where he translated the whole of the New Testament and other pamphlets and writings that fueled reformation efforts across Europe during his one-year refuge. Thus like his forebears, John Wycliffe and John Hus, Martin Luther pointed further generation of men back to the Bible (*solo scriptura*) and to their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (Boer, 1983).

The Salient Points in Martin Luther’s 95 Theses

Luther’s 95 theses contain 95 revolutionary opinions that ignited the Protestant Reformation. There, Luther condemned the avalanche of excesses, immorality and corruption that abound in the Catholic Church. The First two parts of the theses contained Luther’s central contention that God intended all believers to seek repentance by faith alone (*solo fidei*) which leads to salvation and not by works or human efforts apart from divine grace. The rest of the theses were direct criticisms of the obnoxious practice of the sale of indulgence and other unscriptural traditions of the Catholic Church. He attacked purgatory, the system and practice of the pope’s power and authority over purgatory and insisted that the doctrine of the merits of the saints had no biblical foundation.

Martin Luther shared Augustine’s two central beliefs which formed the basis of Protestantism. These core beliefs are namely the centrality of the Bible as the chief source of religious and spiritual authority and secondly that human beings may attain salvation only by faith and not by works of righteousness. In contrast, Roman Catholicism of the Middle Ages elevated tradition above tradition and the authority of the Roman Pontiff over any biblical interpretation. They also taught that salvation could be earned through good works. With the invention of printing, the 16th century Europe witnessed translation and circulation of original biblical texts and the writings of philosophers and early Church fathers like Augustine of Hippo (340-430 AD). Thus, though these ideas had been in existence, Martin Luther popularized them through his writings and oratorical speeches.

The practice of granting indulgence for absolution of sin became increasingly corrupt. Though this practice was banned in Germany, it continued and by 1517, Johann Tetzel began its ruthless merchandize in order to raise funds for building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Martin Luther seized the opportunity to oppose these at a moment in history whose time was ripe for religious and cultural reformation in Europe that impacted the entire global firmament.

Implications and Challenges of Luther's 95 Theses on Modern Christianity

The implications of Martin Luther's 95 theses on the modern Church are far-reaching. Even though the theses were published 507 years ago, they are still very relevant today in addressing herculean and intractable problems and challenges confronting the modern Church which appear inextricably tied to its roots and historical development. The focus of Martin Luther's 95 theses is mainly on three broad issues namely:

- i. The act of selling indulgences to obtain forgiveness for the purpose of building St. Peter's Basilica Cathedral in Rome,
- ii. The bible is the ultimate Christian religious authority
- iii. Pope's claim of power to distribute forgiveness, no longer on the merits of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross,
- iv. Corruption in the ranks of the clergy, immorality, abuse of sacramental offices and
- v. Abuse of godliness, damage of indulgence, purgatory and other Church traditions and questionable religious practices and doctrines to ignorant grieving sinners.

The theses significantly impacted western religion to its very foundations, particularly in questioning Catholicism and as a catalyst in provoking the Protestant reformation. Before this time, European populations were mainly Roman Catholic faithful, with the exception of the Jews. Hitherto, the Church held unparalleled socio-political and economic power over kings, nobles and peasants alike. Luther's theses and its spiral reformation signaled the greatest challenge the church ever had in human history resulting to mass desertion of Catholicism, vast loss in revenues resources and political hegemony. There was a mass questioning (much like Luther's theses) of beliefs that the Catholic Church presented the only means by which a person could enter heaven. The consequent result is that several new Christian sects competed for souls leading to the multiplicity of denomination and Para-Church groups, each having its unique ideas and emphasis on salvation, morality and scriptural texts.

Luther's 95 theses still cause ripples and stir inter-denominational controversies across Churches in the modern times and could still be used to address certain anomalies prevalent in the Church. The astronomical and numerical growth and physical

development in the modern Church is akin to developments in the Church of the pre-reformation era. This is presently a global demographic shift from the traditional areas of Europe and America to Africa and other third world countries. Okorochoa (2018:36) contended that the 1998 Lambert Conference, statistics showed Nigeria's 17 million membership greater than "the whole of North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand put together". The multiplicity of Churches and religious groups never translated to any spiritual depth. There are retinues of sermons and prayer contractors every market day, yet the criminal use of wrong measures, sale of adulterated goods and dispense of fraudulent services have remained on the increase.

In Luther's time, the reading and interpretation of scriptures was the exclusive preserve of the clergy. Many modern mushroom Churches are led by the people with little or no sound theological education. Members are mostly traders, market men and women. Improper contextualization bred syncretism and obscurantism. On one extreme are those who completely rejected African way of life – renounced their local names, traditional attire and socio-cultural worldview. Some members on the other hand remained cult and secret society members and retained their traditional belief systems, while paying lip service to Christianity. Many educated elites who schooled abroad imbibed heretical Christian teachings while some were greatly influenced by the New Age Movements. Efforts by the church to make its leaders (Priest and knights) renounce their membership of secret or occult societies are yet to yield the desired result. On this phenomenon, Okorochoa (2018) noted:

Viewed in this way, to claim to be Christian and at the same time belong to a cult or to whatever the church down the ages has deemed as cultic or heretical such as Christian deviations e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormonism; of New Age Movements such as Free Mason, Eckanchar, Grail Message, or secret societies (Igbo Ndu) such as Ogboni, Lodge, Amorc or Old Fellow etc., is gross self-deception. And dangerous double think... to think that the gospel for which Christ died can be trivialized or bastardized by being mixed up with some eclectic movement, however seemingly elitist and sophisticated or however euphemistically described or innocently portrayed, is to lay oneself open to the danger of eternal damnation which begins now. The Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, recognizes this danger as a true mother, spared herself no pain, even risking losing "donors" to the Church, to point out this danger to her members. (Okorochoa 2018)

Uchegbulam (2021) decried the rampant religious syncretism in the context of the replacement or dilution of the essential truth of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements such as astrology, Christian Science, New Age and reincarnation

citing example with Freemason which began in the United Kingdom in 1717 with overbearing influence on church members resonating from Buckingham palace which provided leadership of the Church of England. He contended as follows:

Those who fail to grow spiritually will find themselves vulnerable to all sorts of pagan concepts. Our mission is not to establish churches everywhere but to make disciples of all Nations (Ethnos). When we consider the life and Ministry of the Apostles and the early church, we understand they were focused and never compromised their calling and ministry. Those who were saved clearly were made to separate themselves from their former loyalty and way of living. Those who were involved in occultism repented and openly confessed their deed and surrendered their books of magic and witchcraft to be burnt. However, it does seem that, the case of our church now in some places are not the same with the early church. Most times, rather than making disciples who will in turn build the church, we are gathering members. Therefore, in most cases, we have a situation where people come to church but they are not separated from their idols and syncretism. (Uchegbulam: 2021)

There are several perspectives from which one may examine the problems and challenges of the modern Church within the context of Martin Luther's 95 theses. Ezeora (2009) identifies three key issues as foundational and posited that "the triple challenges of functionality, utilitarianism and relativism are derivatives of African consciousness" and concluded that "if Christianity must make any meaningful progress in its evangelical drive, it must begin with the following concerns ... challenges arising from functionality ... relativism and from the perspective of rebranding".

Dapo Asaju (2021) identified the contemporary challenges confronting the modern Church to contradictions within the Church system. He contended that many people in the Church are ravaged by poverty, unemployment, and ill health, whereas the Church's resources are used to fund affluent and flamboyant lifestyles of Church leaders in virtually every denomination. This paper proposes to examine these and other challenges facing the modern Church in the context of Martin Luther's 95 Theses under three broad scopes namely – the challenge of Shallow Spirituality; abuse of godliness as a means to economic gain (the spirit of Salmony/Gehazi) leading to heresy and apostasy in the modern Church, Postmodernism and Improper Contextualization of the Gospel.

Abuse of Godliness as a Means to Economic Gain

At the bottom of every wrong doctrine is personal greed and gratification. As it was in early Church and Luther's time, so it is in the modern Church. Heresy, tradition and wrong doctrine was one of the greatest dangers that threatened the life of the early Church

as it is today. This same malady practiced wholesale by the Medieval Church pushed her into the dark Ages. Persecution was an external force and its manifestation could easily be detected, confronted or avoided. However, heresy is internal and sometimes very difficult to notice. The writers of Second Peter First and Second John seriously contended against the problems posed by heretics in the Church. Heresy is a theological concept that presents a shift in the accepted doctrine of the Church as biblical standards. The Christians who fall away from the truth of biblical standards are called apostates. It is a denial of the faith by sin or doctrine either willfully or through exposure to heretical teachings or evil association with heretics. In First Timothy, we noted the dangers posed by the circumcision group - Hebraic Christians. Heresy was mainly advanced by the Gentile philosophers, though Christians but fail to abandon their learning instead try to interpret and rationalize Christ in their philosophy. Heresy began with borrowing from these philosophical thoughts, Platonism etc to outright rejection of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith.

Heresy and apostasy constitute the greatest threat the contemporary Nigerian Church and indeed the African Church especially among the youth. The prevalence of these anomalies as well as the frequency and perversity of obscurantism and syncretism cannot be over-emphasized. Onah (2024) ex-rayed the abnormalities and dangers inherent in all of these to the Church and the larger African society and elucidated as follows:

African Christian youths, most of who are still in their boyhood but are addressed as “men of God” are the champions of contemporary prophetic ministries in the African society. They are addressed as men of God because they pose as prophets. In their age, these youths are the most active and most mobile age-group in the society hence the explosive situation of charismatic-prophetic movements in the African society They do not uphold the tenets of the New Testament prophecy which is essentially the act of the Holy Spirit propelling a person to proclaim the word of God. Rather they choose to adopt the Old Testament system which is so similar to the African traditional system of sorcery and divination.

On the ironical twist and deceitful replacement of the role of “witch doctors” disguised as “men of God,” Onah bemoaned the unfortunate development and contended further that:

Ironically, in the contemporary Christendom, the ‘men of God’ has replaced the ‘witch doctors’. The same role that the *dibia* play in the traditional African society such as oozing with mysterious power which enables them to break-through the impregnable layers of evil spirits and ancestors that is impenetrable to other mortals has been taken over by the ‘men of God’. So, when blessings are not flowing people’s way despite their prayers, they make a beeline to the quarter or Church of the witch doctor turned man of God for help. This explains the throngs

to these circles or wherever programmes by such people are organized. The crowds are not looking for someone to explain to them the way to find pardon with God or lead them the way to eternal life. They want the “man of God” to prophecy and pray for them with their extraordinary powers which to them their church priests and pastors do not possess. (Onah 2024)

He painted a very scary picture of bleak future for the modern Church and society, flowing from the above current evil trends, which ought to be of serious concern to every genuine Christian and Church leader:

The future is bleak for the African Church as most of the Christian youths have either turned syncretistic or totally apostatized into idolatry. Those who have fallen into apostasy have become overt witchdoctors (eze-nwoke and eze-nwanyi) and many of those who still pretend to be Christians are “men of God” in the open but witchdoctors in secret while most of the remaining youths wander from one prophetic ministry to another in search of where it is happening.... By making people drop under some trance in witch doctor pattern ... these youths are becoming stinking reach as the crowd keeps trooping to them with their problems ready to doll out huge amounts of money in form of offerings, seeds-sowing and sacrifices. (Onah 2024)

Shallow Spirituality (Astronomical Growth without Depth)

The 16th century Church, as with the modern Church, blossomed and became worldly while the world assumed churchy. One of the greatest challenges facing the modern Church across denominational boundaries is basically the problem of “growth without depth” (Okorochoa, 2018). The fact that there has been an exponential numerical, statistical and structural growth in the Church can hardly be doubted. Within two decades, the Provinces, Dioceses, Archdeaconries, Parishes and Station churches have more than doubled. Unfortunately, shallowness persisted and does not match the growth in numbers, offices or structures. Instead, the “growth” created additional political tension and unhealthy rivalry among Christian faithful regarding the quest and modalities for occupying the new Episcopal leadership positions created. Barry Cooper (2018) in “The Greatest Challenge in Discipleship Today” bemoaned the apparent “growth without depth”, and “hollowness” despite massive religious activities prevalent across Christian denomination thus:

We start focusing on the moves we’re supposed to be performing as disciples. The “quiet times”, the prayer meetings, the Bible study, the evangelism, and so on. These are wonderful and appropriate things for a follower of Jesus to be doing. But without the ‘music’ of the Gospel to drive them, they become hollow – the

mere technique and artifice, the moves of a dancer, but none of the joy, none of the energy, and none of the grace. Much has been written about the threat to Christian disciples from an increasing secular society. That's true, no doubt. But it is possible that there is also – because of the way we disciple others, and ourselves – a significant threat inside the Church too?

The consequent result of the above anomaly is that the Church is essentially filled with many “believing unbelieving” leaders and members or “babies” who received no discipleship training. The majority may not take any stand for Christ nor defend the truth-claims of Christianity and in the face of the slightest threat; discomfort or pressure would readily deny their faith. Similarly, the challenges of poverty, unemployment and insecurity could be attributed to shallow spirituality by Church leadership and membership as well as share absence of political will, moral ethics and naivety by the political class. This paper had earlier noted with dismay the submission of Asaju to the fact that the resources of various Churches are used to fund the greed, affluence and flamboyant lifestyles of Church leaders across denominational boundaries. Many Pentecostal Church leaders flaunt their several private jets, bullet-proof cars and other luxurious vehicles to the chagrin of the poverty-stricken members who pine away in penury, malnutrition, preventable sicknesses and slow death. Similarly, Ezike (2017) reinforced the above unfortunate abnormality when he asserted as follows: Nigeria is rich with both human and mineral resources, yet many Nigerian citizens are poor. How can we tackle the harsh realities of massive poverty in our nation, especially where a handful of Nigerians display wealth and riches unnecessarily? How can we be discussing poverty in a country like ours with potentiality of abundant riches? It is because Nigerian citizens are generally denied rights to their resources by the minority few who are in power.

The worry and concern about shallow spirituality is immense. The menace of wrong doctrine has remained a serious threat from within the Church, Para-Church institutions and Christian Cult Organization. A case in point is prosperity theology which blurs the boundary between the religious, economic and private institutional realm and is being championed by some “Pentecostal” denomination. It has threatened the peace and unity of the modern Church and the falsity of its central message that poverty is sin and that God wants all people to be rich has long become a powerful refrain, an entrenched culture which ironically, the juicier the claim and promise, the more the crowd and the more money accrues to the pastor. (Mpigi, 2017). Hanegraaff (2003) contrasted their teaching with scriptures and contended that the tragic purveyors of error mislead their followers with a message that sounds authentic but is counterfeit in reality being confined to their obsession with the American cultures of success, upward mobility and crass materialism which thrives on the concept that “God’s kids” “can acquire wealth without work and

dollars without discipline. "Unfortunately, prosperity doctrine has pervaded the mainline churches and is premised on the wrong application of the scripture, non-contextualization and intellectual dishonesty which makes receiving the sole motive for giving.

Mpigi contended on the above subject that "ironically, the assumption that economic hardship came as a result of the fall would suggest that only Christians could be rich which is contradicted empirically as there are many rich people that are not Christians. The richest Nigerian is Alhaji Dangote, a Muslim." (Mpigi 2017)

Syncretism and Obscurantism

The Bible as we have it today was not originally written in English or any of the local languages to which it has been translated to presently. The Old Testament scripture was written in Hebrew while the New Testament was written in koine Greek and a few Aramaic. The result of the above has led to language barrier. Another level of serious challenge results from the fact that the Jewish cultural background in which the Bible was written differs greatly from those of the West, the African continent and other nations of the world. Similarly, Ottuh (2023) contended that the time gap and thought-forms through which the Bible was transmitted greatly vary from those of the Biblical world. Thus, whenever the Gospel is not properly contextualized, it would ultimately lead to either syncretism or obscurantism. Similarly in Luther's days, the bible was hidden from the common people and human tradition was exalted above the clear word of God.

There was little or no intentional, decisive discipleship (the Great Commission) to make every believer an apologist. It is only through this strategy commanded by Jesus and his disciples and the early Church Fathers that the modern Church would convincingly win the world for Christ despite the challenges of poverty, unemployment and insecurity and other ever-increasing socio-political, cultural, economic and religious threats from the global community. Barry Cooper (2018) conceded to the above asserted when he contended that "much has been written about the threat to Christian disciples from an increasing secular society, that's true, no doubt. But is possible that there is also – because of the way we disciple others, and ourselves – a significant threat inside the Church too?" Nwaobia decried this ugly trend and contended as follows:

It has become fashionable for churches to preach 'discipleship making'. Everyone claim it as a priority. But the words, however, often exceed the reality. Closely looking at the happenings one may be made to conclude that most 'Christians' may be very confused as to what the goal of discipleship training is all about.... The three objectives of Discipleship are to glorify God, to learn how Christ train the twelve and to learn how to disciple others. Summarily, goal of the discipleship

should be to help the disciple to mature, function, be fruitful and to spiritually reproduce. (Nwaobia 2020)

The Renaissance (Age of Enlightenment) and Postmodernism

The twist of logic here is that while renaissance propelled the medieval Church out of darkness, today postmodernisms appear to be bankrolling the modern Church into outer darkness. During the period of renaissance, new ideas and technologies circulated throughout Europe. The invention of the printing press meant that, for the first time, written materials were mass-produced and read by large audiences and people's minds were opened to new ideas and new ways of life and doing things. The 21st century is an age of rapid change and movement. The latest trend, fashion, tradition or belief today would quickly vanish into oblivion the next day. This is the nature and character of postmodernism. Postmodern thought is essentially responsible for the shift in the way people see truth which many see as being relative. What is true is what works for a person and any belief is morally acceptable as long as one acts with sincere motive. "Although this shift has affected many areas of life in our culture, it has had a potent effect on believers in Christ particularly, apathy towards learning and practicing apologetics among young believers".

The pragmatic theory of truth projects that truth's value is relative to each individual's personal belief. By this, it is possible to see similar outcomes in the lives of people holding radically different beliefs. For instance, when a Muslim and a Christian live sacrificial lifestyle, they naturally conclude that both religions are true since both beliefs produce a good outcome which is akin to their aforesaid belief that "what is true is whatever works for you". The consequence of current de-emphasis of the corresponding theory of truth in favor of the pragmatic theory of truth is far reaching due to the immense pressure and influence exerted by postmodernist thought. The way a person sees truth is directly proportional to the way one view the scripture. Thus, when the pragmatic theory of truth is applied to the scripture, its truthfulness would be determined by its effect on people's lives. Once this is taken as the truth, there would not be any need to defend its truth-claims as they are made plain by its products – changed lives, hence the Bible's usefulness would be limited primarily as devotional tool to transform lives. Similarly, this would negatively affect believers' relationship and evangelistic approach with unbelievers and the fulfillment of the great commission. There would then be no longer any need to use rational argument, logic or other apologetic tools to reach the world. It is submitted, with the greatest respect that the above contentions expose the great error inherent in postmodernist thought.

Current Dilemma

The modern Church appears to have further degenerated from the spiritual state of the Church at the time Martin Luther posted his 95 theses. One of the current problems confronting the modern Church is shallow spirituality despite astronomical growth. This work found, with utmost concern and trepidation that the astronomical growth has very negligible spiritual depth. Thus, in spite of the number of the new churches that have risen in this short period and indeed in spite of the volume of church attendance by the highly religious populace, the only tangible change is that there is a change in the negative direction. The research also found out that despite the much talked about discipleship and efforts made across the Churches, the astronomical numerical growth, physical/structural development of the church did not have commensurate spiritual depth. It only succeeded in producing “heartless” millionaires among church leaders, general overseers and founders who feast on the gullibility of the people.

A little after Augustine provides further evidence on this: —To prevent man from being wicked was it necessary to limit him to the instinct and make him a beast? No God of my soul, I shall never reproach you for having made him in your image so that I can be free and good and happy like you. Subsequently he tells us that the free will is that aspect of the human being that makes each one of us akin to God so that —I can sense him in me in part through the sentiment of freedom. (Idoko and Mpigi 2023)

The work also observed that it was not everyone who came to Jesus became his disciple. The cost of discipleship is a compelling demand often ignored in the rush to win converts and abuse instigated by Pentecostal denominations. Jesus did not leave his followers in doubt that the world that persecuted and killed him would also persecute and seek to kill them since a servant is not greater than his master (John 15: 20-21; Matth.5:11). Jesus disciples and the Early Church Fathers underscored those points and defended the truth-claims of the Gospel with their lives. Paul identified it as synonymous with spiritual warfare against principalities and powers, rulers of this dark world that blind people’s heart against the knowledge of God (2 Cor.10:3-5). Jude admonished believers to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) while Peter demanded all believers to be always to account and give a rational defense to the faith they have in Christ (1 Pet.3:15).

This work also observed as was prevalent in the time of Luther, the wrong or non-application of polemics within the Church. The wrong assumption is that priests and everyone bearing Christian name found within the Church is a certified Christian. “Defending the faith is needed inside the church too” and need to begin there, amongst top church hierarchy - bishops, clergy, evangelists, teachers, knights, lay-readers and the

entire laity for firm deep-rooted spirituality. Above would flush out the infidel in every believer and thus avoid the tragedy of Evangelist Charles Templeton (1915-2001) who at the height of his career in 1945, evangelized daily to a crowd of over 30,000 but by 1957, he resigned from ministry, publicly renounced his faith and declared himself an agnostic. In Mpigi's words; in a world where humanity is battling with individualism and exclusivism, the church should work for the inclusion of all in her development programmes. "No one must be excluded. God's plan is essentially, inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. (Mpigi: 2023).

Conclusion

The destiny of the modern Church and its members are being wasted by warped idea of using godliness as a means of quick, cheap gain. The inordinate pursuit for wealth has made many to become witchdoctors, sorcerers, ritualists, marine agents in the guise of being "men of God" to the eternal destruction of their souls. Indolence is promoted in the name of miracles and prosperity messages. Discipleship patterned after Christ is not the practice. There is an urgent need for massive biblical teaching and social re-orientation of the youth on the principles of church economics, man's responsibility and stewardship of the created universe. It is suggested that the Youth should be trained and retrained to be employable since an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Furthermore, there should be concerted efforts by the Ecumenical Church authorities to look into the activities of charlatans with the aim of regulating their registration and operation with appropriate sanctions where they fall short of their article of registration under Part C, rules and regulations for the registration of non-governmental organizations, with the Corporate Affairs Commission.

The non-application of Jesus' apologetic models in discipleship is gross errors that need urgent re-visitation. Making Disciples is different from making converts. Church leaders including knights were often suspended for taking other members to shrines. Apologetics need to be incorporated into discipleship programs for success in making disciples, so that the exponential growth and massive structural development would also incorporate spiritual depth. Practical pragmatic discipleship strategies aimed at stemming the tide of challenges confronting the modern Church in order to enable it to forge ahead in its evangelistic missionary efforts is advocated. This must address shallow spirituality, "growth without depth" despite multiple religious activities, massive structural development, astronomical increase in the number of parishes, archdeaconries, dioceses, and provinces with attendant increases in the number of bishops and provincial archbishops.

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