

## SCRUTINISING THE STATE, PRAGMATISM AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHURCH

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### Abstract

Religion easily represents all sorts of divine-human relationships aside from being a fundamental factor in life. The phenomenon so become an all-man concern from diverse stands and approaches - psychological, philosophical, historical, social, scientific, spiritual, and up to religiosity, an interest and participation in religious activities. Howbeit, charismata would work with character for more manifestation goodly. Religion as a non-static phenomenon but dynamic in developments, has given many pathways, from world religions down to church denominations and missionary propaganda. Particularly, Christianity wrote her gospel that believers believe Jesus is Christ, and have eternity or salvation after overcoming evil. Unfortunately, even a casual look around reveals a profusion of evil like hypocrisy, hatred, injustice and more of the things, the Church was chosen, called out and fortified to stamp out or never allow to overrule the world. To compound this, no other time in mankind's history has the Church boasted of a membership boom than now. Therefore, it is the thought of many that the Church as it is today has failed in living up to expectations of even God, talk-less of the society suffering the resultant mishap accruing therefrom. However, all hope is not lost, hence a call on the Church to come back to more work, especially as recapitulating a people's rich heritage mostly the ecclesiastical propensity, for harnessing the potentials of the past and present in a 'well-coordinated splendour helps to activate a better posterity'. The investigation adopted qualitative methodology, allowing a phenomenological approach same-time multi-dimensional, and thus recommended examining past ecclesiastical potentials for better posterity.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Functionality, Christianity, Cosmology

### Introduction

The Church is the people of God, she revolves around Him and has a mandate from God, for which she undoubtedly remains one of the most fundamental realities of Christianity<sup>1</sup> if not all faiths. Although the Greek word, *ekklesiā*, which came to mean Church, was originally applied in the Classical period to an official assembly of citizens; amongst others, the New Testament (Matt.16:18) used it for the entire body of believing Christians throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His apostles went forth according to His mandate to preach the Gospel and developed facilities for those who were converted. Gradually, the Church worked out a governmental system based on the office of the bishop

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<sup>1</sup> S.B Ferguson and D. Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), p.140.

<sup>2</sup> "Church," *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite 2010* (Link unavailable), Assessed 7/10/2024.

known as episcopacy.<sup>3</sup> However, the position of God in religion generally keeps most people thinking. In line thereof, Ekeke and Nwosu argue that the question of whether God is or does God exist has been answered in the affirmative long ago as He was already there before all things.<sup>4</sup> Upholding that God is universally recognised as the Supreme or Ultimate Reality in all religions, thereby surpassing the entirety of His creation. Significantly, the underlying belief about God is not in anything a concept, ideal, force, or intentional inclination referred to as God but, in addition, is a self-sustaining, self-aware, individual entity, who is the source of all things and surpasses the entire creation, while also being present inside every aspect of it.<sup>5</sup> This God, the supreme entity is the revered creator and ruler of the entire universe. Most absolute in power, goodness and wisdom, He allocates or assigns duties to His creation as well as supervises all, even the Church. That He must not overlook derelictions is a believable truth that remains incontrovertible. To a very great extent and of a great essence is the relationship existent between God and humans<sup>6</sup> thereby a warrant for scrutiny through the state of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church pragmatism and functionality.

Accordingly, in recent times for instance, denominations, dioceses and synods have been sensitizing human society to the would-be outcome of any failure to live up to the expectation of God, no matter modernity or scientism. This is consistently done at least from Synod Presidential Addresses and Themes, up to even Synod Motions, apart from crusades, and other church evangelism and worship services. These no doubt seem repetitive believing that repetitions are made and meant for emphasis, particularly in line with the resolve to do all within one's powers to point erring people to the faith' right way, thought and deed. Some Christian gatherings today never relent efforts in to make believers more aware and be part of a required battle for the truth. A non-physical battle which all believers must fight in character in order not to continue disappointing God and even humanity. This is in furtherance of the

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<sup>3</sup> "Episcopacy," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Assessed 7/10/2024.

<sup>4</sup> E.C. Ekeke and E.E. Nwosu, "Humans and the De-creation of God in Contemporary Society," *Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(2), 2024, 2, a9843 <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9843>.

<sup>5</sup> -- "A Critique of the Question of the Nature of God from the African Place," *Filosofia Theoretica Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, Volume 12, Number 2, August 2023, 78, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v12i2.5>.

<sup>6</sup> -- Ferguson and Wright, 140.

gospel, especially in our present world of war and terror, where there seems nothing more important to contemplate than the church for the religious minds and others who care. Ferguson and Wright emphasize this pragmatism as, one of the most fundamental realities of faith. The Church is viewed by many as both militant and triumphant, visible and invisible of which Martin Luther first made such an observable distinction as Ferguson and Wright would further recall.<sup>7</sup> To some even, she (the Church) is rather the last hope of the common man other than the courts of law, or any other organization or institution. Little wonder why she, religion/Church remains a factor in most lives and is also acclaimed even by non-Christians and atheists.

This understanding no doubt makes it more tasking, to conclude whether the Church has or not fallen short of God's expectations. More so, as different schools of thought cannot easily agree on issues of this taunting nature. In this research, the periodization of Church history shall aid in viewing the New Testament Church as, "The Church Then," while that of our time (contemporary) shall here be referred to as, "The Church Now." Tilting towards the visible Church with the simple understanding of, 'visible', makes for more verifiable facts, and such methodology helps more, a down-to-earth easy discussion of the phenomenon. Furthermore, avoidance of boring the readership with the definition of keywords since they are known becomes achievable through the under-listed sub-heads for a free-flow discourse:

- The Church Then (New Testament Experience)
- The Church Now
- Comparativeness
- Conclusion and Recommendation

Evoking Christian worldview adds some savour but before that is to clarify that this work also incorporated ideas like: fact, abundance of evil, mankind as a determining agent in most dealings in worship and faith-life, the world and even godly-living, in discussing the Church then and now to facilitate the required impact.

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<sup>7</sup> -- Ferguson and Wright, 140.

### Christian Cosmology (Worldview)

Worldviews appear prominent in religion even as most religions of mankind are local in their character as the people walk each in the name of their god.<sup>8</sup> Beyond anthropologists claim somewhat, Christianity's knowledge and belief in God is through Jesus Christ, the way, truth and life; for which the claim that believers always walk in the name of the Lord and Saviour of the world forever. The biblical understanding of God is based on the idea of the freedom of the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge. Again, it includes the concept that God could suspend the natural order or break the causal chain through miracles before getting down to

Jesus Christ's resurrection declaration that whosoever believes in Him is saved by such faith. The Christian worldview here requires a re-echo as a veritable guide to know any point of variance either in the Church then or now as it is simply the way Christians view reality. It brings to mind that Christianity is the embodiment of Christ's claim that, He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). When one says this is a Christian way, it means this is the way Christ would have a believer act in such situation, it is not a small matter to think and act as Christ instructs. David Noebel says that the Christian worldview is the only worldview that provides a consistent explanation of all the facts of reality.<sup>9</sup> It is believably helpful in explaining the point of variance between the contemporary and the character of the church.

### The Church Then

The universal or Catholic Church in Christian doctrine, is the Christian religious community as a whole or a body or organization of Christian believers in church history. From there came the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant conceptions of the Church. To the mind of this research, the church is not the building or denomination but Christians, the people of God. The Assembly of God's people where Christians are,<sup>10</sup> or as many conceive it, a gathering for saints and a school for sinners. It has some other

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<sup>8</sup> S. Neil, *History of Christian Missions*, (England: Penguin Books, 1982), p.13.

<sup>9</sup> D. A. Noebel, *Defending the Christian Worldview in the Marketplace of Ideas: The Battle for Truth*, (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), p.3.

<sup>10</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), p.562.

interpretations as further outlined by Ferguson and Wright like, The Messianic community,<sup>11</sup> where promises are realized in the coming of Christ as the Lord (Luke 2:11). Who shows his divine authority by His miracles, proclaims the coming of God's saving kingdom with his presence (Luke 4:21; 20; 12:23) and triumphs over sin and Satan by His crucifixion and resurrection. Again, the Church is the 'Body of Christ.' The Church is described as the body of Christ for its union with Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Another is the fellowship of the spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fulfils the promise of the Father and Christ (John 14:18; Acts 1:4), the Holy Spirit possesses the Church in divine Lordship and leads the Church in her mission (Acts 5:32; 13:2). The Church then, according to Harry Boer was a body of believers in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Conceivably, the church was thus from the beginning a sizeable community. It lived its life in fellowship, worship and mutual help thus receiving new members daily (Acts 2:43-4). Its preaching was simple: repentance for sin, death and resurrection and baptism (Acts 2:29-47). This proclamation was accompanied by signs and wonders and the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in many conversions. The church then was further projected positively thus, we leave our review of the development and life of the ancient church with gratitude to God for all that He gave to Christians through those first centuries of the church's life,<sup>13</sup> Boer carefully added. Such a position persuades our consenting to the fact that though there were some disagreements occasionally, the fellowship and other aspects of the Church's ministry were perhaps better than we could find today. Conceivably, this made Boer bolder to continue to tell the world that, Christological controversies began and ended in Nicaea.<sup>14</sup> The Christians were conscious of who they were and that made the Church. Ferguson and Wright further corroborate that, the disciplines in the Church then sought the glory of God (2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1), the purity of the Church (1Cor.5:6, 11:27) and the reclaiming of the offender (1 Tim. 1:20, 1 Cor. 5:5).<sup>15</sup> Convincingly, faithful discipline will deter others from sin (1Tim 5:20) and avoid Christ's judgments (Rev. 2:1425). Comparatively, this is quite unlike the experience

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<sup>11</sup> -- Ferguson and Wright, 14.

<sup>12</sup> H. Boer, *The History of the Early Church*, (Ibadan: Day Star Press, 2003), p.36.

<sup>13</sup> -- Boer, 175.

<sup>14</sup> -- Boer, 175.

<sup>15</sup> -- Ferguson and Wright, 142.

found in today's socio-political life, where cross-carpeting to the ruling political party frees a public fund embezzler from all crime and punishment, not minding the economic detriment of such nefarious act upon the entire country.

### The Church Now

The Church now is the Church as we have it today. It compares with the New Testament beginning of the Church when the persecution by the empire replaced that by the Jews, which lasted up till 313 AD.<sup>16</sup> Emperor Nero was prominent in that until Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion, aided the church and the clergy with public grants and sought peace of the Church to its fullest. Such liberty for the Church believably has remained till the present. Incidentally, *the Daily Fountain* notes that the irony of Christianity is that it fares under persecution.<sup>17</sup> Reflectively, Church History hotly indicates that Christianity was purer, more authentic and powerful in the days of Emperor Nero than those of Emperor Constantine. This observation is domesticated by G. Mpigi when he said that, the freedom of the Church in the times of Constantine made her lose focus and soul.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the church now can be viewed as more worldly not minding the multiplicity of denominations, edifices, televangelism, long hallelujah shouts, and louder or loudest Amen shouts. Deceptive modest appearance/outlooks, doctrinal and denominational superiority claims, silent materialism, pretence conceivable as micro-wave-able Christianity, money and men nearly becoming God, pronounced leadership positions, a parade of giantsized bibles otherwise Man-of-God bibles and some other exuberances. The leaders and the led are all involved in a current church outlook of, "sanctimonious selfishism," or, the culture of encouraging philosophizing selfishness.

Furthermore, present-day congregations are at liberty to determine so-called modern music/spiritual songs, who preaches and what shall be preached as well as how many times any pastor shall appear on the preaching assignment roster. Also, determine which minister shall be

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<sup>16</sup> "Emperor Nero," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Assessed 7/10/2024.

<sup>17</sup> Church of Nigeria, *The Daily Fountain*, (Lagos: CSS Bookshops Limited, 2016), p.226

<sup>18</sup> G. M. Mpigi, "Gaining the Whole World: Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity," *AKSU Diakonia Journal of Religion and Culture*, Volume 1, Number 1, (Uyo: Akwa Ibom State University, 2018), p.75.

well cared for in season and out of season, the number of years for a transfer tenure and cash flow for the needs of the Church. It is becoming easier to make the religious saying, that the voice of the people is the voice of God, a standard of vision, pronouncements and determination of many issues, whether spiritual or otherwise. Science and philosophies now can comfortably replace faith in some instances. The sacred is giving more way for the mundane through humanism and human rights as well as gender-equality claims, not minding regular crusades and outreaches, and ‘on-the-mountains and down-the-mountain’ stays. Fairweather Christianity rightly summarises the Church character today, referencing Hank

Hanegraaff’s cry of, *Christianity’s crisis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, contending in corroboration that,

A modern crisis in Christianity continues to deepen as an ever-increasing number of 21st-century prosperity preachers, ranging from Joyce Meyer to T. D. Jakes, convince devotees that what happens in your life is a result of the word you speak. If you are healthy and prosperous, the word created your reality. Conversely, if your baby dies or your spouse contracts cancer you are the prime suspect.<sup>19</sup>

Little doubt that, Hank’s observation of “a modern crisis in Christianity” accentuates a disparity between the Church then and that of now, requiring an audit for verification or bringing one to a point of comparative analysis.

### **Point of Comparativeness and Analysis**

On the point of comparativeness and analysis, this research aligns with Nwosu’s outline for this aspect of our discussion to revolve around overdosed-selfishness, disobedience, lack of dedication and ignorance.<sup>20</sup> In one word it showcases the issue of human behaviour which of course has remained a hard nut to crack in any human study as well as of humanity even in universities globally. Behaviour includes any response or reaction of any individual including not only bodily reactions and movements, verbal statements and subjective experiences.<sup>21</sup> Beyond that, behaviourism is a school of psychology that studies human activity such as consciousness and more. Especially in it, the organism is seen as “responding” to conditions

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<sup>19</sup> H. Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crises 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (USA: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2009), p. ix.

<sup>20</sup> E.E. Nwosu, “Religion, Culture and Morality from the African Background,” *AKSU Diakonia Journal of Religion and Culture*, Volume 1, Number 1, (Uyo: Akwa Ibom State University, 2018), p. 275.

<sup>21</sup> M.O. Hogan, *Academic’s Dictionary of Sociology*, (New Delhi: Academic Publishers, 2006), p.31.



(stimuli) set by the outer environment and by inner biological processes.<sup>22</sup> All these put together contextually point to a lack of moral acceptability of behaviours in the church culture, Christianity for which more requires an analysis of the church then and the church now in the following subheads.

### **Overdose of Selfishness**

This here begins from selfishness, the quality of being selfish, or a condition of putting one's interests before those of others and not loving your neighbour as yourself. It is a way of life. But thinking of something more dangerous and misleading is, an overdose of selfishness, which is conceived as a virus or disease religiously. The church father Iwuagwu, teaches that in its metaphorical pungency, overdose clearly illustrates comparatively, the devastating effect of excessive intake of wrong ideas and practices.<sup>23</sup> This ferments every other behaviour that makes the Church now to fall short of God's expectations. It is thinkable the more that, it is responsible for unholy and unrighteous living, greed, materialism and every kind of worldliness which rule the Church now against the culture of the New Testament Church. Recallable, the Church then as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, was where unity and sharing, holiness, righteousness, praising God, Holy Communion and increased membership were the character and even culture.<sup>24</sup> In the same Christianity demonstrates in clear terms evidence of some differences at least in behavioural attitude from the leaders to the leaders, as well as the output that endured till the contemporary times. Again, it was a mission with manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in sound judgment and election of even Church officers. Saint Paul in an example action, demonstrated an awesome height of un-selfishness by declaring his willingness to die for the gospel despite accurate and clear Holy Spirit-inspired prophecies. He was no doubt a leader par excellence and a copy-able reference.

When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them for one day. The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy. While

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<sup>22</sup> "Behaviourism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Assessed 7/10/2024.

<sup>23</sup> A.O. Iwuagwu, *The Mission of the Church in Nigeria*, (Owerri: Ager Publishers, 1998), p.96.

<sup>24</sup> The Holy Bible (NRSV), Acts 5 and 6.

we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, what are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem in the name of the Lord Jesus. Since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent except to say, The Lord's will be done."<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, here is a contemporary practical and good illustration of a particular diocesan week's Pre-synod Evangelism scanty attendance. It was observed that many members in the neighbourhood did not attend the crusade because their church bus driver failed to show up.<sup>26</sup> Again, hardly do you get any person now do something without demanding something. What a selfism or overdosed selfishism? This research is not saying there are no remnants who bear the shame of being called *mugu* (a derogatory term or address for being humble, simple, jovial, kind, humane, sincere or selfless) but, a greater number has deviated, against the biblical instruction of bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit as found in Galatians chapter five and verse twenty-two onwards. Even in Medicare, for example, overdose is detrimental instead of curative, talk-less of what is bad in all ramifications of badness.

### Disobedience

It may not be too overstating that some churches today are avidly economical with the truth and obedience, yet obedience they say is the first law in heaven. Obedience forms our premise to pry into disobedience which simply is, refusal or neglect to obey. That being easy to grasp and applicable contextually, the research feels comfortable with the comparative contrasting observation by Iwuagwu that, obedience is the central ingredient of faith and religious practice.<sup>27</sup> True religion therefore calls for sincere faith and sincere faith calls for obedience and loyalty. Yes, for which Christianity is described by many as a faith. In so far as it is, it requires every amount of obedience as those who must worship God must accept that He is, so to worship Him in spirit and truth. The condition here is not on obedience but

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 21:7-14.

<sup>26</sup> Ven. Ebenezer Nwosu, Diocesan Synod Motion Proposed at the First Session of the Forth Synod of Diocese of Abo Ngwa North, at St. Georges' Church Aro Amano, Aro Amano Archdeaconry, 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 (unpublished).

<sup>27</sup> Iwuagwu, 96.

rather lack of it, disobedience.

This research earlier has described disobedience as the refusal to obey. Invariably, therefore, refusal to obey is rebellion in a divine-human relationship. That being acceptable as fact, it attracts calamities as consequences in the followership of Christ. The Church then (NT Church) understood this implication and avoided disobedience and glued to obedience which invariably accounted for her success even in the face of Jewish persecution, Nero's and other persecutions of that time. This ranged from obedience to the word of God and intermittent pronouncement (prophecies) just as Jesus's mother advised the followers to do whatever He told them to do.<sup>28</sup> For which St. Paul remains quotable thus, I am ready not only to be bound but even to die for the name of the Lord Jesus and could also encourage Christians of all eras proudly thus, "I urge you, then, be imitators of me."<sup>29</sup> A further good and enlightening illustration is the nature of persecution the Church faced then. It vividly recalls that Nero was a Roman emperor, celebrated in the history of the world as a tyrant and a debauchee. He figures in ecclesiastical annals chiefly because of the intolerant and persecuting spirit which he manifested towards the followers of Jesus. At will, Emperor Nero, most of the time although Christians were innocent (*subditi reos*) would employ them (Christians) simply as scapegoats to the point that in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport; for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and, when day declined, burned to serve for nocturnal lights.<sup>30</sup> Nero was the emperor before whom Paul was brought on his first imprisonment at Rome, and the apostle is supposed to have suffered martyrdom during this persecution.<sup>31</sup> He is repeatedly alluded to in Scripture referencing Acts 25:11, Philippians 1:12, 13 and 4:22.

In the Church today, we witness claims and counter-claims about why simple directives shall not be obeyed. From the member to the catechizer/pastor, the pastor to other

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<sup>28</sup> -- John 2:5.

<sup>29</sup> -- 1Corinthians 4:16.

<sup>30</sup> "Emperor Nero History," *McClintock and Strong Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite 2010* (Link unavailable), Assessed 7/10/2024.

<sup>31</sup> -- *Easton's Bible Dictionary Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite 2010* (Link unavailable), Assessed 7/10/2024.

higher officers and beyond human levels. The attitude of some so-called Born-again towards God keeps me thinking, about whether humans have become God. Ekeke and Nwosu simply explain this condemnable reckless religious attitude as, the de-creation of God, the process of humans challenging traditional conceptions of divinity, religious authority and spirituality of God.<sup>32</sup> One may not continue to wonder because the more the disobedience the more no manifestation of the power of God in many aspects of the present-day church's worship ministry. This particularly has given way to seeking power where believers should not thread or other power sources Christianity is supposed to convert or combat. In other words, it is an indirect boost to syncretism. It is condemnable as Christians now wallow and gallop in search of miracles, instead of miracles, signs and wonders from the Lord following them. Multiplication of re-branded American wonders, occultism and magic centres gain more patronage, thereby boosting spiritism and false prophets, like, "my spirit tells me sayings", and, the likes of false and mesmerizing commercial prophetic. Such is consistently making some pulpits become barely audible in condemning sin, especially money connectivity iniquity. Such and more are qualified disobedience of the new era.

### **Lack of Dedication**

It is practically observable at least on the conscious level that people are much aware of evil in the world and fight it in many ways. Mbiti is further understood as cautioning that when good people do nothing, evil triumphs in whichever circumstance is usable as a measurement parameter.<sup>33</sup> This observation is a direct call to action so that evil, ill or sin and sinfulness be opposed and defeated. Such commitment can be taken as a measure of dedication, but, otherwise, it is a lack of dedication. Apart from commitment, is, a preference for the legal description of dedication, as a word, specified in the Meridian dictionary as, deliberate and negligent surrender of all rights.<sup>34</sup> This preference is because it fits properly at this point of this

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<sup>32</sup> Ekeke and Nwosu 2024, 3.

<sup>33</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1977), p.204.

<sup>34</sup> *Miriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite 2010* (Link unavailable), Assessed 7/10/2024.

contemporary discussion. Dedication therefore is commitment without reduction.<sup>35</sup> Religiously, dedication means diligence, surrender and devotion to a higher power which now controls such devotees as exemplified in Peter's question to Ananias. Why did you let Satan take control of you and make you lie to the Holy Spirit?<sup>36</sup> Dedication involves total surrender in service and worship as though a living sacrifice. In this same understanding no doubt, St. Paul in Romans chapter twelve challenged his epistle recipients and all Christians to live, serve and worship God, as though a sacrificial item not minding whether they still live or not.<sup>37</sup> Dedication again, was there in the New Testament Church but reduced drastically in the contemporary Church today as its resultant defect buffets the church in many avenues of marring manifestation. One would fear no contradiction instead but can say that those termed idolatrous or occultist groups, that membership may appear more dedicated to their belief, than many nowadays Christians. That apart, dedication is lightly illustrated in this short story testimonial of one's father. One James D. Nwosu of blessed memory would trek more than 13 kilometres every day from Itungwa to Abayi Umuocham in the early 1950s, for elementary or primary school standards five and six studies.<sup>38</sup> That father though a pupil then was not only regular to school but punctual too. Comparing it with the experience of the now, one would be shocked that it is becoming difficult or impossible for many children to trek to school opposite their doorpost unless parents either force them or have other alternatives made. Modernism, availability of cars and other means of movement notwithstanding, dedication has become drastically reduced, as freedom and human liberty are rather abused daily by lack of dedication to duty. It is not too much of a different story when one considers what is obtainable in our universities and among many so-called university undergraduates who force out of parents' pocket, money, for sophisticated cellphones and other electronic gadgets in the pretence of part of requirements for University training, only to end up *face-booking*, *tik-toking*, *whatsapping* and the like.

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<sup>35</sup> A. S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary International Students Edition, (Oxford: University Press, 2015), p.745.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 5:3.

<sup>37</sup> -- Romans 12.

<sup>38</sup> Synod motion.

Christian dedication is further debased by, too many complaints from the same church members about the church systems today, like, waste of time in worship service, ‘everything and time diocese-diocese’, too many offerings, Diocesan Quotas in multiple phases, ‘the ministers, *una-no-de-watch weather*’ queries (ministers don’t you watch or observe the weather) and other forms of expressing disgust, to a great extent can be traced back to lack of dedication to the things of the Lord. The Church now has more of such than in the times of Peter and Paul the apostles, not minding the few members then. Of a fact, dedication is believing and belonging solidly, so lack of dedication means, that not believing and not belonging solidly to the Church is linkable somehow to ignorance.

## Ignorance

Ignorance means the state or fact of being ignorant; lack of knowledge, education, or awareness.<sup>39</sup> One can be aged or old and still belong to the category referable to or classifiable as ignorant. This class or classification has its background as, a lack of dedication or commitment to where one claims belonged for some time at least. This subhead contains the group definable in Igbo language as, *Ndi-kpere-fuu* or *ndi-ukanonu* (un-rooted worship and go people, or mouth-church-people/mouth-Christians). Ignorance contextually here conveys the ideology of a lack of knowledge or proper information as it applies to one's acclaimed faith. Directly put, Christians have little or no knowledge of who and what it is to be a Christian. Even if not completely public to some extent this remains traceable on the conscious level. Such people fall prey to (1) feigning miracles and (2) running from one ministry or denomination to another. They would always say, “*anacho ebe ihe name*” (looking for where something is happening) instead of, seeking truly the way and mind of Christ.

This character becomes rampant by the day, that some people are so used as “man-of-God” tools in, raising-people -from-dead miracles, healing of even some non-existent sicknesses, etc., all pretentiously to deceive the unsuspecting public into believing in a particular man of God (MOG) or one MOG or the other. Obtaining by trick otherwise, stealing in the name of the Lord, a contemporary brand of priest-craft, suits this type of worship or religious life. It is condemned by God from time immemorial. It does not end there for the singular fact that some have been involved without having pre-knowledge of the way and manner things go, in some

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<sup>39</sup> A. S. Hornby, 801.

Ministries and Miracle Centers. Conversely, the minister who simply speaks the gospel truth is more often momentarily overlooked or looked down upon in this scenario, though in the error of the people's ignorance. Such minister requires prayers and encouragement due to human factor to continue holding to undiluted Christianity. This is partly the targeted aim of this research as such has lasted and even over-growing its bounds in the modernization of the now, when many nearly worship money as God thereby examining nothing whether such is or not godly.

The Church today has become more protestant than in the times of the Reformation due to ignorance. Penitents who should become symbols of faith turn to be something else. This is a very strong factor in the point of divergence between the New Testament Church and the Church Now. Ignorance makes some not conceive the Church as a corporate body of Christ to focus on salvation, a feature that sets Christianity apart from, others and places it ahead of any other belief system. Instead, the Church now pays attention more to denominationalism, *churchitics* (Church politics), and human but not true-heaven-based advertisement. Some new generation Churches, mostly individually owned or found (business-center-like much of the time), use the pictures of the General Overseer (GO) with the wife or husband as sign-boards. Again, the general overseer capitalizes on such exhibition of faith nearly void of reason by members of the Church, to treat them inhumanly. In times of wrong, for instance, the church now punishes rather than correcting according to Christian love and practice. Stories are told even of where healing is done by the sick's swallowing of live snakes, many internet sites paddle such rumours with confidence; apart from other false Christian practices that tend to shift Christian gatherings from Church to Cantonments.

One's inability to demarcate between the do's and don'ts of his/her faith, as in same-sex marriage, trans-gender-ism, homosexuality even among so-called ministers, infidelity, domestic violence and alcoholism, somehow is ignorance of a very high grade. Where one does what he/she should not, and claims not to know is also viewable as ignorance unless the person is a liar. Detection of human ignorance is a way forward, but, coming up with ways and means of curbing or changing that situation, is a better way and is wholeheartedly desired by this research.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Frequent fatal flaws and feel-good fallacies are found flowing in today's Church.<sup>40</sup> Humanly speaking, unless God says otherwise, the contemporary-era Church to some large extent seems either failing in her calling or committing some dereliction. Believably, one fears no contradiction to allege that in every denomination is a flaw which the Church manages as though the managing of marriage in the robotic age of now. Recallable at least is, that many who have gone somewhat very high in church ranks seem to be playing God and more; maybe for ignorance, lack of dedication, disobedience or overdosed selfishness.

Consequently, scrutinizing the Church character-state up to pragmatism and functionality, to be able to learn causes and remedies, is immanent for a better 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church character. Such rediscovery would remain as fundamental as it would remain cherished at least by concerned Christian sane minds. A hope-rising is that there is a way back to Church spiritual health and wholeness as of old as humans remain teachable. It was the emperor Napoleon Bonaparte 1, (15 August 1769, Ajaccio, Corsica and died 5 May 1821, St. Helena Island) who opined that, if you want a thing done well, you do it yourself. For this thought probably, this French general, first consul (1799–1804), and emperor of the French (1804–1814/15) was one of the most celebrated personages in the history of the West.<sup>41</sup> Contextually therefore, to remedy the pathetic situation of today's evil like hypocrisy, hatred, injustice and diverse forms of ungodliness in line with the calling and endowment of the Church by God, never to allow wrongs overrule the world; then, such calls for individual and collective efforts of rethink, and decision for change, as well as commitments.

This work so far, tries to join individuals with the church-body. It recalls marks of the true Church: true preaching of the word (John 8:31, 47), the right administration of the sacraments (Matthew 28: 19 – 20), faithful discipline and conscientious exercise of Christianity (Matthew 18:18, 1 Corinthians 5: 1-5; 14: 33 & 40). The research resourcefully recommends the following:

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<sup>40</sup> Hanegraaff, 2.

<sup>41</sup> "Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte 1", Britannica assessed 28/11/2024.



- Believers shall decide to be symbols of faith (dedication) that is, to become a living gospel.
- Decide to be obedient to the demand of the gospel in public and private; otherwise should better do away with pretence.
- Pray and decide against selfishness which is identified as the root of other ungodliness in the world – the society and the way humans live and behave.
- Change the extreme choice of ‘liberty without constraints,’ to liberty with some constraints (Mark 10:30), since humans are not and will not be God in its strict sense.
- Begin today to see Christian life as joy and responsibility. Then believers shall be less bored of anything committed into their faith genuinely – wealth, time, talent and personal life (acts 4:32-end). This is inclusive of right demands for faith needs only, against contemporary priest-craft, where priest flies multiple personal jets at the detrimental expense of poor penitents.
- As quotable of the German philosopher and poet, Fredrick Nietzsche (1844 1900),<sup>42</sup> We deny that God is God, and resort to materialism and greed. Also forgetting that the material, money, is needed only to serve human life and does not and cannot replace life, talk-less of God. Therefore, all are charged to stop denying that God is God, instead, at least penitents should pray for grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed (His will), the courage to change the things which should be changed (dynamic faith) thereby live-out the gospel daily. As well as the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong or good from bad only for the right and good.

Scrutiny believably aids the understanding that the purpose of divine revelation lies in its communication to the Church of the significance of Christ’s teachings and actions. This research calls Christians firstly and then all, to quickly arrive at an understanding of the times, and know and obey what they ought to do. For which William Barclay taught that ethics is the

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<sup>42</sup> “Fredrick Nietzsche”, Britannica assessed 28/11/2024.

bit of religion that tells us how we ought to behave and emphasized it is mostly needed now. Especially, as it happens that the world is facing today a situation which the Christian Church never had to face before. Such is a struggle for the hearts, ideas and minds of the people.<sup>43</sup> There is an urgent need to be bold to say that, no matter the rate of the thriving of evil, the good is better than bad, for which it is worth scrutinizing the state, pragmatism and functionality of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church.

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<sup>43</sup> W. Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society*, (London: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1973), p.13.