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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY INDULGENCE AND TITHING IN THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This chapter deals with a critical analysis of the 16th century indulgence and tithing in the contemporary Nigerian's churches. Indulgence was money paid by a sinner, or intended sinner for the forgiveness of sins, and even on behalf of death one by the beloved living so as to save such person from purgatory, and to cause such one share in the grace of the church. Tithing is one tenth of believers wages whether weekly, monthly and even yearly. It could be money, crop or animal among other items that are given to the churches. The 16th century indulgence was the practice of the Roman Catholic, as a manipulation means of raising money for the building of St Peter Basilica with Pope Leo X and his messengers as the beneficiaries. The research employed historical and phenomenological approaches to examine the 16th century indulgence and the contemporary churches in Nigeria. The chapter used theological perspective of tithing to examine the primary purpose of tithing in the Churches. The findings shown that tithing in some churches in Nigeria has emerged with the same trend of manipulation of their adherents like the 16th century indulgence era thus; the 16th century indulgence and today tithing system in Nigeria churches are avarice in nature. Therefore, the chapter recommends among others, that the contemporary churches in Nigeria should learn from the 16th century indulgence of the Roman Catholic, and stop their avarice and manipulation of their members in name of God.

Keywords: Sixteenth Century, Indulgence, Tithing, Church, Nigeria

Introduction

Historians would argue that the great Reformation of the 16th century was one of the most important events in the history of the church. The recent dichotomy and controversy on tithing in Nigeria churches, is coming six hundred years after a major controversy in Western Christendom. This controversy saw the emergence of Protestant Churches from within the Catholic Church. On October 31st 1517 Martin Luther nailed Ninety-five (95) Thesis to the door of the Wittenberg, Germany. The discourse in the thesis was his protestation of the sales of indulgence to the communities and people under the Roman Religious Empire. According to Robert (2003) the sale of indulgences in neighbouring territories provoked him to write the ninety-five (95) thesis. Indulgences were an important issue for Martin Luther because they touched on the heart of Christian faith, namely, the forgiveness of sins. The Catholic messengers, who were doing this on behalf of the Pope Leo X, were urging people to give money to the church and in return, they would be absolved of their sins. Thus, this historic movement of the 16th Century Indulgence necessitated the need to examine the tithing system in the Contemporary Churches in Nigeria. For those who are careful enough to observe, it is no longer news that the historical development of Nigeria's contemporary churches are dynamic. The trend in the contemporary Nigerian church is one that incites scholarly attention. Many have watched in amazement how the Pentecostal, 'Neo-Pentecostal' Ministers continue to move away



from the traditional doctrines of tithing and righteousness enunciated in the Holy Bible and has pursued the materials of this world (Ogedegbe and Idemudia, 2012 p1). For quite a long time, discussions on the need for Christians to tithe their income have been mired in controversies, thus, Efe (2012) argues that a number of scholars are of the opinion that the practice of tithing is obsolete, a relic of Judaism that should be interned with other ceremonial laws in the Old Testament; that tithing does not benefit the giver, but a clever way employed by the ecclesiastical authorities for building religious empires, increasing salaries and advancing evangelical missions. The avarice trends that characterized the 16th century indulgence are manifesting in the contemporary churches in Nigeria and their tithing system; no doubt, is inimical to biblical teaches on tithing, thus reflects the 16th century indulgence, which was a radical departure from the Holy Bible and early church teachings on tithe.

Indulgence

Indulgence is the remission before God of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned. It is a monetary payment made to absolve one from sin and to reduce the time spent in purgatory. It could as well be purchased for the dead already in purgatory. In the remission, the faithful with the proper dispositions and under certain determined conditions acquire through the intervention of the church which, as minister of the redemption, authoritatively disperses and applies the treasury of the satisfaction won by Christ and the saints. According to Johnson (2012, p43) "indulgence had been one of the means the church in the middle age used to finance some of its numerous projects." It is a letter given by the Catholic Church to Christians granting them freedom from punishment due for sin after sacramental absolution. Johnson (2012) argues that these certificates were sold and advertised like a government would pursue its policy on taxes and collection. Thus, an indulgence is either partial or plenary, as it removes either part or all of the corporal punishment due for sin.

Biblical Perspective of Tithing

Tithe is a tenth of believers monthly salary or earnings that is given to the church. The Bible support tithing, Malachi 3: 8-10 bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessings that there will not be room enough to receive it. Other texts that are in affirmative to tithing: Genesis 14: 20, Matth. 23: 23. Instructively, the term "tithe" means a "tent part" and it is derived from the Hebrew nouns *asa* (Gen. 28: 22, Deut. 14: 22; 1 Sam. 8: 15-17, Neh. 10: 37-38 and Ma'asar (Gen. 14: 20; Lev. 27: 30; Neh. 10: 37, 38, Amos 4: 4; Mal 3: 8, 10).

The term tithe emanates from the Greek word *apodekatos* which means "to give tithes" (Luke 18: 12); and *dekate* (Heb. 2, 4, 8-9). *Dekatoo* from *dekatos* which is "Tenth" in the active voice implies "to take tithes of" (Heb. 7: 6); also, *Apodekatos* which means "to pay tithe or pay tithe of" (Matt. 23: 23). The first account of tithing in the Bible was the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek, the king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all... (Heb. 7: 1-3). The Hebrew author clears up the typical nature of Melchizedek for he was indeed a type of Christ. During Christ earthly ministry, the Jewish religious leaders would tithe to the minutiae "spices-mint, dill and cummin" (Matt. 23: 23). Whereas, the New Testament was distinct from Old Testament

law on tithe (Deut. 24: 22-29) clearly specified what was tithed as including grain, wine and oil (Leviticus 27: 30) . In the first century there was considerable debate about how the law of tithing should operate; as the time of Christ, the general practice was that everything which is eatable, and is preserved and has its nourishment, from the soil is liable to tithe. It was not news that the Pharisees practice tithing as the primary duty of man to God. This mis-presentation of tithing was observed by Jesus Christ, and he stated that the Pharisees “have neglected the weightier matters of the law” (Matt. 23: 23). Of course, the weightier does not imply the “more difficult or harder”, but rather the “more important”. Thus, White (1940) pointed out the tendency for humans to abuse divine requirements, according to him “in these words Christ again condemns the abuse of sacred obligation. The obligation itself, he does not set aside.” Hence, without any other diverse opinions, we agree with White’s views on what Jesus contextually meant on the “weightier” matters as abused by the Pharisees.

Causes of 16th Century Indulgence

The need for financial buoyant led the church to formulate and manipulate ways of making money, such terms as indulgence, penance, relic, and purgatory were introduced as a way out. Money became the centre of what we called spiritual-economic, give money and sin will be forgiven. It was observed that , Pope "Leo X had been in need of large sums of money to complete the magnificent St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome, begun in 1506 under Pope Julius II. To achieve this, he proclaimed a general sale of indulgences" (Schmitt, 1997 p82). The Pope’s chief salesman was a Dominical Monk, John Tetzel, who travelled across Germany hawking soon as the money in the casket, the troubled soul out of purgatory springs or as soon as a coin on offer rings, the soul from purgatory springs. It was Albert, the Archbishop of Mainz and holder of two other high church offices, that made an arrangement with Pope Leo X to raise money by the sale of indulgences, half of which would go to pay the debts of Albert and the other half to help build St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome(Howard,1960). The indulgence preachers at the time promised forgiveness of all sins to those who would contribute to the building of the St. Peter. The indulgence beard the signature of John Tetzel translates as follows: “with the authority of all saints and with mercy for you, I free you of all sins and crimes and excuse you from all punishments for ten days” (Hunt, 2008 p50). The sale of indulgence as claimed was not only for the building of St. Peter Basilica, but Pope had percent for himself and family; but the people were incredulous, it was whispered that the Pope required the money for the benefit of his family.

Tithing in the Contemporary Nigeria's Churches

There is nothing wrong in raising funds for Christian activities, but it should be done in accordance with biblical principles rather than abusing the tithing laws of the scriptures. Yes, raising funds for Christian's activities is not the problem, but it is the system that is being used by the contemporary Nigeria's Ministers and Churches to raise these funds that is the issue. It is whether the church authorities should use deceptive methods to gain wealth. Tithing system began to manifest in Nigeria before 1980s, within the mainline churches. For example, tithing was operational in Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (PCN) before December 2005, the General Assembly of the PCN held at Hope Wadellel Chapel, Calabar in 1989, adopted tithing system as a major source of income after the exit of foreign aids (Ajah, 2006). The PCN observed that tithing system was better than assessment, pledges

made to fund their annual budget. Enyindah (2017 p34) in his view on tithing and assessment argued that “tithe offering is mandatory for all members of the church who receives income in one form or the other. So the first offering every member must give on Sunday is tithe. ” Although, Enyindah blamed the tithing failure on the unfaithfulness of the operators in the Diocese of Ikwerre (Anglican Communion). However, the emerging trend that puts the Nigeria Pentecostal pastors in the vanguard of those promoting tithes as a religious obligation has been viewed with suspicion. Onuorah Nzekwe, writes “the churches have failed this nation. I don’t think there is any nation in world that has the sum number of churches as Nigeria. But it is unfortunate that the more evil we become ”(as cited in Efe, 2012 p52). The contemporary Nigeria's pastors simply make up their own minds which way to use the tithe ,and then manufacture their own regulations regarding it. They undermine the bible as a book of direction, Pastors manipulate their members by saying if you do not pay your tithes, God will unleash the devourer on you (Malachi 3: 10). This means their members are confronted with all kinds of necessary experience that will continually drain away their finances. David Oyedepo one of the Pentecostal generals said that:

Rat ate all the cables in the car of a woman in his church. When she had the car re-wired, the rate ate the cables again. On investigation, it was discovered she had not been paying her tithes, which was why the devourer rat had been unleashed on her. Once she started paying her tithes dutifully again, the rat attacks stopped (<https://www.vanguadng.com>).

Bishop Oyedepo also said “everybody believes that God has an open heaven order of blessings for his people. But you see it takes your tithing to qualify for it. So, if you only know the promise, but you don’t know the condition, you will die frustrated” (<https://www.vanguadng.com>). But, Pastor Paul, the founder of the House on the Rock had a contrast view on tithing, according to him:

You don’t have to pay tithe in this New Testament. Tithing will not make you a millionaire. You don’t pay tithe to be blessed. You are already blessed. Tithing is a faith response to the blessing. He believed Abraham paid tithe after he was blessed not so that he would be blessed. (amp,.pulse.ng www.pulse.ngcommunities).

He further said “Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek who was a high priest. We pay to Christ who is also our high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (amp,.pulse.ng www.pulse.ngcommunities). Another prominent Pentecostal Pastor is Adebayo; Adebayo had series of profound teachings on the nature of material blessings that could accrue to the believer who gives his all to God through His ministry. He postulated that, the more people give and the more they see the result of giving in their lives. The emphasis placed on tithe in Redeem Christian Church of God (RCCG) is explicitly stated as a central pillar of the church’s fundamental beliefs: “regular payment of tithe and offering is obligatory... tithes and offering must be paid on every income e.g. salary, project from business transaction, gifts, etc” (Efe, 2012 p. 30).

Johnson stated how Pentecostal Pastors manipulate their adherents; “if you don’t pay tithes it shall be tight for you”. (as cited in Efe, 2012 p31).In the contemporary church tithing, donations and offerings remains one visible way of assessing and measuring the productivity and progressiveness of a pastor. The amount of money a pastor raises is now a canon that determines if the pastor is called or flashed by God. In some of the churches,

adherents pay tithes for record – keeping per monthly. Members who are committed to tithe payment have preferential treatment in terms of funerals and weddings celebration. Members who also regularly pay their tithe appear well patronized than other members found contrary. In this manner, tithes assumes a sociological implication. It becomes a methodology which the church uses to identify those who are truly belonged rather than believing. thus, the contemporary Nigeria church is between the paradigm of religious values that people professed ("believing ") and actual religious practice and church going ("belonging ") (as cited in Kwateng-Yeboah, 2016). Unlike "believing" as in the case of Britain, the contemporary Nigeria church is manifesting more of "belonging" as one's commitment to Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal is measured in tithing, offering and seed sowing than genuine Christian commitment and repentance. Many Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria seemed to be "marketing" God with the motive of profiteering. This may explain why they do not see anything really wrong with their flamboyant lifestyle. The Nigeria father of Pentecostalism, Archbishop Benson Idahosa was reputed to have said 'my God is not a poor God'. God did not say you should worship him in rags (as cited in Efe, 2012).

Similarities and Differences of the Discourse

i. Purpose

The primary purpose of biblical tithing were specified obligation as thus:(a) For the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans and the widows (Deut.26:12) (b) that there may be food in the house of God (Malachi3:10) (c) appreciation to the victory already won (Gen.14:20).On the other hand, the primary purpose of 16th century indulgence was to raise fund for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica. The second purpose of indulgence was for personal and family aggrandizement. The purpose of 16th century indulgence is not different to the tithing in the contemporary Nigeria's churches. The tithing operators in Nigeria's churches and the 16th century indulgence operators claimed to build house for God. The secondary purpose of collecting tithes in Nigeria churches today is more pronounced of personal aggrandizement.. Ajah (2006 p51) rightly remarks, "At the height of prosperity and word of faith theologies, materials resource became a central issue in the contemporary church in Africa." Supportively, Marshal (as cited in Obineche, 2012 p74) observed that

In the Pentecostal churches, individuals are not as far removed from the avenues of accumulation as their poorer brethren. There are no restrictions on dressing, not is wealth seen as ungodly; on contrary, fine clothes, nice cars, foreign goods are common currency and the pastors themselves promote and foster this image.

From the above assertion, the materialistic nature of some contemporary churches in Nigeria is same to the trend of 16th century indulgence led by Pope Leo X, Archbishop Mainz and John Tetzel. Some self-purpose pastors asking for Tithes, Seeds of Faith and Offerings trigger some young Nigerians into pastoral ministry, and today, "every graduate of theological colleges and bible schools want to be a general overseer and make money or a name for him/herself" (Johnson, 2012 p8).The churches are now turning into full-fledged business centers in Nigeria .

ii. The Lifestyles of Participants

The lifestyle of Pope Leo X, Archbishop Mainz, John Tetzel and others in 16th century indulgence participants were not less luxurious to the contemporary Nigeria's pastors. Many



bishops and abbots used their offices to live their lives of luxury and leisure, living more like Princes than humble servants of God. Many priests and Nuns in this period abandoned their religious vow of chastity and engaged in sexual relationships, subsequently had children. For instance, Pope Alexander fathered and raised children, hence his interest was more of his family and economic gain than religious. They lived in the magnificent palaces and wares their costly jewelries. This characterized the contemporary Nigeria's ministers whose ministry are measured as men of God, on the basis of the numbers of jet they have, the kind of houses they were living in, the type of cars they ride, the number of adherents under their controlled, of course, the kind of shoes, phones, necklaces, dresses etc. as a primary measure of their calls. This deceitful lifestyles of some pastors, who are riding on personal jet, living in their earthly mansions and eating the wealth of the poor, yet promising their members mansions in the heaven. God originally designed tithe, so that the receivers of the tithe can enjoy the standard of living equal to that of the tither. Of course, this means that the pastors ought not to live above the givers. The luxury endemic in Nigeria's churches seemed to have cut across the dominations. The "I no go beg for food" ministers, the get "quick rich" crusaders misappropriates tithes for their personal gains. Ajah (2006), opines that, tithing query the biblical basis, point to abuses and the lifestyles of pastors, and allege the commercialization of the gospel. Olofinjana (2013) argues that the independent churches are young churches who rely on the committed giving of their members in order to survive. According to him "It must be mentioned that the abusive use of Prosperity Theology that enriches the Pastor at the expense of the congregation, or its use as a magical formula for success is not scriptural" p5. It is not uncommon for men of God to flaunt their wealth and materials possession in their churches and teach the same to their members. This trend had rippled effect on the Nigeria society.

iii. Method of Fund Raising

The method of fund-raising was and still that of manipulation of their members. During the 16th century indulgence, the Pope Leo X and his messengers claimed to absolved sin already committed. The pontiff and messengers manipulated the people to pay for their sins and even for their beloved dead. The grace of God was sold to the participants who in all benefit from the Catholic Church, as a result of their contribution to the building of St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica, together with their deceased parents who they claimed shall now and for eternity be partakers in all petitions, intercessions, alms, fasting, prayers etc., the believers who purchased confessionally letters or certificate may also become participants in all these things. John Tetzel the commercial expertize radically presented the sales of indulgence as soon a coin on the offer rings, the soul from purgatory springs". He personally sealed the sales of indulgence with his signature. Of course, tithing method in contemporary Nigeria's churches is different from the biblical standards but similar to 16th century indulgence in terms of manipulation of her adherents.

iv. Common Words or Phrases

As stated elsewhere, "If you don't pay your tithe, God will unleash curse on you". "I don't pay your tithe today, you will suffer tomorrow". "If you don't pay your tithe you will not make heaven" "If you don't pay your tithe, you are a thief." Writing on the contemporary churches in Nigeria, Ogedegbe and Idemudia (2012 p14) observed that "they prefer to concentrate on the so-called "assets" – the money bags, those who support church projects

heavily in their church and neglect the poor majority they considered as 'liabilities.' Though Jesus Christ rebuked the Pharisees for their concentration on the tithe payment neglecting the important matters. Today church like the Pharisee are interested on the amount of money one pays rather than one's salvation and the grace that was once free is now manipulated for money. The church also promises people heaven if they pay their tithes. John Tetsel in the 16th century was travelling to towns to raise the fund, but the contemporary tithing in Nigeria has gone technologically, ministers now hawk for tithe online.

vi. The Beneficiary

There are benefits in serving God, and in name of God many leaders have abused and manipulated their followers to pay tithe. The framework of Russell McCutcheon (as cited in Robert, 1994 p58) suggests that "religionist theorists manufacture religion to benefit themselves: to give themselves a discipline and, with it, jobs. Knowledge is power, as Sophist back in fifth century Athens proclaimed." This establishes that there are beneficiaries of religion, particularly her leaders. Thus, in 16th century many groups prospered and at same time, many also suffered as a result of the selling of indulgence. Besides, the steady flow of vast sum of money into the heard of the church officials, the merchants, labourers, bankers gained wealth through the money obtained from the selling of indulgence. Pronounced beneficiaries were the Pope Leo X, the Archbishop of Mainz who masterminded the sales of indulgence and John Tetsel. The Archbishop personally postulated the sales of indulgence for his debt redemption. The sales of indulgence as claimed was not only for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica, but Pope had percentage for himself and family. Hunt (2008) affirms that the people were incredulous, it was well spread that the Pope required the money for the benefit of his family. Then, who are the beneficiaries of tithing in contemporary Nigeria church? Simply the answer is the General Overseers of the contemporary churches in Nigeria and their families. According to Ogedegbe and Idemudia (2012) this trend has been very well experimented in Benin City by; the Church of God Mission which was taken over by Margaret Idahosa at the death of her husband, the Spirit and Life Bible Church which was also taken over by Eunice Osagiede at the death of her husband etc. This is no longer news, that churches in Nigeria has become a family business. and it is a replica of many prospering and at same time majority are suffering in Nigeria. After the General Overseer's families, the bankers, drivers, and few other workers in the church are also beneficiaries. Apostle Chibuzo, the General Overseer of Omega Power Ministry (OPM) (in his television ministry) has decried on the misused of tithe's money by pastors who owns schools, hospitals, and universities among other things, which is out of reach of the common tithe payers in their churches. Tithes money are now used for their personal aggrandizement, thus, in their churches, the poor are seen as "liability" and the rich as "assets". Although, the 16th Century Indulgence, the German Priests and other Nations saw their coffers regularly depleted as fund flowed south to Rome; deceived by the idea of quicker avenue to heaven, the poor were encouraged to spend money on a religious luxury than they could not offer. This was illusion that the church used then for remission of sins while those involved were after their personal gain. Today, the Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Pastors, Prophets, Prophetess, Evangelists, Mummy A, B, Y and Z, Brothers or Sisters, and whatever nomenclature as to those who claims in the name of God, to collect tithes from the people are all beneficiaries. They like Roman Catholic of 16th century struggle to possess earthly goods – materialism, has since

taken the centre stage in their churches. Unlike the Europe where their money moved to Rome, the Nigeria money is within but in hands of few pastors and some of them in Nigeria, has estimated net worth of one hundred something a million dollars.

Recommendations

- i. The contemporary Churches in Nigeria should learn to keep and follow scriptural standard of tithing that devoid of manipulation of their members.
- ii. The contemporary church leaders in Nigeria should know that tithe paid to their churches were not only meant for them or for their personal aggrandisement but are paid to care for the orphans, widows and foreigners in their midst.
- iii. The contemporary Church members in Nigeria should know that tithe is one of the biblical obligation thus, they should learn to genuinely pay their tithe without being brainwashed to do so in their churches.

Conclusion

We have established that Indulgence was the practice of 16th Century Roman Catholic Church in which "remission of sin "and "forgiveness for sin," were sold to her members. We observed that Salvation was advertised and sold for money, and that the church promised her adherents quicker avenue to heaven. We established that tithing is biblical obligation for all believers, it is given to the church . It practices manifested in various ways, as an appreciation, food, and duty to God in the Holy Bible. However, we established that the practice of tithing in the contemporary churches in Nigeria is an aberration to biblical tithing, that today, members are manipulated to pay tithe in these churches. Symbolically, tithing in the contemporary churches in Nigeria are materially the same as the 16th century Indulgence, which the operators demonstrated religious aggrandizements for personal materialistic gains.

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