

DENOMINATIONALISM AND PENTECOSTALISM IN EVANGELISM: FACTORS THAT MUTILATE CHRISTIAN IMAGE

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Abstract:

Christians are expected to follow and adhere to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is this form of life that gives a Christian the image of Christ which means that the person is a Christian. But diversity of denominations and the spate of Pentecostalism which emanate over the years against Jesus' instruction of being one, has mutilated Christian image. *Evangelism is regarded as converting non-Christians to Christianity. It is the preaching of the gospel or the practice of giving information about a particular doctrine or set of belief to others with the intention of converting others to Christian faith. Preaching the word of God as it is done by some denominations cast a spell on Christianity as some of denominations do not follow Jesus' instruction laid down in the Scripture. Pentecostalism on its own may be a challenge sequel to the way some denominations see it. Jesus in John 17:21 says that the Church may be one even as he and the father are one. Denominationalism has defocus this prayer as it is referred to anything distinguishes by a name. Such names do not give room for a good understanding of Christianity as each denomination comes up with her own set of belief. This paper therefore, examines denominationalism and Pentecostalism in Evangelism, as they affect the image of Christianity. The work will center on Christianity alone as no other Religion will be considered.* Historical aspect of research is adopted in the work.

Introduction

Denominational identity is an accurate predictor of theological stance, worship style, organizational preference or social class as it once was. There is no indication that denominations will soon disappear but neither does it appear that anyone is eager to justify them theologically. According to Vason (2010), The trend seems to be towards a new kind of denominationalism one that is no longer based primarily on association of congregations with a common heritage.

The term “denomination” in general refers to anything distinguished by a name. In religious contexts, the designation has traditionally applied both to the broad movements within Protestantism, such as Baptists and Methodist, and also to the numerous independent branches of such movements that have developed over the years. Presently, these denominations are engaged in evangelism. Jerome , (2012) opines that evangelism is the preaching of the gospel or the practice of giving information about a particular doctrine or set of beliefs to others with the intention of converting others to the Christian faith. Evangelism and mission are focused on the command of Jesus to his eleven disciples “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always. To the very end of the age. (Matt.

28:19,20). The work of evangelism is vested on a person who is known as evangelist. Sometimes, the regular minister of the church is called a preacher in a way that other groups would typically use the term Pastor. The evangelist in some churches is one that travels from town to town and from church to church spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many Christians of various theological perspectives would call themselves “evangelists” because they are spreaders of the gospel. Many churches believe that one of their major functions is to function as evangelists to spread the evangelist belief that Jesus is the saviour of humanity which is also a general belief. In evangelism, it-it behave that Pentecostal power simplifies evangelism. Pentecostalism therefore according to Ishiguzo (2013) is a Christian religious movement that emphasizes the Holy Spirit and is known for speaking in tongues. In some of these Christian movements, everything is connected to the Holy Spirit even their mistakes. This however can be a factor that mutilates the Christian image as this paper seeks to inquire.

Who is a Christian?

The name Christian is derived from a Greek word *Christianos* which means follower of Christ. The word Christ comes from a Greek word *christos* meaning anointed one with an adjectival ending borrowed from Latin to denote adhering to or even belonging to as in slave ownership. Magnus(2013) opines that in the Greek Septuagint *Christos* was used to translate the Hebrew *Messiah* meaning one

who is anointed. In other European languages, equivalent words to Christian are likewise derived from Greek such as Christian in French and Cristiano in Spanish.

The first recorded use of the term or its cognate in other languages is in the new Testament in Acts 11:26. After Barnabas brought Saul (Paul) to Antioch where they taught the disciples for about a year, the text says”....the disciple were called Christian first in Antioch”. The second mention of the term follows in Acts 26:28 where Herod

Agrippa II replied to Paul. “Then Agrippa said to Paul, Almost thou persuades me to be a Christian” the third and final new testament reference to the term is in 1stPeter 4:16 which exhorts believers “yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

From the foregone a Christian supposed to represent Christ in al he does. A Christian should not be an opposite of Christ rather as the name implies he is to be like Christ.

A wide range of beliefs and practices is found across the world among those who call themselves Christians. Denominations and sect disagree on a common definition of Christianity and although most would identify themselves as Christians, many would not identify other within the larger category as Christian. Most fundamentalist for example would not acknowledge Mormons or Christian science as Christian. In fact, a greater percentage of people who self-identify as Christians are from collective unity. The

denominations preach Christ but in different ways. Such ways at times defocuses the image of Christian.

What is Christianity?

Christianity is a religion based upon the teachings and practices of Jesus. Jesus is the anointed one from God, the father who came to the world fulfilled the Old Testament laws and prophecies, died on the cross, and rose from the dead physically, ascended into heaven and will come again. Christianity provides thoughtful, biblical perspective on theology, church and ministry and culture. It is a monotheistic religion, a world faith. Christianity is based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ who served as the focal point for the religion. Christian theology is summarized in creeds such as Apostles' Creed and Nicene creed. These professions of faith state that Jesus suffered died and was buried, descended into hell and rose from the dead, in order to grant external life to those who believe in him and trust in him for the remission of their sins. The creeds further maintain that Jesus bodily ascended into heaven, where he reigns with God the father in the unity of the Holy Spirit and that he will return to judge the living and the dead and grant external life to his followers.

Magnus (2013) opines that Christ incarnation, earthly ministry, crucifixion and resurrection are often referred to as “the gospel” meaning “good news”. The term gospel also refers to written accounts of Jesus life and teaching, four of which Mattlew Mark

Luke and John are considered canonical and included in the Christians bible.

Ayodele (2010) infers that Christianity is an Abrahamic religion that began as a second Temple Judaic sect in the mid 1st century. Originating in Judea. It quickly spread to Europe Syria Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Transcucasia, Egypt, Ethiopia and India and by the end of the 4th century had become the official state church of the Roman empire throughout history. Christianity has weathered schisms and theological dispute that have resulted in many distinct churches and denomination. Some of these denominations operate on different evangelical system and Pentecostal garb.

What do Christians Believe?

The core beliefs of Christianity are summarized in I Corinthian 15:1-4 Jesus died for our sins, was buried, was resurrected and thereby offers salvation to all who will receive him in faith unique among all other faiths, Christianity is more about a relationship than religious practices instead of adhering to a list of “do's” and “don'ts” the goal of a Christian is to cultivate a close walk with God. That relationship is made possible because of the work of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Beyond these core beliefs, there are many other items that are, or at least should be indicative of what Christianity is and what Christianity believes. The bible is the inspired word of God; its teachings is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21) Writing

on the Authority of the word of God, Ishiguzo(2013)asserts on the inerrancy of the word of God.

Christians believe in one God that exists in three persons the father, son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the above, there are yet denominations that do not have strong belief in the triune God. By that, the image of Christians is being mutilated. Christians believe that mankind was created specifically to have a relationship with God. But sin separates all men from God. (Rom. 3:23;5:12) Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ walked this earth fully God and yet fully man (Philippians 2:6-11), and died on the cross. Christians believe that after his death Christ was buried, he rose again now lives at the right hand of the father (Heb. 7:25). Christianity proclaims that Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to completely pay the sin debt owed by all men and this is what restores the broken relationship between God and man Hebrews. 9:11-14.10:10 Rom. 5:8;6:23 Christianity teaches that in order to be save and be granted entrance into heaven after death, one must place one's faith entirely in the finished work of Christ on the cross. If we believe that Christ died in our place and paid the price of our own sins, and rose again, then we are saved. There is nothing that anyone can do to earn salvation.

According to Ikwun (2002) salvation in Christianity is freedom from the old sin nature and freedom to pursue a right relationship with God. Where we were once slaves to sin, we are now slaves to

Christ (Rom. 6:15-22). As long as believers live on this earth in their sinful bodies, they will engage in a constant struggle of sin. However, struggle with sin by studying and applying God's word in their lives and being controlled by the Holy Spirit that is submitting to the spirit's leading in every circumstance. Other belief systems in Christianity include miracle, prayer, prophecy, faith revelation e.t.c.

Miracle

Many denominations in Christianity believe in miracle. Miracle is a divine act by which God reveals himself to people. Amaechi (2010) infers that the classical definition of miracle assumes that it is contrary to natural law. The miracle worker supposes to be a child of God showing the image of the master Jesus. He is also expected to follow the footsteps of the master and to hear from Him. He is not expected to speak when God has not spoken. But today the personality of the miracle preacher is in a mess some of them are of low repute. Similarly, they speak when the lord has not spoken thereby deceiving many members of the church. The activities of these fake miracle preachers leave much to be desired. In some cases the real Christian principle is not followed. As a result, well meaning people of the society cast aspersion on their actions. In the words of Johnson (2011) God performs miracles not merely as a wonder to inspire awe but as a “sign” to draw people to himself. Jesus stressed the connection between his miraculous ministry especially the casting out of Demons exorcism, and the coming of

the kingdom of God. Presently, some of the miracles point people to the kingdom of darkness because the performers or the cultic functionary projects self instead of Christ. On this, Magnus (2013) is of the view that there is no place for the spirit of God in such miracles. Such miracles are demonic and devoid of Christian image.

Prayer

Prayer is our way of talking to God. Prayer to God or gods is a feature of many religions but here the author focuses on Christianity as a religion. Amaechi (2010) says that a classic definition of Christian prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies. In prayer, human talk to God and He can talk to human. Through prayer, we discover the will of God. Thus prayer is a vital part of every Christian life. Prayer is an expression of sincere desire. It is not to inform God of matters that he would otherwise be ignorant of and the validity of prayer is not affected by length or repetitiveness. Private prayer is to be discreet and secret. Jesus in Matt 6:5-15 gave Christian a Template of prayer and what-should be followed the parables are another source of Christ teaching, emphasizing persistence in prayer. (Luke 18;1-8). Simplicity and humility (Luke 18:10-14) and tenacity (Luke 11:5-8). There are various elements in prayer. Praise involves the recognition of who God is and what he

does. It is “giving God the glory” not in the in the sense of adding to his glory, but of willingly recognizing God as God. Thanksgiving can be for life itself, for the use and beauty of the physical universe, for Christ and his benefit or for specific answers to prayer. Confessing of sin involves unreserved recognition of sin both in inner motive and outer actions some of these denominations do not recognize these elements as well as the format. The mode in prayer at times does not show that we are the same. In his work prayer, Ogu (2002) asserts that different approaches to prayer has defaced Christianity. Some churches believe in praying silently while other believe in shouting. Others think that for prayer to be answered you must garnish it with fasting. While others says it depends on ones relationship with the Lord. The variation in the patterns of prayer is a pointer to the mutilation of Christian image.

Prophecy

There is a quest for prophecy in many denominations. Only the front line (churches-the conventional churches or orthodox churches control this quest. Everybody wants to be prophesied to. A lot of people come to church only to see if the prophet can prophesy to them. Sequel to this desire which is in the members, the cultic functionary say even when the Lord has not spoken. Prophecy according to Amaechi (2010) is to proclaim or to announce God's message. Prophets speak (or repeat) what God has told them. A prophet is God's mouthpiece to the world. Prophecy is the message.

Prophecy, along with its related terms “prophet”, “to prophesy” and “prophetic” is derived from group of Greek words that in secular Greek means proclaim or “announce”. In biblical Greek however these terms always communicate speaking or announcing something under the influence of spiritual inspiration. Johnson (2011) is of the view that one of the clearest and most significant statements on the nature of prophetic inspiration in the old in Num. 12;6-8. The Lord said to them “Now listen to me! Even with the prophets I the Lord communicate by visions and dreams. He is entrusted with my entire house. I speak to him face to face, directly not in riddles! He sees the Lord as he is. Several important insights into the nature of prophetic inspiration are found in this passage.

Many preachers, prophets and prophetesses are not inspired rather they speak without the Lord speaking first to them. They speak their own mind instead of the word's mind. In some cases, the personality of the prophet or prophetess is questionable. Some broke away from the main churches just to display fake prophetic power which is not in line with Christian tenet; others do that for material gain.

Revelation

Revelation is an aspect of Pentecostal belief. It is a word that comes from the Latin word *revelation*. It is usually one of the two things (1.) Revelation can be of the revealing of something so that all people can know it; or (2). Revelation can be the actual thing that is

being revealed. For Christian revelation usually refer to the way God revealed things about himself or thing about the world and the universe. However, revelation also refers to the bible itself, which is God's word for all people Magnus (2013) asserts that in the New Testament, revelation is sometimes called 'apocalypse' which means uncovering or making someone or something known.

The challenge of the above is that sinners can say that he has received a revelation from God to a congregation. In most cases, such revelation is used to deceive innocent members of the church. since it is done in Christianity, it is not to the credit of Christians. The is also a problem as it is doubted by the member. Such revelations are reeled out under the guise of the Holy Spirit which is the core of Pentecostalism

What is Pentecostalism?

According to Vason (2010) Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within Protestants Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God, through baptism with the Holy Spirit. The term Pentecostal is derived from Pentecost the Greek name for the swish feast of week for Christian, this event commemorates the decent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ as described in the book of Acts. Like other forms of evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostalism adheres to the inerrancy of scripture and the necessity of accepting Christ as personal Lord

and savior. It is distinguished by the belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit that enable a Christian to live a spirit filled and empowered life. This empowerment includes the use of spiritual gift such as speaking in tongue and divine healing.

Pentecostalism according to Vasson (2010) emerged in the early 20th century among radical adherents of the holiness movement who were energized by revivalism and expectation for imminent second coming of Christ. Believing that they were living in the end time, they expected God to spiritually renew the Christian church thereby bring to pass the restoration of the spiritual gifts and the evangelization of the world.

The challenge at this juncture is that orthodox Christian and the Pentecostal Christian. The Pentecostal accuses the orthodox as rigid and stereotype. Position according to them does not have a place in heaven while the orthodox accuses the Pentecostal as being religiously mad and fanatical. At this point of disagreement, Christian image is being mutilated.

Conclusion

From the forgone, it can be deduced that Christianity has denominations under one umbrella. These denominations are not unified. They have different approaches to matters which in some cases are not in line with the great commission. The variation

however is not to the interest of Christianity and Christians. Most of this group claim to be Pentecostal as Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. The different ways the emphasis is made mutilate Christian image. Pentecostalism is not a problem but the problem is extremism or fanaticism; a situation which is in excess and far beyond the norm, drastic or of great severity.

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