Christian Soteriology

HUMAN SOUL and ETERNITY

CHALLENGES OF MODERN HERESIES



A Festschrift
Celebrating 70 years of Life and Work of
Josephine OlaTomi Soboyejo

EDITED BY ABOLAJI S MUSTAPHA, AND SELOME KUPONU

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A Festschrift Celebrating 70 years of Life & Work of
Josephine OlaTomi Soboyejo

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Chapter Two

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF ETERNAL SECURITY IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL (ECWA) IN NIGERIA: ITS CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Prof. Rotimi Williams Omotoye, Dr. Mary Taiye Daniel &
Dr. Olumuyiwa Aduralere Ajetomobi

Abstract

ONE OF THE MAJOR doctrines in Christianity is the doctrine of salvation, which finds its deepest meaning in the spiritual aspect of life. Its fulfillment is held vigorously in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which brought about salvation which is the highest goal of Christianity. In the 'Articles of faith and practice' of different churches, teachings on salvation vary in content but not in goal. This variation became unavoidable from the point of view of God's sovereignty and omnipotency. This variation was further compounded by the unanimity in the doctrines of churches that God is holy and has zero tolerance for sin in His sovereignty. Within this context, these schools of thought emerged namely: Calvinism and Armenianism. In Calvinism, God offered irresistible grace to those whom He elected to save in the exercise of His sovereign power, while in Armenianism God's grace was the source of redemption but could be resisted by people through free choice. The doctrine of ECWA as their articles of faith and practice (8) confirmed Calvinism. The objectives of the paper were to determine the import of sin and how the doctrine of eternal security could remain intact where sin did not abound; to determine the significance of

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dependence on God and how the conditions can be fulfilled as requirement for eternal security. The research methods used were historical and interpretative. Some major findings were as follows; though some Christian denominations do not profess the doctrine of eternal security, but there is a reflection of the doctrine in some, and once God's exercise of sovereignty was not denied this attribute would as well blend with God's grace not to sin; sin and the practice of it could be said to be voluntary and those who chose God would not see the beauty of sin over belief in God; the imminence of eternal salvation was a design of God and He remained its guarantor and; the Calvinists and Arminians need God's grace as strong bottom-line for the achievement of eternity. The Calvinist argument dovetails into the acceptance of the view that God remained the author of Christian conversion. (Acts 11;18). The element of faith accompanied with repentance is the acknowledgment of the truth of the gospel. Apparently, the stable life in Christ is taken to be vulnerable to regeneration and transformation; thereby guaranteeing eternal security. It is recommended that Christians should be diligent, hopeful and upright for the attainment of eternal security.

Keywords: *Salvation, ECWA, Eternal Security, Armenianism, Calvinism*

Introduction

The doctrine of "eternal security" in the Evangelical Church Winning All as a denomination teaches that a Christian once saved remained eternally saved. This doctrine is controversial and misinterpreted by other denominations, because it is often assumed, that it is a way of discrediting the concepts of sin to salvation. The research is to help us see the point those churches that do not teach it, do not necessarily neglect sin as much as the church that teaches it. Indeed, what eternal security means is that those who truly believe in Christ can never be lost as long as they do not remain in sin; once they are saved, it is forever. Ryrie opined that; "eternal security is the work of God which guarantees that the gift of salvation once received is forever and cannot be lost".[1] This implies that all true believers in Jesus Christ are free from the danger of losing their salvation, they are permanently secured in Him, because even if they sin they will always repent and go back to Christ. This doctrine has strong footings in predestination and adoption. Guy

Duty noted that Augustine, a fifth century catholic monk originated the doctrine of predestination. His teaching on predestination is that;

> God from all eternity predestinated some to be saved and passed the rest of the race by, with no offer or possibility of salvation, and that those elected for salvation would finally persevere and can never be lost.[2]

It was by the comment of Augustine, a theologian who lived between 354 and 430 AD that the doctrine of predestination got introduced into the church. John Calvin a Christian theologian who lived between 1509 and 1564 AD got his inspiration on predestination from Augustine. He developed Augustine's doctrine to a conclusion that he coined his own doctrinal position which he called "Calvinism", therefore, the concept of Calvinism on predestination is generally called "eternal security"[4]. Calvin, like Augustine, taught predestination as God's eternal decree by which God's absolute sovereign-will decided the eternal destiny of every individual [5]. The rigidity that characterizes Calvin's position is total in the absoluteness of God. This cannot be denied. However, God has not made man sufficiently irrational for him to decide on what he want God to do for him. For example, the death prediction or message to King Hezekiah by Isaiah made the former to go on his knees before God for a change, and God did answer his prayer. (II Kgs 20:5).

Jacobus Arminius' position is stronger than Calvin's when he said; "if a person truly regenerates and neglects grace and grieves the Holy Spirit with sin, he falls away totally and at length finally falls from grace into eternal probation".[6] Arminius believed that Christians become the elect of God and remain so, as long as they meet the conditions of salvation. He believed and taught that it was possible to fall away from Jesus Christ and be lost forever. Since then, there has been a great dichotomy among Christians in this area of theology. It is observed that some Christian denominations remain sharply divided doctrinally on the issue of eternal security, which Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) is one of such that salvation, once received, can never be lost; it is forever.

The aim of this work is to examine whether the arguments on eternal security is a problem of biblical interpretation or not. The role of 'grace' in salvation seems

not to approximate the tendency of once saved. Ordinarily, grace is unmerited favour attached to human activities governed by principles and duties inseparable from the end-results. So, we intend to see how grace cannot abound when people relish in sin. In this research, we shall show how comfortable the teaching on eternal security is in dutiful circumstances in Christian living.

The Biblical Concept of Eternal Security

Salvation is the centre of Christian experience and theology. Believers in Jesus saw it as a reason that prompted Jesus to leave His throne in heaven for this world to fulfill God's plan for the salvation of human. It is in the light of this that Lewis Chafer said that; "salvation represents the whole work of God by which He rescues human from eternal ruin and doom of sin and bestows on him/her the riches of His grace, even eternal life now and eternal glory in heaven."[7] The message of salvation may appear simple but its biblical teachings are sometimes complicated because of all that it takes to sustain it. Doctrinal teaching such as eternal security of a saved Christian is a controversial issue for biblical scholars. William Orr, said that;

> It is not news to tell you that there are opposing schools of thought on the question of the security of the believers in Christ. One which holds that it is impossible to a duly-saved person to ever be lost. While the other school holds that under certain conditions a saved person may lose his salvation.[8]

These two schools of thought can be acknowledged as having certain conditions which amounts to being punished, if a sin is being committed, but God still finds a way of bringing the sinner back to himself. The condition is that God is willing and always accepts that sinner if he repents, for example, in Psm 51, David begged God for forgiveness after he sinned.

The issue of eternal security has caused a stormy debate right from the beginning of the Church between 396-430 AD. According to William Orr, "it has divided the Christian world of theology since the days of Church Fathers." In the gospel of Saint John, Jesus opined that "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can

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snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my father's hand" Jn. 10:27-29.

Jesus takes cognizance of His sheep; they hear and listen to his voice and he distinguishes them from others and provided happiness for them by giving them eternal life. They shall be saved from everlasting perdition and by no means perish forever.

In the 21st century, Christian denomination, some scholars still remain sharply divided over the question of whether a person once saved, can subsequently forfeit his salvation or not. It is important to say at this point that the 'certain conditions' which illustrates relishing in sin are also tenable for the school of thought that says some are duly-saved. The point here is that those who have not been duly saved still claim to be saved when they have not overcome the 'certain conditions. The problem between the Arminianism and Calvinism is the factor of permanence in salvation experience.

A Brief History and Growth of ECWA

Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), (formerly known as Evangelical Church of West Africa), has roots in the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). It is interesting to note that the name changed as a result of restrictiveness of the Mission to West Africa. By way of moving from this restive status quo, it was considered necessary to globalize the mission intention which resulted in the name "Evangelical Church Winning All". The history of ECWA cannot be discussed in isolation. The SIM being the mother body of ECWA, it is therefore appropriate to begin this work with a brief history of SIM.

In the year 1893 – 1900, Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) emerged in Nigeria. It was the period when the Mission was formed and it made several unsuccessful and fruitless attempts at gaining foothold in the Sudan. The first attempt was made in 1893 by three pioneering missionaries; namely, Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham but did not succeed. They were unable to gain foothold in Nigeria, instead Gowans and Kent died at the end of 1893. The disappointing return of Bingham to Canada could be viewed as fruitless, but spiritually, it was the sowing of the seed of the gospel by means of "martyrdom" which was

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to germinate in later years. The two early pioneers became "martyrs" for a good cause, "The burden of the Sudan"[9].

SIM established an indigenous body in the 1954 known as "The Association of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA)"[8]. This church has grown from a position of weakness, obscurity and humble beginnings in Northern Nigeria since 1954 to become Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), one of the largest denominations in Nigeria today.

Great success was witnessed in the work of the SIM in Nigeria between 1915 – 1949. Olatayo substantiated this by saying; "more missions and stations were opened and many local churches were started in both the North and South of the Niger in Nigeria"[10]. It is observed that the church has achieved more success till date.

ECWA Doctrine of Eternal Security

The singular goal of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) is to glorify God; and this is achieved through the preaching and teaching the Bible, which is the inspired and infallible Word of God that comprises both the Old and the New testaments. ECWA believes that the Scriptures are without error in the works of the original writings, the complete revelation of God's will for salvation of men and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and practice[11].

As far as eternal security is concerned, ECWA teaches that everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ's atoning work and has appropriated this benefit personally to life is assured of salvation both now and forever. Those so assured are eternally kept saved due to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. Salvation is received by faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from works.[12]

This implies that basically, security is based on the grace of God and the fact that eternal life is a gift and it is forever. When a person believes in Jesus, he is brought into a relationship with the God-head that assures his salvation is secured.

This is true of "born again" people only, (Jn. 3:3) because there are those who profess but do not possess life. Sometimes, we can make a reasonably sure judgement as to whether an individual only professes or actually possesses eternal

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life, and sometimes we cannot. But the regenerated person's salvation is secure because of that relationship to God which he has, through faith.

Reasons given by ECWA for believing and teaching eternal security are categorized under the relationship that exists between the Triune God; that is God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit[3]. They are as follows:

a. **Reasons related to the Father:** God purposed to glorify the same group of people he predestined, called and justified (Rom. 8:30). This statement is daring and could not be made if any one of that group could lose his salvation. If so, then the ones whom He justified would not be the same. Christians would agree that God's power is able to keep the believers (Jude 24) but some would argue that it can be thwarted by a person renouncing his faith. But the Lord said that those who believe in Him are secured in His hands and the Father's hand and that no one can seize the believer from the safe position (Jn. 10:28-29). Now, "no one" means no one, including the individual himself. The promise does not say that no one, except yourself, can seize the believer out of God's hand, it says no one.

b. **Reasons related to the Son**

   i. *Jesus Death:* Paul ask two questions in Rom. 8:33, who will bring a charge against God's elect, and who condemns them? His answer that no one can is based on the death, resurrection, intercession and advocacy of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:34). If any sin can undo a believer's salvation and if, in fact, he can lose that salvation, then Jesus Christ's death did not pay for that sin. But it did. Paul asserts: Jesus also declared that He would lose nothing – of what the Father gave Him (Jn. 6:39-40), everyone who believes in Him will be raised at the last day[13]

   ii. *The Prayer of Jesus:* Jesus' present ministry in heaven of praying for His own consists of two aspects: a preventive ministry (intercession) and a curative ministry (advocacy)[5]. Chapter 17 of John's gospel illustrates the preventive aspect. There he prayed that Christians (v.17), that they would be united (v.21), that they would be in heaven with Him (v.24), and that they might behold His glory (v.24). Because of His unceasing

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intercession for Christians – he is able to save them completely and eternally (Heb7:25).

Advocacy comes into action when sin is committed (I Jn.2:1). Again, if any sin can undo salvation (and any can), then Satan has an airtight case against any believer whenever he sins (Rev. 12:10). Satan can justly demand the Christian's eternal damnation, and were it not for the advocate Christians would be condemned. But the Lord points to His work on Calvary that removes the guilt of all sins committed by the Christians, those committed before and after salvation, and this suffices to answer Satan's charge.

c. **Reasons related to the Holy Spirit**

i. *The Holy Spirit regenerates:* (that is, it gives new life to everyone who believes). If Christians are born again by the Holy Spirit when they believe, if one can renounce his faith to lose his salvation, then he would have the new birth taken away as well.

ii. *The Holy Spirit indwells:* (that is, resides in everyone who truly believes). If salvation can be lost then the presence of the Holy Spirit that resides within the life of the believer would have to be removed.

iii. *The Holy Spirit Baptizes:* (that is, places every true believer into the body of Jesus, thus joining each believer in mystical union). The Holy Spirit joins the believer to the body of Christ when he believes (I Cor. 12:13) therefore, if salvation can be lost, the believer would have to be detached from the body of Jesus Christ.

iv. *The Holy Spirit Seals:* (that is, by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer, the divine mark of ownership is eternally placed to indicate that the one indwelt in God's own eternal possession). The Holy Spirit seals the believer until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14, 4:30). If salvation can be lost, then His sealing would not be until the day of redemption but only until the day of sinning, or apostasy, or disbelief[14]. Of course, Holy scripture gives no hint that a Christian can lose the new birth, or that the holy spirit cannot indwelt in him/her or that he can be removed from the body of Christ (thus maiming

His body) or be unsealed. Salvation is eternal and completely secu
to all who believe.

To be sure, believers are warned against false profession and Christi
immaturity, but God never takes back the gift of His salvation once it is recei
Believers will not always persevere in godlessness. For instance, in Gal 2:11, P
the Apostle did not. Many Ephesians believers did not (Acts 19:18). Lot did
(2 Pet. 2:7). At the judgement seat of Christ there will be some whose works
be burned and who will be saved as through fire (I Cor. 3:15). Even though ev
believer will bear some fruit (4:5). It is difficult if not impossible to quantify h
much or what kind each one will bear and thus to make judgements as to
spiritual condition of an individual.

ECWA believes that there are some passages of the Bible that are misunderst
as invalidating the doctrine of eternal security. We shall examine some of th
passages to show that there are interpretations that do not contradict the doctr
of eternal security. ECWA teaches what might appear to go against the doctr
of eternal security is really about losing one's inheritance (reward), not abo
losing one's salvation. For instance, one can be dis-inherited without ceasing
be a member of the family[15].

A. Two passages severely warn against trying to replace the way of grace wi
the old way of the law. In Gal. 5:4, Paul clearly declares that those who atten
to be justified by the law have" fallen from grace". That is, trying to use the l
as the ground for justification is to fall away from grace which provides the on
way to be justified. The same kind of warning appears in Heb. 10:26-31. He
the writer warns that if a person rejects the truth of Christ death for sin, there
no other sacrifice for sin available and no other way to come to God.

B. Passages which warn against losing rewards (But not salvation). Paul speal
of this possibility in the "race" passage I Cor. 9:24-27. Races are run for reward
and Paul felt the need to live a disciplined life so that at the end he would not b
disapproved, nor, eliminated from the race, not losing his crown.

The Lord's illustration of Vine and the branches teaches the same truth (Jn
15:1-17). These branches are in Him, thus referring to believers. Believers, then
are to abide in Him in order to be fruitful. Abiding means to keep Christ's

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commandments (vs 10 & I Jn. 3:24). The believer who does not abide, though still in Christ and thus saved, loses his opportunities and rewards, both in life and at the judgement seat of Christ. The casting forth, withering, and burning refer not to loss of salvation but to loss of present witness and future rewards[16].

Another passage is Heb. 6:1-8, which is understood to be referring to "born again" people who are not growing in the word of God. The phrase in vs 4&5 clearly refers to a conversion experience. It is a strong admonition to go on in the Christian life. The warning against immaturity and fruitlessness are severe and the consequences significant. But those consequences do not include hell because of losing eternal life. Paul exalted in the confidence that nothing, including any other created thing (which has to include oneself), can separate the Christian from the love of God which is in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). And he again declared, if we are faithless, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). The consistency of God's character guarantees a secured salvation

The Teachings of Two Key Players on Eternal Security

i. The Armenians Teachings on Eternal Security

Guy Duty notes that the Arminians are the followers of a Dutch theologian named Jacobus Arminius who lived between (1560 – 1609).[17] Arminius engaged in bitter arguments about Calvinism, rejecting the Augustinian – Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Arminius' position is stronger than Calvin's for Arminius said; "If a person is truly regenerated and neglects grace and grieves the Holy Spirit with sin, he falls away totally and, finally falls from grace into eternal probation".[18] Arminius believed that Christians become the elect of God and remain so as long as they meet the conditions of salvation; he believed and taught that it was possible to fall away from Christ and be lost forever, because the Christian's security is dependent upon his state of grace. Here are some of the biblical passages Arminius used to support his views;

> We must pay more careful attention therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great

> salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him. (Heb. 2 - 1 – 3).

This passage teaches that diligent attention must be given to the scriptures re so that the truth does not slip away from us. It is the great concern of every tr Christian to give the most earnest heed to all biblical directions, and to prize the highly in his or her judgement as matters of the greatest importance, to hearke to them diligently, read them frequently, meditate on them closely and mix fa with them; either one believes the doctrine of eternal security or not. No pers can neglect something that he does not have. Paul warns the saints that every will be judged by God and that it is possible to let the truth and salvation slip aw

In Heb 10:38, Paul says that;

> Now, the Just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

This implies that the just shall live by faith, if they continuously move wi Jesus and do not "draw back". James teaches that anyone who is a hearer of t word but not a doer is self-deceived; and this religion is vain, but if he continu to do it, he will be blessed.

James says in Jas. 1; 23-25 that;

> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forget what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

II Pet. 1:10-11 says;

> Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Peter says Christians should make their calling and election sure by being diligent to their salvation. The names of God's elect shall never be removed from the book of life if they remained faithful to their calling.

ii. The Calvinists Teaching on Eternal Security

The Calvinists are the followers of John Calvin, a Christian French theologian who lived in Geneva between 1509 -1564 AD. He was a follower of Augustine, a monk who lived in the 5th century. He was the originator of the doctrine of predestination. Calvin developed Augustine's doctrine of predestination to a conclusion that he coined his own doctrinal position which he called "Calvinism". The concept of Calvinism on predestination is generally referred to as "eternal security" today[19]. The view of the Calvinists contends that once an individual is a recipient of the saving Grace of God he cannot fall from that state, but that he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

In other words, those who hold this view believe that no Christian can ever lose his salvation even if he falls into sin for it is by grace you have been saved... it is the gift of God not by works (Eph. 2:8). The doctrine of Eternal security is based on God's promise and not by works. It holds that if the elect could at some point lose their salvation, God's elect of them to eternal life, would not be truly effectual. In support of Calvin, Berckhof wrote; "If one has gotten salvation, he never loses it and if he is said to have lost it, he has never gotten it"[20]. This implies that those who are Christians cannot be lost. Though, they may fall into sin temporarily, they will eventually return and be saved and if they refuse to return, then they were never Christians in the first place. Anyone living consistently in sin is not a true follower of Jesus.

Beckhof further maintained that; "The believer in Jesus will continue to the very end because God never forsakes His work. The continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life will be brought to completion at eternity"[21]. The Calvinists maintain that the Christian kept by grace of God, will successfully endure all trials and temptations of this life and remain true to the Lord until death. To buttress this, Pink opined; "If there is no guarantee that salvation is permanent, believers may experience a great deal of anxiety and insecurity that will distract them from the major task of the Christian life"[22].

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The Calvinists support their views with many biblical passages, such as; "I gave to them eternal life, and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them out of my hand..." (Jn. 10:28-29) "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear... he will make a way of escape that you will be able to bear all temptations" (I Cor. 10:13). "...and into an inheritance that can never perish..." (I Pet. 1:4) "Who are kept by the power of God" (I Pet. 1:5).. Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb. 10:14).

Pink observed that; insisting that one must follow rules and laws (and be objectively good) in order to obtain or to keep one's salvation is actually an indirect opposition to the true gospel[23]. The New Testament does not teach that after the coming of Jesus we become new creatures, and that the man or woman will not sin again. One central premise in the gospel is that man is not good, nor can he be good. For example, Paul the apostle sometimes did things he did not want to do and that he still sometimes sinned (Rom. 7:15-24). Hence the need for the leading of the Holy Spirit and for God to chastise the Christians when they misbehave. The scripture tell us that sinning Christians are to be disciplined;

> Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes every one he accepts as a son (Heb. 12:6).

Therefore, it says nothing about being cut off from God for all eternity; this in conformity with the teachings of the Calvinists.

It is observed that some Christians may not be comfortable with this teaching because so many vices are committed everyday by some Christians. There corruption, embezzlement, rape, injustice, oppression, unholy acts being practiced by Christians. We cannot conclude therefore that these people have professed be Christians they are therefore saved forever. If they continue in sin they will definitely lose their salvation and go to hell. This is based on what the scripture says that one cannot continue in sin and expect grace to abound (Rom 6: therefore, one must remain permanently in the salvation experience in order be eternally saved.

Challenges of Doctrinal Issues in the 21st Century

Eternal security has been the doctrine of Evangelical Church Winning All that *"once you are saved you are saved forever"*, but however, there are divergent opinions through various interviews on the challenges of the doctrine. According to Kayode Olorunshola in an unstructured interview on Eternal Security is that one cannot lose salvation once he gets it, though such a person can commit sin but he should be careful not to relish in it, or else, if he dies relishing in sin, he has lost it forever. He continues that some pastors in ECWA do not understand the doctrine of eternal security because they do not have ECWA background.[24] According to Victoria Odeyemi, she says that once one is born again, God has adopted such a person as His own child, there is a need to consciously walk in the light of his word. She continues that one cannot lose his salvation once one does not die in sin, though repenting every time can be frustrating, the mind needs to grow in the word of God.[25] According to Abegunde Jones, he believes in the concept of eternal security but some don't stand on it because of different interpretation of scriptures by different denominations.[26] But when you have real encounter, your eternity will be secured. God knows how to bring his child back to Himself in form of reconciliation like the prodigal son in the bible. Some lose the salvation because they are not genuinely born again. According to Kolapo Odetayo, he quotes Hebrews 5:9, that Jesus is the author of eternal security. Misconception comes from the inability of some ministers to understand the scripture and some also read the bible out of context.[27] Ministers should study the scriptures properly because according to him, there are people who do not study the word of God as expected of them. Christians are to live faithfully in accordance with God's word.

According to Elder Olayemi Olaniran, he doesn't want to misjudge the concept of Eternal Security. He believes that once you are saved you are saved because of the word ETERNAL.[28] You cannot disown a child because deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) present in the human body is there to prove it, Children of God don't relish in sin. It is dangerous because if you are not on the same page with God then there is a problem. One doesn't believe it and move about doing evil but rather revalidate the relationship with one's God. Thus, asking for reform might be from new members of the Church, therefore, they should be given some time to grow

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in the word of God. God speaks to his children, and one should not allow sin t be a barrier to salvation.

According to S. O. Olabiyi, a pastor in Shalom Baptist Church, Ilorin. H said among others that eternal security is one of the statements of the Nigeria Baptist Convention (NBC) and he laid claim to the fact that truly once you a saved, you are saved forever and the stand of Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC does not change beyond this statement but that some of the young ministers i NBC now raised some conditions to be attached to the statement that once yc are truly saved, you are saved forever "if" you still work in line with the salvatio requirements as it is written in Romans 8:35 that who shall separate us from th love of Christ ...?[29] Though, there are some personalities that the bible recorde that they were saved but they backslide. For example, Demas in 2 Timothy 4:1(Ananias and Saphira Acts:5, the seven churches recorded in revelation in th book of Revelation which only a church was written to have kept the faith th Church of Syrmnia (Rev 3:8) like that of the first love they had for Christ. Th Holy Spirit dwells in every believer so the Spirit helps someone that is savec According to Rev. Aweda, J.T, he also laid claims that United Missionary Churc of Africa (UMCA) does not believe in eternal security, that human being is fallibl and once the person repents from sin and returns to Christ, the person can b restored.[30] It is possible one can lose that salvation, if he does not maintain thi salvation experience. According to Sunday Olaoye, as a person, initially I didn believe eternal security when I was new in Christ.[31] Though, it is right, becaus you will be strong in Christ. One can do follow-up for evangelism so that the can be deep in the word of God. Those asking for reform should be taught wha the concept is all about. According to Elder Samuel Babatunde those asking fo reform in terms of the position of the church on Eternal Security are talking basec on their understanding of their relationship with God.[32] We are not perfect bu must repent whenever we err.

Conclusion

It is pointed out that ECWA believes in the doctrine of Eternal Security of a truly saved person, and not one who professes to be a Christian with mere lips. The believer in Jesus who does not abide (though still in Christ and thus saved) loses

the opportunities and rewards, both in life and at the judgement seat of Jesus Christ and not his salvation. No matter how many conditions one kept, it is only by God's undeserved grace that Salvation is received, and one must continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43, Titus 2 11-12). Good works is to complement the saving grace of God.

The interpretation and teaching of eternal security is seen as a challenge within the Christian circles; it has been established that some Christians believe that those who hold to the teaching of eternal security of the believers in Jesus are purposely promoting a license to sin. On the other hand, some Christians believe that those who do not believe in the eternal security have to keep their salvation by works. Both sides often misrepresent the other and instead of being gracious on this debatable issue (as commanded in Rom.14:1-12), people accuse one another of being unbiblical.

We have examined some scriptures bearing in any way with eternal security. The paper has found some promises of eternal security for true believers and often plainly stated a condition attached to the keeping power of God over the promises The paper has also given repeated emphasis in this study that a Christian cannot merit nor earn salvation no matter how many conditions are kept. It is a gift of God and not of works. Many struggle helplessly to fulfill their responsibility to obey God's laws but end in defeat. Paul confirms this in his spiritual battle in Romans chapter seven; and then talks about the delivering power of the Holy Spirit in chapter eight of the same Romans. No one seems to have everything perfectly understood in relation to the topic of this paper. Each position has its strengths and weaknesses and if we understand human depravity properly, we know it does not take much to use the grace of God for evil no matter what position being held.

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Chapter Seventeen

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH, NIGERIA AND HER CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Prof. Rotimi Williams Omotoye, Dr. Mary Taiye Daniel &
Dr. Olumuyiwa Aduralere Ajetomobi

Abstract

Assemblies of God Church is one of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria which emphasizes the gift of the Holy Spirit and doctrine of salvation. The paper sought to find out why such a Church known for Spiritual gift and salvation is experiencing pronounced leadership crisis and moral decadence. The objectives of the paper therefore was to consider some of the challenges the Church is facing in the 21st century and its effects on the spiritual life of her members.

This paper adopted historical and analytical method of approach to achieve the objectives in order to analyse the unpleasant issues and challenges faced by the Church in the 21st century.

It was discovered that some of the issues confronting the doctrine of salvation in the Church included, ethnicity, misunderstanding of the issues raised by the Frontiers (Body of Ambassadors) and various charges levied against Rev. Paul Emeka, the General Superintendent of the Church. Again, that loss of focus on spiritual matters, misappropriation of Church funds, lack of trust among the leaders, witch hunting, and lack of sense of accountability. The effects included

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fighting and rivalry among top leaders, internal schism and break into splinter groups in the Church, distrust among leaders, decline in spiritual fervency of the members, lack of respect for the Church and the name of Jesus Christ by non members of the Church.

The paper concluded that the Church should act fast in getting to know that only the beginning of any crisis is known; but no one knows how it will end, hence, the Frontiers should come to an agreed terms with other members of the Church, so as to allow peace to reign. The issues at stake should be quickly and properly addressed by the Frontiers and other key leaders. Lessons should be learnt from the crisis and the Church leadership must be proactive and ensure that a reoccurrence is avoided.

The paper recommended that crisis could be resolved by revisiting the Church constitution; that leadership should have a well written articulated consensus; also that major matters of the Church and issues of ethnicity should be well addressed. It was also recommended that there should be a working committee of elderly and spiritually filled individuals within and outside the denomination that would ensure dialogue between the warring parties. The constitution of the Church should be reviewed to accommodate righteousness, perseverance and uprightness. There should also be clarity of ambiguities; and encourage the members to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and not to the leaders in words only.

Keywords: *Sin, Salvation, Assemblies of God, Leadership Crisis*

Introduction

The Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria (AGCN) is one of the denominations in the comity of Classical Pentecostal organizations in Nigeria. It originated in the United States of America in 19141. The Church made inroads into African countries, such as South Africa, the Belgian, Congo, Nigeria and Ghana. It was brought into Umuahia, an Igbo community in Southeastern Nigeria in 1939. It was affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ (CJC), an indigenous Pentecostal Church, led by the late Augustus Ehurieiwe Wogu2. The Church has grown numerically from its little beginning in 1939 with a handful of members to about

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2.6 million members with over 14,300 local branches and 11,650 pastors including 50 missionaries working in Africa, Asia, Europe and America, as at 20223.

The Church has spread into all the geo-political zones in Nigeria and has created seventy-three (73) administrative districts and eighteen (18) areas making a total of ninety-one (91) units in all, for effective management of the Church (This number may have increased since 2014 when this research was carried out)4. Each of these units enjoy its autonomy but relates in fellowship with one another, under one General Council with its central administrative headquarters at the Evangel House, Plot R8, Ozubulu Street, Independence Layout, Enugu, in Enugu State, Nigeria. The General Superintendent, whose office is at Enugu, takes the general oversight of the entire General Council with all the District Superintendents and Area Supervisors/Area Chairmen (as the case may be) reporting to him through the Executive Committee of the Church. During her General Council meetings held every four years, the AGCN elects its Executive Committee (EC) members who are collectively charged with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the national Church. This committee is headed by the General Superintendent. He is assisted by an Assistant General Superintendent, a General Secretary and a General Treasurer. These four elected persons constitute the Board of Administration of the General Council Leadership. Along with other District Superintendents elected in the Council (each from the various zones of the country) and one United States of American missionary representative. They form the Executive Committee of the AGCN. This Executive Committee is subject to the General Council of the Church (the Council in session) which comprises all the ordained pastors and one delegate from each of the "set-in-order" sections from the zones of the entire national Church. It is this Council in Session that is the apex authority of the Church, hence it is the highest decision-making body of the Church. Although the Executive Committee members serve as the administrators of the Church, the Council in Session is the highest authority of the Church. This arrangement makes for checks and balances in the Church since authority does not reside in one particular individual.

On the other hand, the various Districts are under the leadership of district Presbyteries which are headed by District Superintendents, while Area Counseling

Committees (CC) are headed and led by Area Supervisors. Each of the District and Areas has its independent government, constitution and by-laws or policies as allowed by the General Council constitution. Although each unit is subject to the supervision of the General Council through the Executive Committee, they enjoy a level of autonomy. Under the said Districts and Areas, there are sections and groups as the cases may be. Each section or group has a Sectional or Group Leader at the helm of affairs that the pastors within the said sections and groups report to monthly. The Group or Sectional Leader, in turn, reports to the District Superintendent or Area Supervisor. The Superintendent and the Area Supervisor reports to the General Superintendent. The administrative set-up makes for interdependence and strong bonding among the various arms of leadership and does not give room for any of the leaders to operate as a despot. The Assemblies of God, Nigeria has made some meaningful and remarkable contributions to the Nigerian society and beyond. These include missions and Church planting; education, economics, politics, as well as in other social spheres. Also, the Church has established to its credit, ten (10) theological colleges and two (2) auxiliary Bible schools for the training of her indigenous pastors, school teachers and Church leaders. Five (5), out of these have grown to become degree-awarding institutions and are located in all geo-political divisions of Nigeria.

Statement of Faith in Assemblies of God Church

Assemblies of God is a Pentecostal and evangelical denomination. Thus A/G practices Presbyterian and congregational system of Church government; is Armenian in her soteriology; pre-millennial in eschatology; keswickian among the Holiness Movement groups; Trinitarian instance, has intense missionary consciousness and evangelistic zeal and believes in social services, secular and theological education. Therefore, A/G maintains a decentralized accounting system and believes "earn-as-you-work" philosophy of remuneration. Assemblies of God like any other denomination has her creed or statement of faith. This is referred to as "Tenets of faith".

There are sixteen items in A/G Statement of faith. They include:

1. We believe that the Bible is the word of God, *(2 Tim. 3:15, 16, I Pet. 2:2).*

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2. We believe in the one true and living God *(Deut. 6:4, Mark 12:29, Is. 43:16, 11, Matt. 28:19, Luke. 3:22).*
3. We believe in the separation of man from God and in the way back to God *(Gen. 1:26-31, 3:1-7, Rom. 5:12-21).*
4. We believe in the salvation of man *(Titus 2:11, 3:5-7; Rom. 10:13-15; Lk. 24:47).*
5. We believe in Water Baptism (Matt. 28:19; Act 10:47, 48; Rom. 6:4; Act 20:21; Heb. 10:22).
6. We believe in the Lord's Supper (2 Peter 1:4; 1 Cor. 11:26).
7. We believe in the promise of the Father *(Luke. 24: 49; Acts 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9).*
8. We believe in the sign of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. *(Acts 2:4; I Cor. 12:10-14, 28).*
9. We believe in complete sanctification *(Heb. 12:14, I Pet. 1:5, 16; I Thess. 5:23-24; 1 John 2:6).*
10. We believe in the Church *(Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:22; Heb. 12:23).*
11. We believe in the workers and their work *(Mart 16:16-20; Eph. 4:11-13).*
12. We believe in healing from God. *(Isa. 53:4, 5; Matt. 8: 16-17; I Peter 2:24).*
13. We believe in the joyful hope. *(I Tess. 4:16, 17; Rom. 8:23; Titus 2:13; I Cor. 15:51-52).*
14. We believe in the time Christ will rule for one thousand years (*2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 1911-14; Rom. 11:26, 27; Rev. 20: 1-7).*
15. We believe in the lake of fire *(Rev. 19:20; 20: 10-15).*
16. We believe in the New Heaven and the New Earth *(2 Pet. 3: 14; Rev. 21 and 22).*

All these beliefs are commonly shared by Assemblies of God all over the world; Doctrine of the 'Four Core Beliefs' of the Assemblies of God which include: Salvation, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Divine Healing and the Second Coming of

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Christ. However, the purpose of this paper, the doctrine of salvation, issues and challenges will be discussed.

The Concept of Salvation

The word Salvation comes from the Greek word "Sozo" which has the basic meaning of rescuing or preserving from danger5. Salvation in Christianity means deliverance or redemption. It means saving man from sin and its consequences, which include death. For instance, when Jesus was on the cross, the passers mocked Him and said, come down from the cross and save yourself (Mark 5:30). Some said "He saved others... but he can't save Himself (Matt 27:42).

In this context, salvation referred to being delivered from death6. Closely related to this can be found in (Matthew 14:30) when Peter tried to walk on the water to meet Jesus, he began to sink and he cried out, "Lord, save me". Another meaning of "sozo" is to free one from disease or demonic possession. For example, the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years was healed after touching the hem of Jesus garment (Mathew 9:22). The word "has healed" pronounced by Jesus in the passage, is the same Greek word Salvation translated "save" in other places7. The word Salvation communicates the thought of deliverance, safety, restoration, and healing in theology.

"Salvation" or "save" has a very broad meaning. McCain opines that; the basic idea is to deliver from death or disease and to restore to the normal condition8. However, the major use of the word "Salvation" in the Bible denotes a work of God on behalf of men, it is a major doctrine of the Bible which includes redemption, reconciliation, repentance, forgiveness, and others. The Biblical Salvation is a supernatural act which God alone can accomplish. It means to be rescued from sin in the past, in the present and in the future.

Apparently, the word "saved", or "salvation" is used in three different ways. Firstly, the scripture speaks of salvation as if it were a completed act in the past and speaks of salvation as if it were something that is ongoing and also speaks as if salvation will be something that will ultimately take place in the future9. Salvation in the past implies that Christians are now delivered from the condemnation of sin and from the punishment that such sin deserves (Rom. 8:1). Meaning that

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Christians will not be condemned nor punished by God for their sins if they are joined to Jesus Christ by faith.

Christians have been declared righteous in the presence of God (2 Cor. 5:21). In Rev 1:5, God says, 'He has freed us from our sins, by his blood'. This implies being "saved" is used in the past tense, it describes the deliverance from sin that the Christian has experienced. With that deliverance such Christian is qualified for an eternal life.

Saved in the present: Because of the sinful nature of man, Christians still have to wrestle with the flesh even when their sins are forgiven. Sins can be overcome by the resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual strength has been provided in order to overcome the power of sin in the lives of the Christian. When one is controlled by the Holy Spirit, he can overcome sin's corruption (Rom 8:11-13). If one chose to yield to the Holy spirit instead of yielding to the desires of the flesh, one will overcome. The resurrection power of Jesus Christ will give life to mortal bodies through his spirit who lives in you (Rom 8:11). This is being saved from sin in the present (Rom 5:10). Therefore, salvation is an ongoing process.

Salvation in the future: At the return of Jesus and the establishment of his kingdom, he will deliver his followers from the presence of sin and its effects on the world (Rom 8: 18-25). In that future day their salvation will be complete. They will have resurrection bodies like that of Jesus Christ (I Thess 4:16-17, Phil 3: 20-21). The book of Isaiah 65: 17-25, Rom 8: 21 say even the world itself will be changed into a place of perfect peace and beauty. It is for this reason that paul says in Rom 13:11 that "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believe". This indicates salvation from sin in future (I Pet 1:5).

Biblically, moral evil that is in the world or any thoughts, word, action that are contrary to the law of God are considered to be sinful. In 1 Jn 3: 4, the Bible describes sin as the breaking or transgression of God's law.Sin is also regarded to be a form of disobedience or rebellion against God. Having seen sin it is not possible to remain in sin and at the same time enjoy the goodness of God. This is why Paul says that we cannot remain in sin and expect God's grace to abound (Rom 6:1).

It is apparent to know that God is holy and there is no one who relish in sin and expect God to save him. Apparently, the salvific intention of God which,

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theologically was brought about by the death of Christ is of importance in the consideration of sin. Rom 3:23 says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the implication of this is that all humanity have sinned but at the same time those who accept Jesus Christ as saviour are saved or have salvation. In the process of accepting Christ, the person becomes redeemed, he/she is not expected to remain or continue in sin.

At the instance of being saved, there are consistent in commitment in Christ and the abandonment of sin. From the doctrinal point of view, those who accepted Christ are point of view, those who accepted Christ, sin has no dominion over that person. Furthermore, such a person does not relish in sin because God is Holy and all who believe in Him must be holy (1 Pet 1:16). In this context, anyone who truly believes in Christ Jesus atoning work and who has overcome relishing in sin and who does not back slide from this status will have salvation. Therefore, salvation has nothing to do with sin as it cannot be guaranteed with sin as it is to this extent that the abandonment of sin in Christian doctrine becomes the epicenter of the teaching of salvation.

In summary, sin has left the human race in a terrible situation. God's plan for mankind is to be saved from sin. In the bible, God pleads with people to call to him to be saved (Isaiah 45:22, Rom 10:13). It is not possible for man to save himself. Only God was able to make resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God took his wrath against the sins of man and thus made it possible for Christians to be forgiven and declared righteous.

Some Prevailing Challenges in Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria in the 21st Century

The Statement of Fundamental Truths states, "Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God". The Assemblies of God holds the Arminian position on salvation. While it agrees with the Calvinist position that God is sovereign, at the same time, it believes that mankind has free will—free to accept or reject God's gift of salvation and eternal life. Therefore, the Assemblies of God disapproves of the doctrines of double predestination and the unconditional security of the believers, which holds that once saved it is impossible

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for a person to be lost. Instead, the Assemblies of God believes that salvation is received and kept by faith, if faith in Christ is lost, then salvation is lost.

Assemblies of God Church is one of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria which emphasizes the manifestation of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The paper therefore found that the Church known for Spirit gift is experiencing some uncharitable challenges in the 21st century which is;

After barely three years of Rev Prof Paul Emeka as the General Superintendent (GS) of the Church, trouble began in September 2013 when some members called 'The Ambassadors', wrote a petition against some of unbridled practices of the then GS, Rev. Paul Emeka.10 The five-page petition, dated September 2013, was signed by 12 members of the body, mainly Igbo. It was addressed to all district presbyteries of the AGC in Nigeria. He was accused of high handedness, financial mismanagement and abuse of office. They claimed that he had arrogated too much power to himself and operated like a General Overseer or Founder of the Church. They accused him of spending over 250 million naira on the purchase of a building in Germany without the approval of the Executive Council (EC), as well as misappropriating another 200 million naira from the Pension Fund without due process.11Apparently, it behooves one to see these allegations coming from a saved or born again leader who knows the statements of faith of the Church. These practices alleged him, contradicts the laid down statement of faith (4) which states that "We believe in salvation of man". For the Church to have elected him (Rev Prof Paul Emeka)as the GS, he must have been thought to be saved.

Rev Paul Emeka was also accused of introducing alien practices into the Church: one of them was wearing 'big rings on some fingers of both hands'. These practices, "The Ambassadors" said: was against what the Church stands for. They alleged that the practice has been adopted by many upcoming ministers, dubbed the 'GS boys', in the Church and that Emeka had created a universal impression that he is the General Superintendent (GS) as well as the General Overseer (GO) and the physical personification of the AGN.12 The AGC has a way dressing, it is expected that a minister of God should follow the rules if there will be a ring on a minister of God's hand, it should a wedding ring and will not be on the both hands of which he was not known for such dressing until he assumed the position of General Superintendent. He started introducing such practices to the point

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that the youth started emulating him and it is believed that a saved person should moderately in the presence of God and everywhere he or she appears.

It was also alleged that Emeka wanted the freedom to act without being checkmated and wielded executive powers without consultations. The ambassadors accused him of living in opulence and wasting the Church's resources for personal aggrandisement, especially when travelling overseas; he was alleged to have spent $6000 on a luxury wristwatch in London during a shopping spree in which he did not deny when this allegation was made against him. Despite the existence of a palatial office complex for him in the Evangel House (the administrative headquarters of the AGN), He also built another 'befitting personal office edifice in Enugu. All these acts, they alleged, angered many leaders and members of the Church. In the heat of all these allegations, Emeka lost the support of 11 members of the Executive Council and deliberately stayed away from the convocation of the General Committee (GC) where these issues and many others would be discussed. He also called the convocation *illegal* and tried to obtain a court injunction to stop the GC's meeting.13 At that point, the deliberations became tense and the suspension of Emeka was pronounced under the watch of Revd. Dr Charles Osueke, the then retired GS who chaired the deliberations.

Emeka's Assistant General Superintendent (AGS), Revd. Dr. Chidi Okoroafor, an Igbo who had been at loggerheads with him while contesting for the position, was pronounced the acting General Superintendent with immediate effect.14Emeka challenged his suspension in court because the AGN has never used votes to decide on the suspension or punishment of an erring member. He alleged that the retired GS, Late Rev Charles Osueke, an Imo State indigene, was using promotional efforts to impose Okoroafor, an indigene of Abia State, on the Church, an act that he would never accept. Thus, the national Church (the AGN) split into two with one group supporting Emeka and another group supporting Okoroafor. This helps to point out the causes of the crisis which include:

The Challenges in Assemblies of God Church include Corruption and High-handedness; Rebate problems; The problem of Spread; Several Litigations; Tenure of Office; Ethnic Politics and Various Press Releases

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Corruptions and High-handedness/Dictatorship

Many Church leaders have held on to power and are refusing to hand over leadership. This approach to leadership is attributed to insecurity and lack of integrity in the ministry. Probably, those in leadership fear that their names will be forgotten or are covering up something or worst still they may have converted their Churches to an enterprise. Roger N. McNamara says in his article15, "Some pastors, ignoring Peter's admonition not to "lord it over God's heritage" (Peter 5:3), exercise dictatorial control over every aspect of the Church's ministry. They appoint and remove deacons at will. They move funds around anyhow as they fit. They make decisions about programs and properties without seeking counsel or permission from anyone. When they snap their fingers people jump. Everyone knows they are the "boss" who is in control. Nothing happens without their permission." These words echo exactly what happens to many Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria.

Apart from society's criticism, this kind of leadership has crippled the Church itself. There is no transparency in the leadership, gifts and potentials are suppressed and this has made it impossible for a smooth transitioning. Such kind of leadership has substituted God's will for leaders with personal interests. As Paul Jackson rightly observed, "Pastoral authority is not absolute. Pastors are, first and foremost, under-shepherds to the Chief Shepherd, to whom they are accountable (see Heb 13:17 and Jas 3:1). Pastors are also accountable to their congregations (1 Tim 5:20), ultimately being subject to removal by the same (if they disqualify themselves from office)."16 The case of corruption and high handedness has been found in Rev Emeka's allegation in which he has been accused of malicious use of the Church's resources in which the Church never expected of a true leader who had been elected as General Superintendent of the Church through prayers, trust and a conviction of being a saved soul but the issue in Assemblies of God now is that they find it difficult to elect leaders that can be trusted.

Rebate Problems

Although, the Church is advancing in terms of membership and at the same time it has put a bit of burden on members in terms of putting everything they want to do at the General council, district, and mission field must be paid by members.

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There was a time it was passed to the whole Church that they wanted to change the car of the General Superintendent in which some members within the Church had to question the authority that how many members have they bought cars for, and how many members can come out to say he has a car or has a good car. Then the question of what they were using the money sent to them for and some members were not pleased with this, some left and some fought it to a point. Even in Ibadan, Oyo State, the same thing also happened when they wanted to buy a car for the District Superintendent, the District would levy the whole Church and when some women executives could not hold this, according to Mrs. Bada, they had to call the leaders and poured out their grievances and since then, they have looked for a way of doing things now that when the District wants to levy, they will do that and add money to it from the account of the District. The women executives made them to realize that they are not making the local Churches to grow structurally, spiritually, financially and among others because every penny is taken away from the Church to either the General Council or the District council.

Truly saved believer should be accountable and transparent in financial issues committed into their hands, but some of the issues the leaders in Assemblies of God are having is the issue of misappropriation of funds in which Rev Paul Emeka was accused of and he was not apologetic but rather claimed that he informed the Executive Council of the use of the fund, which he intended to use to curb embezzlement that he has gotten information of.

However, when one is controlled by the Holy Spirit, he can overcome sins and corruption. Rev Emeka chose to yield to the desires of the flesh instead of yielding to the holy spirit therefore, refusing to be saved from sin in the present.

Holier than thou attitude

The Assemblies of God Church unlike other denominations have a standard that they feel should not and cannot be compared to other doctrinal standards and beliefs. They do not participate in any program outside their Church, whether it is a Christian oriented program or not. The Assemblies of God Church find every other Church doctrine underrated to them. Speaking in tongues, words of knowledge, word of wisdom, divine knowledge among others are believed to be of higher standard in their Church other than all other denominations outside their

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Church. This is difficult to reconcile with Heb 10:25 that says, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together".

Assemblies of God Church has an institutional means for conflict resolution like the Church boards, deacons, elders, councils, presbyteries and disciplinary committees.In the Assemblies of God Churches (AG) (a branch located at Salvation Army Roadat Mokola, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria which is the sectional headquarters), the conflict resolution body is known as, Church board and it is made up of the local Church Pastor and Deacons. The number of Deacons depends on the size of the congregation. In conflicts like doctrinal conflicts, the constitution of the Church, the tenets of faith ("what we believe") and the Bible are utilized in resolving conflicts.

For domestic and personality conflicts reported to the Church for their intervention, the parties involved are invited to present their grievances against one another. The parties to a conflict are met individually but not in their houses, Biblical injunctions are used to caution, reprimand and appeal to them to go and apologize to each other, but where this fails, the Church board falls back to the Biblical injunction that says "the fellow should be handed over to Satan and other members should consider such a fellow as a stranger in the household of God" and this is what is commonly known by members of AG as "Back-sit" (a disciplinary measure). Effective interpersonal problem-solving skills contribute to violence prevention and encourage acceptance of difference and resiliency. But how effective is this strategy of interpersonal conflict management? Where there is a conglomeration of serious Church conflicts, the Church pastor often utilizes the bible generally while preaching on Sundays and during mid-week services to conscientize and appeal to the conflicting parties to let go the feuds for peace's sake. All these efforts are made by the members of the "Church board to reconcile the parties and they were warned to desist from conflicts and where it warrants discipline it would be exerted on the defaulting member. But if after these efforts to reconcile the conflict continues after several warnings, the defaulter would be suspended while total ex-communication from the Church is seen as the last resort; especially where every conflict resolution strategy available to the Church has been applied.

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However, according to the Sectional Leader at the Assemblies of God ChurchMokola, Ibadan, "there is an avenue for a suspended member in a local Church branch to appeal to the Sectional and District Headquarters. There, the presbyters (not the Church board) revisit the matter and if peradventure they could not resolve the conflict at this level, then, the Executive Committee situated at the "General Council" Headquarters Enugu State Nigeria, (the highest level of arbitration) can also be appealed to if the suspended member is not found guiltythere, the suspension would be lifted. It is worthy to note that the decision of "General Council on any matter is final. Members are not permitted to go to court although, the Church has records of individuals who had at one time or the other taken the Church to court and in that case, the Church has no option than to appear before the court".17

Tenure of Office

Assemblies of God Church constitution and bye-laws stands as one of the causes of the present crisis, as it does not specify a mandatory number of terms that an elected official should remain in office in which the key players of the crisis evolve. The constitution does not specify that the offices of the 'four generals' (General Superintendent, Assistant General Superintendent, General Secretary, and General Treasurer), should be rotated throughout the 11 zones of the country to accommodate the minority population (those who do not fall within the purview of the Zones of the Igbos) within the Church polity. If the constitution had specified a mandatory number of terms and had given room for a rotation all over the zones of the country, in a way, the issue of ethnicity as another cause of the crisis would not have surfaced and when an Igbo man was sacked, they would have known that the position does not belong to their zone and would have resolved the crisis or to have settled without making it public.

The afore mentioned challenges are some of the challenges prevalent in Assemblies of God Church that is known for the direct word of God and the doctrine of Salvation is a core belief but it behooves this paper to discover that the mentioned challenges is bedeviling the Church and the effects of the challenges are that members are no longer having trust in the ministers of God anymore.The Spiritual life of some of the members is going cold, people are no longer faithful

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in their tithes and offerings believing that the money they are realizing is making them to embezzle as they have been accused. And morally,some of the members are beginning to see that they are using lies to hold the Church together because of the various views the two factions are given in their submissions;lack of respect for the Church and the name of Christ by the outsiders in that they never wanted to hear about the Church preaching against sin due to the various reports available to members and non-members of the Church.

The paper therefore concludes that there is the need for Assemblies of God Church to trace her step back to the core teaching of the Church especially the focus of this paper which is the doctrine of Salvation that culminates to lack of observing the core teaching or the application of salvation in the administration of the Church and therefore the paper makes the following recommendations that:

i. Involvement of the Holy Spirit in directing the affairs of the Church through a dedicated and trustworthy leader;

ii. The issue of tribalism in the Church should be revisited to have the whole geopolitical zone represented at the General Council level of the Church;

iii. The constitution and polity of the Church should state the number of years a leader can spend on a position in other for probity and accountability to set in;

iv. They should try to make the person coming into power know that the Church doesn't belong to him but to the whole members;

v. They should re-organise the hierarchical structure of the Church by making a compulsory resignation of all other General council members and have a credible and God-fearing election of new leaders into the position;

vi. That the Church should be ready to have a round table talk to bring the two factions together and have a credible dialogue;

vii. That there is a need for a by-election to get new sets of leaders for the Church;

viii. That the Church should set up a committee that would give the members a straight record of the crisis, instead of the various submissions by the two factions;

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ix. That there is a need for a revisitation of the Church's constitution especially as it relates to tenure of office by each of the Church leaders, and;

x. That there should be a form of progressive politics whereby, the local Churches will in a way be faithfully involved in having a say in the polity of the Church management.

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