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VOLUME

Editorial

ARTICLES

Critiquing

Mepai

Martin L

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AKUNGBA JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND AFRICAN CULTURE

VOLUME 6,

NUMBER 1,

January-June 2018

Editorial 03

ARTICLES

Critiquing the Motivations for Luther's Reformation 06
Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola

Martin Luther has Resurrected: An Appraisal of GAFCON and Anglican Orthodoxy 18
Benson Ohihon Igboin & Nelson Olusegun Adewole

'This is Nigeria!' Creativity, Development and Contemporary 'Indulgence' Amongst some Pentecostal Churches 34
Babatunde Adedibu

The Beauty and The Beast of the sale of Indulgences: Implications for Contemporary Church 49
Akiti Glory Alamu

John Calvin's Teachings on Eternal Security and Its Implication on Contemporary Church in Nigeria 63
Mary Taiye Daniel

Is Church God's Business or Man's? An Exegesis of Acts 20:28-31 76
Akintunde, Felix Bamidele & Akindolie, Akinwumi Ambrose

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth in 2Timothy 2:15 and its Theological Implication for the Contemporary Church 88
Michael O. Oyetade

The Beauty And The Beast of The Sale of Indulgences: Implications For Contemporary Church

AKITI GLORY ALAMU

Abstract

The phenomenon of the sale of indulgences had been a doctrinal trademark of the Catholics until it was challenged by Martin Luther. No doubt, the sale of indulgences was for a purchase of pardon from sins committed by laity. In addition, it was a means of raising fund for the building of St. Peter Basilica. However, the sale of indulgence was not only auctioned to the living, but also, the dead, which sparked-off reformation. Despite this phenomenon, the contemporary church is yet to learn her lesson. To this end, this paper, therefore, adopts historical and theological approach leading to the fact that the sale of indulgences in contemporary times is labelled 'transactional giving', 'quasi-magical worldview' and 'kingdom principle', which ensure that heavenly blessings are released to givers and as well increase their giving to God. The paper postulates that whatever name accorded 'giving' should be re-assessed in modern context so that the auctioneers of giving presently will not close heaven against the poor faithful. The paper, therefore, concludes that not all givers are candidates of heaven.

Keywords: Beauty, Beast, Sale, Indulgence, Contemporary, Church.

Introduction

The most popular and famous tradition of the universal church during the medieval period was the sales of indulgences. As a matter of fact, an indulgence was a payment to the Catholic Church that purchased a pardon or an exemption for punishment for some kinds of sins. The sale of indulgence by the auctioneers raked in large sums of money that flowed into the papal coffers, year after year. No doubt, this 'carbon tax', which also meant indulgence made popes to secure worldly gains and prestige, and parts of this income was also used for many righteous purposes, both religious and civil. However, this insurance cover from sin was extended to the dead of whom this sale of indulgence was not meant for the dead. This exceeded official Catholic doctrine and much greed, abuse, extortion and corruption set in. The abuse and excesses of indulgences was challenged by Martin Luther- a monk and German theologian who nailed his 95 theses at the castle church in Wittenberg on the 31st October, 1517. This period marked the beginning of the crisis that

brought about sectarianism, proliferation and commercialization of churches.

Having broken the cord of the universal church, Protestants and the likes emerged, thinking that such harm has not been enough as food for thought. Instead, the contemporary church perhaps the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have deployed ways like 'transnational giving', meaning giving beyond one's financial reach and 'quasi-magical worldview' which implies giving with automatic financial reward as a yardstick to extract money from the poor faithful. Thus, the auctioneers of transnational giving assure the givers that their substance facilitates heavenly blessings for them and subsequently increases their giving to God. This implies that heaven is closed against the poor faithful. Therefore, it is the intention of this paper to examine the beauty and the beast of the sales of indulgences vis-à-vis the current trends in contemporary church.

The Meaning of the Sale of Indulgences

Indulgence as a Catholic doctrine is open to several interpretations, and there is no universally acceptable definition. Yet, attempts would be made to give various submissions of some scholars. To start with, Jim Jones sees indulgence as a pardon for certain kinds of sin, sold in the late medieval period.¹ Also, Cross describes indulgence as a payment made to the Catholic church by catholic faithful with an exception from punishment for some types of sins.² Durant Will, who was a former priest and a scholar depicts that "an indulgence, therefore, was the remission by the church, of part of all of the temporal i.e. not external penalties incurred by sins whose guilt has been forgiven in the sacrament of penance".³ In addition, indulgence is a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins. Apart from that, an indulgence is the purchase of a pardon which secures the buyer's salvation or releases the soul of another from purgatory.⁴ Swiss theologian and historian, Philip Schaff defines it simply as the remission of the temporal (not the external) punishment of sin (not of sin itself) on condition of penitence and the payment of money to the church or to some charitable object.⁵

The Catholic Church was authorized by Papal encyclical to absolve penitent from the guilt of his sins and from punishment in the hellish inferno of the hereafter.⁶ According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church,

indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed

¹Jim Jones, Background to and against Sale of Indulgence by Martin Luther (West Chester: University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 75.

²F. L. Cross, (ed), The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 1471.

³Durant Will. The Story of Civilization, The Reformation, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1989), 77.

⁴Austin Flannery, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Document (Northport, New York: Costello, 1980), 62-79.

⁵Philip Schaff, A Brief History of Universal Church in the Medieval Era, <http://www.org/eeellschaff/hcc.html> accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

⁶Jones, 76.

conditions through the action of the church which as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.⁷

In 1967, Pope Paul VI reiterated Catholic teaching on indulgence and added new reforms in his apostolic constitution. To him, the pope will give plenary indulgence as a complete relief from the suffering of purgatory to people who participate in the celebration of Mass. In 1976, indulgence has been variously described as a 'carbon tax', 'Insurance cover', 'selling forgiveness', 'pardon from sin', and 'buy your way to heaven'.⁸ Here, it must be emphasised that the popular and greatest auctioneer of indulgence in the medieval period that sparked off reformation was Cardinal John Tetzel (1465-1519), a monk who sold indulgence in Germany in 1517 for Albert of Hohenzollern (a German noble) and Pope Leo X.⁹

The above reveals that at the beginning, the sale of indulgence was sold as pardon from sin. After the medieval period indulgence became abused as it was extended to the dead. Meanwhile, it is a known fact that the dead is resting in his jurisdiction of which he does not know what transpires here on earth. The inclusion of the dead on indulgence infiltrated Martin Luther against John Tetzel who was the auctioneer who was raking in money for both Albert and Pope Leo X.

An Overview of the Sale of Indulgences

The idea of paying an indulgence goes back to the patristic era. During the Roman period, *remissiotributi* and *abolito* were seen as amnesty or pardon granted by the Roman Emperor during special occasions.⁸ Thus, the bishops who attended the council of Epaone (held in 517AD in the kingdom of Burgundy) later expanded the idea of indulgence with an edict that shortened or lightened the penance of the apostates.⁹ In point of fact, 668 AD would not be easily forgotten in Church history as the Archbishop of Canterbury Theodore authorized the monetary payment to him and the church in lieu of penance and absolution in his penitential. This marked the first instance that Christians in England offered willingly monetary compensation for the remission of their sins.¹⁰ The money the church received from the Christians in Europe was sent to Rome for various purposes.

The sales of indulgences increased in leaps and bounds during the chaotic and gory years of the crusader. Even, some church historians believed that the sale of indulgences was a by-product of the crusaders in the 12th and 13th Centuries. But these scholars such as Vera Wilke and Harry Boer did not know that the

⁷History of the Christian Church, Vol.VII, Modern Christianity. The German Reformation- Christian Classics Ethereal library, <http://www.org/ceell/hcc7.11,111,1,html>, accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

⁸Jones, 77.

⁹Jones, 78.

¹⁰Jones, 77.

phenomenon of indulgence historically began during the patristic era. However, the sale of indulgences continued during the crusades, because people risked dying without the benefit of a priest to perform the appropriate ceremonies.¹¹ Without equivocation, the Crusaders were promised immediate salvation if they, while fighting to free the Christian holy city at Jerusalem.¹² It is of interest to note that church leaders justified this position by arguing that good works earned salvation, making Jerusalem accessible to Christians was an example of good works. Overtime, Church leaders decided that paying money to support good works was as good as performing good works.¹³ Over several centuries, the practice of indulgence metamorphosed and Church leaders opined that they had inherited an unlimited amount of good works from Jesus, and the credit for these good works could be sold to believers in the pattern of indulgences.¹⁴ In other words, indulgences functioned like "confession Insurance" against eternal condemnation consequent upon purchasing an indulgence.¹⁵

It is obvious that, in the medieval period, the sale of indulgences spread to include forgiveness for the sins of the people who were already dead. This found expression from a sermon by Cardinal John Tetzel, the monk who sold indulgences in Gutenberg.

Don't you hear the voices of your dead parents and other relatives crying out; have mercy on us, for we suffered great punishment and pain. From this, you could release us with a few alms... We have created you, fed you, cared for you and left you our temporal goods. Why do you treat us so cruelly and leave us to suffer in the flames, when it takes only a little to save us?¹⁶

Even the post-reformatory period also lent credence to the idea of indulgences. The Council of Trent (1545-1564) issued papal decree that gave salutary effort to Church teaching on indulgences. Apparently, the Council teaches and commands that the use of indulgences most salutary to the Christian people and approved by the authority of the holy councils is to be retained in the Church, and it condemns with anathema those who assert that they are useless or deny that there is in the Church the power of granting them.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the approved tradition of the Church must be upheld by avoiding extremes, lest by too great facility, ecclesiastical discipline would be

¹¹The Historical Origin of Indulgences' Catholic News Commentary Information Resources and the Liturgical Year, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?> Accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

¹²On Indulgences, <http://www.etwn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6INDULG.HTM> accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

¹³On Indulgences, <http://www.etwn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6INDULG.HTM> accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

¹⁴On Indulgences, <http://www.etwn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6INDULG.HTM> accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

¹⁵On Indulgences, <http://www.etwn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6INDULG.HTM> accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

¹⁶HelmarJughaus, *Die Reformation In AugenzeugenBerichten*, (Dusseldorf: Karl Rauch Verlag, 1967). 44.

¹⁷Flannery, 73.

weakened.¹⁸ However, desiring that the abuses which have become associated with them and by any reason of which this excellent name of indulgences is blasphemed by the heretics be amended and rectified.¹⁹ This unbridled extreme has been sanctioned in a general perspective by the present decree that all evil traffic in them, which has been a most profound source of abuses among Catholic must be completely abolished. Other abuses, however, of this kind which have sprung from superstition, ignorance, irreverence, or from whatever other sources, since by reason of the manifold corruptions in places and provinces where they are committed, they cannot conveniently be prohibited individually.²⁰ This approved tradition of the papacy had mandated all Bishops diligently to make note of each in his Church, and report them to the next provincial synod.²¹ Since 1967, indulgence, having been modified as plenary becomes a regular source of income for the Church.

As earlier noted, in the medieval period, the sale of indulgences was expanded to include forgiveness for the sins of the dead as proclaimed by Cardinal John Tetzel- the auctioneer. John Tetzel at Gutenberg impressed it on the people to purchase indulgence for their dead both adult and juvenile. This was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Enraged by this, Martin Luther challenged and disputed this by nailing his 95 theses at the Castle church in Wittenberg on the 31st October, 1517. Luther did this to seek for clarification and he did not plan for or envisage any reformation, which was the usual academic practice. However, John Eck disputed the 95 theses with Martin Luther and subsequently found 41 theses to be heretic. Be that as it may, reformation had begun in earnest by destroying the indispensability and infallibility of the papacy and changed the face of Christianity till date.

The Beauty of the Sale of Indulgences

It is worth- mentioning that indulgence was authorized by the Catholic Church to absolve penitents from the guilt of their sins and from punishment in hell fire. With this authorization, Christian people or the penitents could get one to excuse many lesser sins.²² In other words, the buyers for indulgences were Catholic believers who feared that if one of their sins went unnoticed or unconfessed they would spend extra time in purgatory before reaching heaven or worse, wind up in hell for failing to repent.²³ This was the beauty of purchasing indulgence by Catholic believers so as to join the church triumphant.

In addition, the revenue gathered from the sale of indulgences was used to build St. Peter Basilica in Rome. Today, this St. Peter Basilica has become the biggest

¹⁸ Flannery, 76.

¹⁹ Flannery, 65.

²⁰ Flannery, 75.

²¹ Flannery, 66.

²² Flannery, 78.

²³ Flannery, 79.

and largest auditorium where people from the globe gather for pilgrimage. Not only that, it was asserted by Spaniard of the time that money spent on the building of the Sistine Chapel by Sixtus IV (Pope 1471-84) was a revenue from the sales of indulgences. Furthermore, the revenue from indulgence was used as good deeds for charitable donations for a good cause.²⁴ The Society of Jesus- the Jesuits carried out charitable donations to victims of wars, inquisition and among others. Moreover, money raised from indulgence was thus used for several righteous causes, both religious and civil.²⁵ Building projects funded by indulgences include churches as pointed out above, hospitals, leper colonies, schools, roads and bridge.²⁶ Certainly, money raised from indulgence also was used to send Catholic believers on pilgrimage on yearly basis.

Apart from the foregoing, it is pertinent to state that the revenue from indulgence flowed into the papal coffers year after year. This was the reason why they were referred to as "a succession of very worldly popes".²⁷ The Pope's affluence far exceeded the wealth of the richest millionaires at that period. It was recorded by Durant Will that 40 percent of landed property in Europe were owned by these world priests and if you want to spoil your son, make him a priest.²⁸ This was backed by the record of the time. Indulgence also became a way of Catholic leaders to fund expensive projects, such as crusades and Cathedrals by keeping a significant portion of the money raised from indulgences in their lands. Indulgence grew to extraordinary magnitude, in terms of longevity and breath of forgiveness.

The Beast of the Sale of Indulgences

In the late Middle Ages, greedy commissaries sought to extract the maximum amount of money for each indulgence. Professional pardoners who were sent to collect alms for specific project involved the unrestricted sales of indulgences. A handful of these exceeded church officials with avarice or ignorant zeal, promised rewards like salvation from eternal damnation in return for money.²⁹ A more reflection of Tetzels capacity to overstate the matter in regard to indulgences for the dead made him to state that "as soon as money in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs" as enunciated by Henry Bettenson.

Martin Luther, however, diametrically opposed him in numbers 27, 28 and 29 of his ninety-five theses thus:

27. Those who assert that a soul straightway flies out (of purgatory) as a coin tinkles in the collection-box, are preaching an invention of men.

28. It is sure that when a coin tinkles greed and avarice are increased; but the

²⁴ Mankind's Search for God (New York: WatchTower Bible and Tract Society, 1990), 303.

²⁵ The Historical Origin of Indulgences' Catholic News Commentary Information Resources and the Liturgical Year, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?> Accessed on the 15th October, 2017.

²⁶ The Historical Origin of Indulgences' Catholic News Commentary Information Resources and the Liturgical Year

²⁷ Mankind's Search for God, 305.

²⁸ Mankind's Search for God, 305.

²⁹ Mankind's Search for God, 305.

intercession... of the church is in the will of God alone.

29. Who knows whether all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed?
(Remember the story told of S. Severinus and S. Pascal).³⁰

The essence of this objection is that it is not scriptural; this points out the ugly side of this theology.

On the extortion of revenue from the poor faithful for the building of St. Peter Basilica, Martin Luther attacked John Tetzel with energy on the *modus operandi*. According to him in his 95 thesis on 50 and 51, he opines that

50. Christians must be taught that if Pope knew the extractions of the preachers of indulgences he would rather have S. Peter's basilica reduced to ashes than built with the skin, flesh and bones of his sheep.

51. Christians are to be taught that the Pope (as is his duty) would desire to give of his own substance to those poor men from many of whom certain sellers of pardons are extracting money; that to this end he would even, if need be, sell the basilica of Saint Peter.³¹

Besides, in the 16th century, when the abuse of indulgences was at its peak, Cardinal Cajetan (Tommaso de vio, 1469-1534) complained about the incident. According to him,

Preachers act in the name of the church so long as they teach the doctrines of Christ and the church, but if they teach, guided by their own minds and arbitrariness of will, things of which they are ignorant, they cannot pass as representatives of the Church; it need not be wondered at that they go astray.³²

We recall that the papacy that exerted influences both on secular affairs and spiritual matters amounted to corruption because of the new sources of revenue. The papacy became corrupt in all its members. Durant Will again describes the Papacy thus:

Every ecclesiastical appointee was required to remit to the papal curia- the administrative bureau of the first year (annates) and thereafter annually a tenth or tithe. A new archbishop had to pay to the pope a substantial sum of the pallium- a band of white wool that served as the confirmation and insignia of his authority. On the death of any cardinal, archbishop, bishop, or about his personal

³⁰Bettenson, 262.

³¹Bettenson, 264.

³²Jones, 76.

possessions reverted to the papacy... Every judgement or favour obtained from the curia expected a gift in acknowledgement, and the judgement was sometimes dictated by the gifts.³³

The worldly gains, pageantry and profligacy exhibited by the Popes made them pleasure-seeking, sensual, corrupt, fraudulent and avaricious and subsequently rejected Christ. The palaces of Popes and priests became scenes of the vilest debauchery.³⁴ Ellen G White buttresses that:

Almost...the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and his apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God and she substituted human theories and traditions.³⁵

In fact, the collection of the money from the faithful poor involved their skin, flesh and bones as posited by Martin Luther in his 95 theses, but all for the sure guarantee of the Pope. Even, the collections cannot pardon a venial sin of soul from either in this world or in purgatory. Suffice it to state;

I see that we can scarcely get anything from Christ's ministers but for money; at baptism, ... at marriage money, for confession money-no, not extreme unction (last rites) without money; they will ring no bells without money, no burial in the church without money so that it seemed that paradise is shut up from them that no money.³⁶

However, this emphasis on money is antithetical to the scriptural injunction that:

For the love of money is the root of all evil; which some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou O man of God flee these things; and follow after righteousness. (1 Tim 6: 10-11, KJV).

Sequel to the above, it is clear that the abuse of indulgence in the medieval period was all-encompassing and all-inclusive because it extended to virtually all aspects of the Universal church. The scripture is explicit on this issue because the love of money becomes the root of all evils. This depicts the fact that moderation over every aspect of human endeavour is the watchword in order to avoid excesses and abuses.

³³ Mankind's search for God, 308.

³⁴ E.G. White, *The Great Controversy* (California: Pacific Press, 1950), 60.

³⁵ White, 49.

³⁶ Mankind's Search for God, 308-309.

The Contemporary Church

We have pointed out that the abuses deployed in purchasing indulgences especially for the dead by Cardinal John Tetzel at Gutenberg, ignited reformation which divided the medieval church to splitter groups. Thus, the Luther-led group was called Protestantism. Later, other reformed groups sprang up in Switzerland, pioneered by Ulrich Zwingli, England by Henry VIII and Geneva by John Calvin. Indubitably therefore, these splitter-groups were called protestants, Mennonites, Anabaptism, Puritants, Anglicanism, Methodism, Calvinism and among others.

The early 20th century, a handful of African independent churches ran on internally generated revenue, which was a pointer to the significance of giving money as part of Christian mission. Theologically and traditionally speaking, there are a number of reasons why Christians are obliged to give to the church. First and foremost, it is part of Christian worship; it is an understandable element of one's response to God for what he has achieved in Christ. Again, Christians give to support the physical and corporate social programmes of the church, such as evangelism and mission. Lastly, this relates to Pentecostalism, giving is symbiotic in facilitating blessings into the lives of the giver. However, the 20th and 21st century church opened up another strand of Christianity that is called Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches. Today, there are multifarious denominations or sectarianism in the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, and the central message of a handful of them is enmeshed in prosperity gospel, 'health and wealth preaching', and money theology, which replicated indulgence. In other words, contemporary church has emerged with the promotion of 21st century indulgences through giving and seed sowing.

Patterns and Styles of Giving in Contemporary Church

From the beginning, the biblical standard of giving hinges on "tithe and offering" as described in (Mal 3:8-10). But the essentials of "tithe and offering" have been interpreted and quoted out of content. In contemporary church, Asamoah-Gyadu opines that "giving" is linked to the material and spiritual prosperity of individuals and nations.³⁷ With regard to prosperity gospel, giving is a standard form of raising fund in the contemporary church. Thus, a handful of prosperity preachers have elaborated on a broader perspective or have developed templates on giving. Wariboko develops templates of prosperity teaching on giving and calls them "covenant paradigm," 'transnational giving' and 'quasi-magical worldviews'.³⁸ Ashimolowo calls giving as freewill offerings" and 'seed sowing' that increase our credit account with God.³⁹ In the same vein, Oyedepo asserts 'kingdom principle of covenant sacrifice and prophetic giving as yardsticks for open heaven and

³⁷J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*, (Oregon: WIPF& Stock, publishers, 2013) 79.

³⁸Nimi Wariboko, "Pentecostal-Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa" in K. Atanasi and A.Yong (eds) *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio- Economics of Global Charismatic Movement* (New York: Palgrave 2012) 37.

³⁹Matthew Ashimolowo, *The Coming Wealth Transfer*, (London: Mattyson Media, 2006) 193-94.

unprecedented blessings'.⁴⁰ To this end, we shall lucidly discuss them.

Wariboko, a scholar and a Pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God posits that prosperity, teaching in African Pentecostalism is called covenant paradigm, which he argues that God blesses people and nations according to either the covenant of giving or the covenant of good effort.⁴¹ In addition, Wariboko asserts transactional giving from the story of the boy who brought five loaves and two fishes to Jesus that the miracle could not have taken place if the boy had not been willing to give his own meal. He claims speculatively that the boy was rewarded with the twelve baskets of leftovers.⁴² Another type of giving as enunciated by Wariboko is how people believe that prosperity comes to those who sow gifts as inspired by "quasi magical worldviews" in the hope that they will reap God's promises. Nevertheless, Asamoah-Gyadu convincingly asserts that this covenant of sowing and reaping in Pentecostal parlance is anything but sacrificial.⁴⁴

Apart from the foregoing, Ashimolowo, the Senior Pastor of Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) considers freewill offerings and seed sowing as yardsticks for God's blessings. He buttresses further that seed sowing increases our credit account with God and that the force of financial blessings is released as we give money.⁴⁵ He takes a step further to state that giving is the planting of a financial seed in order to experience a financial harvest.⁴⁶ He articulates this with biblical support in 2nd Corinthians 9:6 of one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully.

David Oyedepo, the presiding Bishop of the Living Faith Church worldwide, also known as Winners Chapel, has emphasised tithing and prophetic giving as kingdom principle of receiving from God.⁴⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu adds that Oyedepo specifically said that God called him to make his people rich, and one way of doing so is to teach them about blessings that come from faithful tithing.⁴⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu again posits that sequel to the above method of giving, cash and other gifts that go to the men or women of God.⁴⁹ This individual, according to Paul Gifford may be a preacher, prophet, evangelist, pastor or anybody who by virtue of what he or she does in the church is seen as representing God in mediating religious experience.⁵⁰ In some churches, this kind of giving directly to a man or woman of

⁴⁰David Oyedepo, *Power to Make Wealth*, (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 2005) 94.

⁴¹Wariboko, 37.

⁴²Wariboko, 38.

⁴³Wariboko, 38.

⁴⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, 87.

⁴⁵Ashimolowo, 193.

⁴⁶Ashimolowo, 194.

⁴⁷Oyedepo, 93.

⁴⁸Asamoah-Gyadu, 88.

⁴⁹Asamoah-Gyadu, 86.

⁵⁰Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst, 2004) 62.

God has been instituted into a 'Pastor's Appreciation Day'. During these special occasions, some Christians bring material gifts and money to sow as seeds in the lives of their charismatic leaders. Associated with pastor's appreciation days are the celebrations of particular events in their lives, at which funds may also be raised for them. In particular, landmark birthdays and wedding anniversaries are gaily marked.⁵¹ As a matter of fact, the principle of sowing and reaping has taken another dimension lately during thanksgiving, testimonies, preaching and song ministration, where Christians are challenged to sow. As a result, people have sowed buildings, air travel tickets, luxurious cars, jewellery, computers, clothes, footwear, and other such material objects in the lives of men and women of God, in anticipation of God's blessings and favour in return.⁵²

Asamoah-Gyadu observes another avenue of giving in contemporary church. According to him, it is a standard practice for members touched by a preacher's message or moved by it in any way to simply walk forward in the middle of the sermon and place an offering at the feet of the preacher. Givers may just place the money and return to other seats; or say a silent prayer over the offering before returning to their seats.⁵³ Lately, some pastors gifted with motivational and oratory prowess are being invited to raise money for several purposes. In the process, some of them would demand for certain amount as "Abraham sacrificial giving", and such amount must be 'redeemed' within 24 hours. While, some would announce that members should empty their pocket for God's blessing. Not only that, some would rather state that God has sent us to seven or more people who can give certain amount to God. The present writer personally witnessed this.

The most dangerous aspect of this giving is that it becomes synonymous with simony. First, the practice in which Simon the sorcerer sought to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit with money. Peter's rebuke of Simon is very instructive for our purposes: "may your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money" (Acts 8:20).⁵⁴ Second, Simony depicts selling holy articles meant to have been freely given. For instance, the sales of anointing oil, mantle, foot washing, pastor's attires and shoes and blessed water are by-products of simony. The end-product of these avenues is flamboyant and pleasure-loving life. Asamoah-Gyadu's submission is apt here;

There is no doubt that funds raised whether through tithing, offerings, or special fund raising events, enable the new Pentecostal churches to fund their very expensive programmes and projects, which include the establishment of private universities, television and radio ministries, and the very large cathedrals and worship

⁵¹Gifford,70.

⁵²Asamoah-Gyadu,91.

⁵³Asamoah-Gyadu,91.

⁵⁴Asamoah-Gyadu,100.

auditoriums that many of them have been able to build. Many of the pastors also have access to money and have very comfortable lifestyles that include the building of palatial homes and the use of luxurious cars, (private jet)... It is now fashionable for the average contemporary Pentecostal pastor to travel first or business class and for his children to be born and educated abroad. The United States of America is the destination of choice.⁵⁵

It is, therefore, worthy of note to assert that average Pentecostal pastor today lives in profligacy and life of luxury when a handful of his members cannot eke out a living. Again, these contemporary pastors believe that all the seed money sown would definitely come back in hundred fold when it is obvious that it is done as part of spiritual worship. Asamoah-Gyadu bemoans that "if one pays tithes with the intention of coming for a refund if God does not bestow the expected blessings, one is treating God like a customer service point".⁵⁶

A Critique

In whatever disguise giving is taught whether as tithe, offerings, freewill offerings, transactional giving, covenant paradigm, quasi-magical worldviews, kingdom principle of covenant giving takes us back to pre-reformation days when people literally paid for the grace of God through the purchase of indulgences.⁵⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu argues that we give to God not necessarily to buy his grace, favour, or some heavenly harvest reserved for tithers, but because giving is part of worship and we live in expectation of God's grace. Therefore, we should not treat God as a customer service point.⁵⁸

Some pastors who teach covenant paradigm, transactional giving, such as Kingsway International Christian Centre's Ashimolowo and The Redeemed Christian Church of God's Wariboko, seem to be informed that magic of sowing and reaping does not necessarily work all the time. In point of fact, God is not a "father Christmas" who is expected to bless his client at every encounter. Again, God is not a magician since God's hand cannot be twisted in our favour, to think otherwise is to challenge God's sovereignty. The promises of God come true by His grace and we can only trust Him to fulfil these promises through his own gift, Jesus Christ who is Lord and Saviour.⁵⁹

Asamoah-Gyadu is correct when he states that there is nothing wrong with encouraging people to pay tithes as part of Christian duty, but to build this act on a

⁵⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, 88.

⁵⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, 100.

⁵⁷ Diamaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*, (London: Penguin, 2004), 31, 154-155.

⁵⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, 102.

⁵⁹ Asamoah-Gyadu, 102.

teaching of transactional giving to God is to fail to take account of the workings of the grace of God in human lives and circumstances.⁶⁰ As far as transactional giving is concerned, God is sometimes treated as a business partner who has no choice but to agree to the demands of those who have fulfilled their side of a bargain by paying their tithes and by putting a bigger offering in a collection box. In all, the truth is that there is blessing in giving, but transactional giving undercuts God's power and sovereignty.⁶¹ The craze for wealth and material things by some of these pastors make them threaten some of their members with curses and calamities so as to milk them dry. Adeniyi aptly describes these prosperity preachers and spiritual dictators thus;

Thieves of various shades and sizes seize our common patrimony and we applaud them in ... churches even as they non-challantly rape all of us with unprecedented impunity...paradoxically, the owners and preachers of the doctrine are busy amassing wealth here on earth and robbing their flock silly.⁶²

Furthermore, the emphasis placed on giving in recent times especially among new Pentecostals lends credence to the fact that some people find solace staying at home than going to the church where emphasis on giving takes precedence. Since, giving is detached from worship, it is certain that some people as a result of 'showmanship' in the church put their hands into wrong places or steal from the coffer of their employers to donate to the church or the man of God in order to be eulogised by men. The consequence of this method is that such individuals have received their reward from men like the Pharisees hence we look at the outward appearance of man while God looks at the heart of man. The abuse of the sale of indulgence in the medieval period broke the bond that held the church together and heresies became the issue of the time. In fact, it became appalling that worldliness crept into the church of which believers were looking for salvation by all means. The pride of place salvation possesses in contemporary church has been lost to the exploitative tendency of giving. Therefore, the poor faithful who worship God in truth and in spirit will attain heaven, while tithers, preachers and teachers of givers who are robbers will miss heaven because they have men's reward with their skills of prosperity theology. To this end, the contemporary church should learn lessons from the tragedy that befell the medieval church as a result of the abuse in the sale of indulgence which is today encapsulated in giving.

Conclusion

Our excursion so far has shown the beauty and the beast of the sale of indulgences coupled with the implications for contemporary church. Again, it has

⁶⁰Asamoah-Gyadu,100.

⁶¹J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press 1993), 132.

⁶²See *The Nation*, 21st February, 2017, 14.

revealed the fact of the method of selling indulgences in the medieval period with a bit difference, yet it involved the skin, flesh and bones of the poor faithful, as it showed that heaven was shut against the poor faithful. Though, the priests enjoyed fame, prestige and became wealthy to such an extent that forty per cent of the landed property in Europe belonged to them. We equally treated the good and bad of the sales of indulgences and the contemporary church. As a matter of fact, the contemporary time has not changed rather it has assumed an alarming proportion. The various trajectories have been x-rayed, processed and appraised leading to the fact that today's church especially in Nigeria is associated with prosperity gospel or money theology. By this, many innocent people have been led astray, while many people have been discouraged from attending church service. In all, many poor faithful have been made to understand that they are excluded from the kingdom of God.

To this end, it is clear that transactional giving with public approval is pharisaic. The theology of giving should not be over-emphasised in contemporary church in order to avoid stealing and other immoral practices. Both the rich and the poor should be treated equally in the church. There should not be preferential treatment on the basis of affluence against the needy. It is hereby postulated and concluded that heaven is within the reach of the poor faithful who sincerely serve God in truth and in Spirit, while, heaven becomes a mirage to givers, titers, preachers and teachers of giving who are robbers.