

WAATI

Papers



West African Association of Theological Institutions

THEOLOGY

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First Published, February 2014

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ISBN 9988-8026-1-7

Typesetting by

Cyte Press

Anloga Junction, Kumasi

024 291 3065

Printed by

University Printing Press

KNUST, Kumasi

03220 60150,

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An Appraisal of the Perspectives of the Pentecostals and Charismatic on Theological Education in Nigeria

Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola

Abstract

This paper aims primarily at investigating the bases for the unfriendly attitude towards theological education. In addition, using historical antecedents as a benchmark, the paper will articulate the relevance of theological education in the expansion of God's kingdom, with a view to reducing mediocrity in religious parlance and inculcate proper orientation in the development of church leaders in Nigeria. Though theological education remains a veritable platform to bring enlightenment to the souls and minds of individuals about God and his activities for the singular purpose of transforming and liberating men from the bondage of ignorance to knowledge; yet, a cursory look at the happenings among the Pentecostal and Charismatic circles in Nigeria suggests that majority of them have developed apathy towards such training. Even the few who have Bible Colleges de-emphasize rigorous theological study in their curricula, hinging such stand on many factors and assumptions.

Introduction

We shall have a brief definition of the key words in order to do justice to this discussion: Theological Education, the Pentecostals and Charismatic. By "theology", we mean a combination of two Greek words *Theos* and *Logos*, meaning the doctrine of the word of God. T.C. Hammond corroborates this definition by stating that "theology is the study and the description of the revelation of God".¹ Therefore theology could be defined as a conscious effort to study God through his revealed word. Reflecting on the concept, John Parrat asserts that "Theology is properly defined as speaking about God".² This definition looks rather simplistic,

given the fact that, mere speaking about God may not necessarily make adherents of religion to study Him logically. Since, according to Hammond, theology has to do with analyzing and codifying the responses to the fact of God's revelation, it should be defined as a scientific reflection concerning God and his activities in the world, not a mere speaking about Him.

Therefore, theological education is the formal process through which the souls and minds of individuals are enlightened through critical training with the purpose of achieving a spiritual, contemplative and intellectual formation of the candidates for the ministry. This will no doubt transform individuals from the level of childhood to adulthood.

From the general definition, Pentecostalism is a movement that attempts "to recapture the ardour of primal Christianity, believing that the chosen people in the historic Christian churches have become the frozen people of God."³ It is the most significant religious movement of the 20th century⁴, growing three times faster than Protestants as a whole, particularly in Africa and also in Latin America where it is the largest protestant denomination.⁵

Pentecostalism, according to Dunn⁶, Ayegboyan and Isola⁷, Fatokun⁸ as well as Budgen⁹, belongs to that stream within Christianity which places emphasis on receiving of certain gifts of the spirit, such as speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), prophesying and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism, which has been considered a movement to Christian renewal, stresses the importance of personal religious experience of the Holy Spirit rather than theology.

Pentecostalism and Charismaticism in Nigeria

In discussing the history and types of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, one cannot ignore the heterogeneity of the movement. Their study reveals doctrinal differences and varying degrees of denominational affiliation. Gifford traced the difference to social or political context in which they operated. However Pentecostalism in Nigeria could be traced to the indigenous spiritual or charismatic movement of the twentieth century. Fatokun discussed the movement under four categories.

The first was the prophetic-healing revivalist movement founded by Garrick Sokari Braide, an Anglican member from the Niger Delta area in 1915; the second, a prayer movement (known as the Precious Stone or Diamond society), which took its source from St. Saviour's Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode in 1918 under the leadership of the church's sexton, Daddy Alli (later J.B. Shadare); the third, through the Cherubim & Seraphim society founded in 1925 by an itinerant

evangelist Moses Orimolade; and the last group which originated in 1930 at Ogere-Remo through the charismatic activities of Josiah Oshitelu whose possession of prophetic and visionary acumen influenced the birth of the church of the Lord Aladura¹⁰

In addition to these, mention was made of indigenous Pentecostal revival movements in eastern Nigeria, typified by the Qua Iboe missionary, Rev J. W. Westgarth and “the messifident Holy Church” among the Ibibio and the Efik people¹¹; and of course, the Redeemed Christian Church of God that started in South Western Nigeria.

Apart from the indigenous Pentecostal movements discussed above, Nigeria witnessed the infiltration of classical Pentecostal church movements between 1931 and 1955. Matthews Ojo referred to them as denominational Pentecostal churches because of their affiliation with churches from the U.S.A and Britain. These include: the Faith Tabernacle, The Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Faith and The Assemblies of God¹². The Full Gospel (Apostolic) Church and Foursquare Gospel Church¹³ also fell into this category.

Ojo branded these churches as holiness movements based on their doctrinal stress on perfection, strict personal ethics, restitution, bible inerrancy and baptism in the Holy Spirit. The marked difference between the mission-based classical Pentecostals and the early indigenous (*Aladura*) Pentecostals is that while the former saw speaking in tongues as evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, the latter placed much emphasis on prophesy and healing.

The last type of Pentecostals is what Ojo referred to as the transdenominational charismatic movement¹⁴. They are otherwise known as neo-Pentecostal Churches. They started as Interdenominational Students Fellowships in Nigerian Universities during the 1960s and early 1970s before their metamorphosis into churches. Majority of them were founded to fill the vacuum created by the extremism of the Holiness Pentecostals. Their attitude towards dressing is less rigorous and many who found it inconvenient to conform to classical Pentecostal tenets resorted to the neo-Pentecostal movements.

The neo-Pentecostals incorporate varying elements of doctrine and practices that identify them with the American and British fundamentalists, evangelists and U.S Pentecostalism. A few of them which are worthy of note are Rhema Chapel, Scripture Pasture Christian centre, Latter Rain Assembly, Living Faith Church Worldwide, All Nations for Christ Ministry and Deeper Life Bible Church which

embrace the strict holiness doctrine. It has been established that many Nigerian neo Pentecostals were influenced mostly by contacts with the American Faith Preachers, correspondences, literature and tapes of Faith preachers like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Paul (now David) Yongi Cho among others¹⁵, sharpened their gospel of faith healing and liberation known as “prosperity Gospel”.

In sum, it is pertinent to corroborate Gifford’s view that despite the significant differences between classical and neo-Pentecostals, members of these movements recognize themselves as part of a special or sacred community¹⁶ bonded by conversion experience. Born again Christianity is a common term for identifying members of the community and the rallying point of their unification. Most charismatic movements can be called Pentecostal because of their striking similarities. However, it must be stressed that, the African Charismatic Movements of the 20th century were initiated by Africans.

According to Allan Anderson, the Pentecostals or Charismatic can be called “the African Reformation of the 20th century” that has fundamentally altered the character of Christianity, including that of the older mission churches.¹⁷

A Survey of the history of Theological Education

Theological Education has remained one of the legacies bequeathed to the global church by the early church in Africa. The famous catechetical school, the first of its kind in the world, was founded at Alexandria in Egypt around A.D. 180.¹⁸ Other seminaries were established in North Africa, especially Carthage, which for many generations stood as the theological centre of Western Christianity just as Alexandria was to the Eastern Church. This intellectual capital of Christianity produced the globally recognized ‘Trio of African Saints’ – Tertullian (born in Carthage), St. Cyprion (also born in Carthage) and St. Augustine (born in Thagaste), a place known today as Souk-Ahras in Algeria.¹⁹

In addition, it must be mentioned that the unrivaled library of Alexandrian Theological Institute later became the model for university libraries all over Europe. For almost five centuries, prior to the Middle Ages, the theological centres served as incubators for theological thinking in the global Church; and their texts examinations and curricula patterns served as the content of education that became normative in the medieval university.²⁰

Furthermore, records have shown that the eighty universities which emerged during the Middle Ages, among which are Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg,

Louvain, Padua, Paris and Salamanca, were established purely for theological education. Other courses were later added in the course of expansion. Hence, the saying that “theology is the queen of all sciences”.

The indispensability of Theological Education in the Development of Christianity

There are various means by which theological education has positively affected the development of Christianity. These would be approached from both historical and contemporary events.

Provision of Christian Exegesis: It is only through a critical study in the seminary that a candidate could be familiar with the legacies of early Christian thinkers or scientific investigators of sacred texts. These include Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Athanasius, whose works had extensive influence on Cappadocian fathers – Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. All these great men decisively shaped the rules and methods for interpreting the scripture accurately. Any candidate well informed or grounded in this aspect will be an accurate teacher and be apt in the dispensation of pastoral duties.

Definition of Christian Dogma: Theological education provides a forum to inform men and women about the beginning of Christian dogma, both in Africa, the western and the Eastern Christendom. It provides the history of major dogmatic battles within the world Christianity e.g. Christological and Trinitarian issues, the key players in the controversies and classical defense of Christianity by the Apostles, sub-Apostles and early church fathers. The efforts made by Christian thinkers to form the dogma with precision helped in the global expansion of Christianity.

Grooming of Manpower for the Church: It has been observed that theological education is imperative in order to groom and equip the manpower for the expansion of the kingdom of God. This is only achieved through intellectual and spiritual training offered by theological education. Anyone aspiring to go into the Ordained Ministry or wishing to contribute meaningfully to the spiritual growth of the church (as a lay preacher) needs worthy instructions that theological education offers. In the seminary where priestly formation begins, candidates are exposed to techniques for teaching, preaching, mission, counselling and deliverance. Such exposure helps them to tackle (in future) the existential realities facing their

members.

In addition, with the development of intellectual faculty of the candidates, they become philosophically and logically sound, thereby becoming relevant in various communities or stations where they serve. Furthermore, such courses like critical introduction to a particular course, exegesis and historical background will definitely assist the candidates to understand the basic languages used in writing the Bible – Hebrew and Greek. Also, the historical context of any passage would be studied in order to shed light on the scripture. Fully armed with these instruments, the students after graduation would not fall into heresy or misapplication of the gospel message.

Developing the Potentials of Students: Every individual has some qualities that are often times untapped until the right and conducive atmosphere is created. Another role that theological education plays in the life of individuals is the development of their leadership potentials. This aspect is crucial because if such quality is left undeveloped, the administration of the church will become comatose by the time such people occupy the leadership of the church. To lay emphasis on the spiritual and contemplative formation of candidates for the ministry is not sufficient. Such should be complemented with intensive training in leadership skills because administration plays a vital role in the growth and expansion of Christianity. D.G. Barnhouse corroborates this view when he said:

If I had only three years to serve the Lord, I would spend two of them studying and preparing. Study is getting a second and third opinion before diagnosis and treatment.²¹

Evidences also abound in the scriptures to support the veracity of theological education. Joshua received theological education under the tutelage of Moses for many years (Num 27:20); the prophets in Samuel's training school were adequately trained before being qualified to function as prophets (I Sam. 19:20); Elisha also understudied Elijah for many years before he was commissioned (2 Kings 2: 12-13); the disciples of Jesus Christ received thorough training for over three years, and St. Paul was not in a haste to become a rabbi. He released himself to be trained by Gamaliel. The examples are endless.

Factors Responsible for Apathy towards Theological Education by the Pentecostals and Charismatic in Nigeria

Several factors may be adduced for the indifferent disposition of the Pentecostals and Charismatic towards theological education. However, the following reasons

would be considered here:

Historical or Circumstantial Factor: This has to do with the origin of some of the Pentecostal or Charismatic Churches whereby at inception their leaders rebuffed every attempt to attach theological strings to the study of the Bible. Garrick Sokari Braide from the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria,²² a leading indigenous Pentecostal figure discarded any rigorous study of the Bible or Church doctrine, but emphasized only confession of sin and repentance of the same as necessary pre-requisites for salvation. By the time Joseph Ayo Babalola joined the indigenous Pentecostal movement, emphasis was already placed on prophetic healing through rugged evangelism and revival. Other itinerant preachers followed the ideals of their predecessors without any recourse to theological education for proper training.

Anointing Factor: Most of the Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders believe strongly that the power of the Holy Spirit through special impartation is most needed for the ministry. Therefore, gospel ministers in these circles seek divine anointing to teach the word of God effectively and to combat the problems of their congregation. They assume that most theologians are ineffective in spiritual matters, despite the number of years spent for formal training in preparing for the ministry.

The Factor of Curriculum: Majority of the Pentecostals and Charismatic have argued against the reliability of theological seminaries because of the prevalence of some courses that find no relevance in African continent. These include courses like Philosophy, Islam, Hebrew, Greek and New Movements or Christian by ways among others. They contend that these are imported from seminaries in Europe. Coupled with this is the current trend whereby, through permissive attitude of the West, secularism has infiltrated Christianity in Europe, the result of which is the revisionist theology, homosexuality and others. All these expose the church to danger, hence the leadership of these churches develop apathy to theological education which they assume is a place where a "saint" could easily become a "sinner".

Lack of Governmental Regulatory Body: It is a known fact that in most British colonized territories in Africa, religion remains the only parlance devoid of official control by the government, therefore making it easy for anyone to dabble into it unlike what obtains in other professions or vocations where certain requirements are necessary before they are established by the practitioners. Such requirements include adequate training for a number of years e.g. before one qualifies to be

a teacher, engineer or medical practitioner. Lack of governmental control gives room for many leaders of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements to establish their churches without acquisition of theological education. No wonder today that we hear all sorts of embarrassing stories about the activities of these churches capable of rubbishing Christianity basically because the fundamental principles are discarded.

Advocacy for Attitudinal Change

Having highlighted earlier the imperatives of theological education, this paper emphasises that it is the backbone of the church and that its purpose is to further Christ's mission in the Church and society. Through theological education, church leaders are enabled to serve and minister to all people in the various relationships in the family, community and church. Through it, the minister is transformed from being a mere interpreter of God's word and an ordinary shepherd of flocks to a position of sound managerial and spiritual control of the flock of Christ. His exposure to the deeper knowledge of the word of God and the historical events in Christianity sharpens his intellectualism and prepares him for debatable issues of faith.

Through theological education he or she will be adequately informed about apologetics, the heritage of the church fathers, needed today against all assaults on Christianity; about Martyrdom; about Revolutionary Reformation, Revivalism and Puritanism, as well as Mission and its strategies.

On the contrary, any church leader who is theologically ignorant has created a lacuna in his ministry. He may be an orator – fluent and full of charisma with which he attracts people to himself, yet he will remain a pastor with zeal but without knowledge, the consequence of which is dishing out to his congregation, half-truths of the gospel because he himself is half-baked or unbaked. An adage says, "knowledge is power". We can therefore argue that lack of knowledge brings confusion and destruction. It is through training and retraining, according to Lasebikan,²³ that the clergy can be brought to standard of excellence for good and up to date performance.

Furthermore, Aladekugbe observed that there exists a synergy between anointing and theological education when he asserted that "the anointing can flow to a greater height when made to work hand in hand with appropriate training, otherwise, formal training without the anointing is a pariah while anointing without training creates a stagnant pool of water..."²⁴ Therefore, for an effective ministry, a clergy needs to be well grounded in theological studies coupled with the development of

spirituality which are afforded by the theological education.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, this paper would be making some suggestions to Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches, secular government as well as stakeholders of theological seminaries not only in Nigeria but in Africa generally.

Firstly, the time is ripe for Pentecostal and Charismatic circles to know that theological education is key to their ministerial formation. In view of this, it should be taught in their Bible Colleges while those who do not consider its importance should have a rethink.

Secondly, the government should not continue to be indifferent to happenings in religious circles because of religious freedom or pluralism. The current trend of allowing untutored elements to dominate Christian religion without any regulation portends danger not only for the church but also for the society, since the quest for materialism, violence and religious extremism are all products of wrong training and indoctrination.

Lastly, the stakeholders of theological seminaries should realise the urgent need to review their curriculum towards enhancing skills in Musicology, Counselling, Church Planting, Communication, Evangelism, Management, Agriculture, Economics, Public Relations and Computer Technology. Robert Hardy corroborates this when he said;

The overriding concern... is the need... for training and ministerial formation, which is theologically appropriate, educationally effective, adequately resourced and affordable.²⁵

In addition to the above, I want to make a clarion call on authorities of theological institutions not to lower the standard of theological education by compromising the basic admission requirements.

Candidates that are not qualified educationally should be encouraged to have their basic entry subjects, so that they would be saved from future embarrassment at the point of going for higher degrees in theology.

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