

Nominalism in the Church of Nigeria: A Response for a Return to Biblical Christianity

Mipo E. Dadang

Nigeria

***Corresponding Author:** Mipo E. Dadang, Nigeria.

Abstract: Christian nominalism among church membership in Nigeria is an attempt to describe one of the major problems in the growth of the Christian population in churches in Nigeria in particular and the church in Africa in general. This writing aimed to create a warning signal and a need for taking action by pastoral caregivers and organizational church leaders of the challenges of nominal Christian faith in their respective church memberships to return to biblical Christianity as a solution to the problem of nominalism in their churches and the alleged nominal faith of their church members. The burden on this subject has raised several fundamental questions in my mind. Some of the questions are: How should pastoral care givers and leaders of church organizations in Nigeria respond to the persistence of nominal traditional old beliefs and practices long after people have become Christians? How should a Christian deal with nominal way of life in Christianity? How can churches deal with the resurgence of spiritism and Witchcraft among members of Churches in Nigeria? To ignore them and think they disappear as Christians grow in faith is to open the door for a syncretism that threatens the heart of Christian faith. To try to condone or compromise biblical standard and stamp them out by replacing them with important philosophical beliefs and practices without apply biblical Christian life leads to nominal way which attracts syncretic practice of religion. Thus, the reason for writing on this subject of nominalism.

Keywords: Nigeria, nominalism, syncretism, theology, practical and pastoral theology, Christianity

1. INTRODUCTION

Nominal Christian practice in Christianity is found among church members in Nigeria. It is also common to an extent that it saps the vitality of even churches that appear vibrant. As a matter of fact, the church in Nigeria has become nominal. At best, it has limited the Christian faith and practice to a narrow segment of peoples' lives. This kind of Christian life that is practiced according to traditional beliefs and also mixing it with the Bible is a problem to Christian spirituality. Thus, there is a problem of nominal Christianity even among those who provide leadership in churches and among Christians in general. Therefore, this work provides a statement of the problem, discusses nominalism, offers theological response, critical contextualization to uproot nominalism in Christianity as a way forward to biblical Christian practice in the churches in Nigeria. Practical steps are recommended for pastors in Nigeria to effectively address the challenges of Christian nominalism in order to bring transformation in the life and ministry of their respective local churches.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As a result of nominal Christian living among some Christians, pastors, and even organizational leaders, worldliness seems to be taking over the contemporary church in this present generation. For example, academic research in Jos, Central Nigeria shows that many Christians even pastoral care givers, Church organizational leaders falsify their credentials to make them eligible for employment, elections and or jobs and to elongate themselves with false credentials. Result of the research showed that 47% of respondents admitted to have falsified their ages or their data information. 15% had used false measures in business transactions. 14% had also abused their offices and its privileges. 22% had committed electoral fraud while 17% were culpable to theft of money at workplace and mistreatment of those under their leadership. 14% respondents who remembered that they are members of churches affirmed they had not engaged themselves any form of social sins, unrighteous or nominal lives.

The questions are clear. Today, like in the days when Prophet Isaiah started his prophetic functions (Isaiah 1: 1-31), Israel was confronted with so many social vices. So, contemporary church in Nigeria

is confronted with political, social, religious, and public corruption. Socially, widows, orphans, and the poor and needy are oppressed. Because the church is nominal, as a country, justice is denied of many masses. Spiritually, as a result of nominal life of some Christians, the moral lives have become low in churches. Morality of some clergy people are not sound to an extent that they too get involved into dirty politics and corrupt practices as if it were the norm of the day. Because of nominalism, many Christians now focus on ill-gotten wealth and use it to oppress the less privilege in society. Let me discuss nominalism that has affected the contemporary church.

3. NOMINALISM IN THE CHURCH

What is nominalism? I have taught in seminary, would be theologian, missiologist and those preparing themselves for pastoral or leadership in organizations that when people become Christians and their everyday life Christian questions are not answered, they continue to go back to their old traditional beliefs. The result is divided loyalty in their Christian faith. Those are people who claimed they had confessed and believed in Christ and come to church every Sunday. But during the week, they turn to diviners, astrologers, and native or witch doctors to solve their everyday problems. These are the people I define nominal Christians and I would like to use a major church denomination in west of Africa. This church denomination is the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). This church has its root of this church stemmed from Western missionaries: Rowland Bingham, Thomas Kent and Water Gowans, in their early twenties left the comfort of their homes: England, Canada and America to preach the gospel. Thomas Kent and Water Gowans died in Bida and Girku (Kaduna) within the first year of their efforts to bring the gospel north of Nigeria. Rowland Bingham, the leader of the team had to be evacuated back to Canada as a result of malaria.

Ruth A. Tucker (1983:139) rightly describes that “Africa known for centuries as a White man’s graveyard has claimed the lives of more Protestant missionaries than any other area of the word.” Tucker (1983:296) affirms that “In less than a year after they left on their eight-hundred-mile overland journey both Thomas Kent and Water Gowans... were dead.” Mipo E. Dadang (2020:17) documents that “ECWA is one of the largest church denominations in Nigeria, with international spread to other African countries, the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Israel reaching about ten million people. ECWA is a partner church of the international Christian Mission Organization: Serving in Mission.” Dadang (2020:17) states that “(SIM, formerly Sudan Interior Mission). It was founded in 1954 when the SIMs churches came together to form one indigenous body. Since that time, mission stations, Bible Schools, academic schools, and medical programs have been transferred to ECWA leadership. Thus far, ECWA has experienced an exponential growth in membership, scope and leadership.” Dadang (2020:16), reiterates that “the missionary journey which started like a lifeless project had metamorphosed into a historical breakthrough that had over 10 million members in Nigeria alone and some 10,000 pastors of local gatherings of believers associated with the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria”. This church has its roots not only in Nigeria, but international. Western missionaries: Rowland Bingham, Thomas Kent and Water Gowans, in their early twenties left the comfort of their homes: England, Canada and America to preach the gospel. Thomas Kent and Water Gowans died in Bida and Girku (Kaduna) within the first year of their efforts to bring the gospel north of Nigeria. Rowland Bingham, the leader of the team had to be evacuated back to Canada as a result of malaria.

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religiosity or spirituality may be an impetus to spiritual idolatry. Excessive spirituality can become a breeding ground for sins of this nature.” Turaki (2011:153), reiterates that “African Traditional Religion endures because it has spirit power behind it. Colonialism, Western Missionary Christianity, Islam may have destroyed its shrines, blood sacrifices and institutions, yet it lives on in the minds and traditions of many Africans.” Turaki (2011:153) notes that “Even second-generation Christians who know little about traditional religion still live under its power. As a worldview it does not need any physical institution to sustain it. In fact, it thrives in churches, mosques and Western institutions.” The syndrome of nominal Christian living in churches today has affected spiritual growth and has brought about moral decadences. Thus, there are dangers that nominalism has caused among Christians. Nominalism lures nominal Christians to live by the dictates of the world, the flesh, the devil which easily gives birth to power, pride, contentiousness, and complacency.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF NOMINALISM ON THE CHURCH

It is not time for the churches in Africa to celebrate its growth in numerical numbers. The reason being that the church faces the same temptations that all men and women of ages faced. These temptations are presented by that notorious harmony faced are the world, the flesh and the devil. Consequently, Weber (2010:40,41,42,43,44,45) laments that “the Church of England claims thirty million baptized constituents in Great Britain but less than two million are active members.” Weber (2010:56) provides an alarming statistic that nominalism is not only applicable to the church in Africa. He notes that in Western Europe only five to six percent of church membership is active. In United States of America “almost half of the persons in a fundamentalist home fail to continue in their childhood faith.” Weber (2010:56) explains that “in some non-western countries, indifference to and ignorance of the most elementary truths of Christianity are the rule; sin, apathy, and worldliness is the norm. Early recipients of Christian mission however succumbed to Christo-paganism.” Weber (2010:57) affirms that “the turning of Christians to Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, as a result of missionary efforts by these groups is not uncommon.” Weber (2010:58) argues that “nominalism is not a matter which is merely generational, afflicting only second, third and fourth generation Christians. Moreover, it is not a distant problem encountered only by some and then only in certain circumstances.” The nominal phenomenon is an ongoing problem in most churches in Africa. P. M. Steyne (1989:32) gives reasons why nominalism continues to prevail. He states, “Nominalism is a natural response to sociological factors and that Lausanne committee has established five sociological factors of nominalism.” Steyne (1989:32) notes these factors: (i) One who attends church regularly and worships devoutly, but who has no vital personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (ii) One who attends church regularly but for cultural reasons only. (iii) One who attends church only for major church festivals (Christmas, Easter, Good Friday,) and ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals). (iv) One who hardly attends church regularly, but maintains a church relationship for reasons of security, emotional or family ties, or tradition. (v) One who has no relationship to any specific church and who never attends, but yet considers himself a believer in God.

Steyne affirms that “all five types of nominalism listed by the Pattaya Thailand report on Christian witness to nominal Christians among Protestants are essentially socio-psychological factors.” Paul further, states that man wants benefits of religion, but rejects commitment to its dynamics (2 Timothy 3:5). When Christian life becomes nothing more than identification with, and the accommodation to a body of beliefs and practices, nominalism is the natural result. It is unfortunate that today religious practice and activities are more of socio-cultural, rather than possess true meaning and relationship with Jesus who is the giver of life to such activities. This is tendency to revert to or embrace nominalism in the place of a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. Nominalism waits for an opportunity to overtake the Christians at any time in their religious pilgrimage. Dadang (2022:121), notes that when this happens, it is “because of inadequate Bible teaching, nominal Christians are likely to respond to violence in ways different from genuine believers in Christ. Dadang, (2022:121) reiterates that “the situation is difficult to figure out because spiritual growth is beyond human measurement.” There are three enemies of the believer that entice them into nominal ways of living: the flesh, the world, and the devil.

4.1. The Flesh

Paul refers to the flesh as “the old man,” “the natural man” – that aspect of humanity that opposes God – “man’s fallen nature” (Galatians 5:17-21). It is programmed for sin because it is built on the law of

failure. It cannot please or serve God (Romans 8:7, 8). The flesh is a difficult enemy because of its close inner relationship with man's personality. It cannot be tamed, reformed, or improved through human effort. The flesh invites and encourages acts of violence against man. Scripture attests that the flesh rouses man's desire for physical gratification without spiritual responsibility. It tempts the desire to gratify sensual appetites through thoughts and words. It stirs up lasciviousness – the desire to attract attention to oneself in a manner that flaunts God's standard of moral purity. It yields to idolatry – the desire to choose a god that pleases and condones sins of the flesh. (Galatians 5:19-21). Mark I. Bubeck (1975:29,30,31,32), alleges that "It encourages drunkenness- the physical stimulation to produce a sense of wellbeing which only the Holy Spirit can give. It craves reveling – the desire to gratify the body and its appetites without moral responsibility." Thus, the battle with flesh is a lifelong one. The flesh desires to settle for nominalism. The world itself contributes to nominalism.

4.2. The World

The reason that the world system is such a deadly enemy and promotes nominalism is because, Satan uses the world's system to deceive, delude, deflect, dehumanize, and destroy man so that he finds it difficult to walk in obedience to God. Through Satan, his devices, and his legions of evil spirits, he manipulates and rules the world system so that man will bow before him. Satan appeals to man's pride, personal ambition, and independent action apart from God's knowledge and mandates. Sinful man relishes in what the world stands for and offers. John reminds Christians that "the world appeals to man's depravity, his sinfulness, even as it provides a person within a pleasurable atmosphere to practice his sin with approval (1 John 2:15-17). Satan uses the world to tempt nominal Christians to materialism. The devil is the chief architect to nominal lives of many Christians.

4.3. The Devil

The Apostle Paul reminds Christians that Satan and his kingdom pose a constant challenge and threat to the effectiveness and stability of Christians. Satan opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and therefore is persistent in his onslaughts on the church (2 Corinthians 2:11). The devil keeps the church busy and turned in on itself, working hard at sponsoring the socio-psychological functions of the religion. M. Mohr (2004:14) alleges that "the devil deliberately seeks to keep Christians from being pilgrim-people of God." This is true because he keeps Christians focused on peripheral issues which seldom have anything to do with bringing people into a dynamic relationship with Christ. He deliberately makes Christians ineffective because he knows that they are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Nominal live guided by the world, the flesh and the devil can easily give birth to a struggle for power, pride, contentiousness and complacency. They can be temptations that can sap the energy. They can divert the focus of a person. They can damage the witness of a person and distract attention of any nominal Christian from being effective in his or her moments of greatest opportunities in Christian service.

5. POWER, PRIDE, CONTENTIOUSNESS AND COMPLACENCY OF A NOMINAL CHRISTIAN

5.1. Power

From a Scriptural point of view, dependance on power is always a temptation. Satan even tried to tempt Jesus's divine power by asking him to turn the stones to bread (Matthew 4:2, 3). Jesus answered (Satan) "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." W. Harold Fuller (1996:169) notes that "The church of Jesus Christ has always possessed the powerful resources of the Word of God and of prayer."

5.2. Pride

Fuller (1996:170), explains that "Human pride is so subtle. Humans can become proud that they are humble. While rejecting the spiritual emptiness they have perceived in some forms of institutional Christendom, can unfortunately develop a sense of spiritual elitism."

5.3. Contentiousness

While Paul exhorted Timothy to fight a good fight of the faith, he also told the young pastor that the Lord's servant must not quarrel. Rather he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, and not resentful. Timothy was charged to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Timothy 6:11). God's people need to avoid contention over secondary matters that would sap their strength and divert their energies from the major issues of the kingdom of God.

5.4. Complacency

Nominal Christians quickly become complacent. Today, in the church of Nigeria, there are large church memberships which make little impact on the society or to a world in need, because materialism, misguided goals, and self-centered comforts have immobilized them. Earlier in the statement of the problem, I raised questions concerning how to respond to the resurgence of nominal Christianity in the church today. The responses to nominalism are dealt with in the next heading.

6. RESPONSE TO NOMINALISM IN THE CHURCH

First, is to consider a theological response to the phenomenon of nominalism in the church today.

6.1. Theological Response

Right theological perspectives and practices are built on a reliable foundation drawn from correct legacies and documented information about doctrinal beliefs inherited in the Christian faith. Theology is the science of God and the relations between God and the universe. Turaki (2011:153) notes that “Many African Churches with no depth of theology free to experiment with beliefs, rituals and practices that may look innocent but eventually tend towards neopaganism and syncretism.” They therefore, need the right understanding of what theology does to traditional beliefs and nominal living in a church setting. Cook (1987:12) explains that “theology is the collecting, ordering, comparing, exhibiting and defending of all facts from general and special revelation concerning God and the relations between God and the universe.” Theology is a function of the Christian faith and scholarly scientific labor within the church. This is why Brown (2015:1, 2, 3, 4), notes that “doctrine guides us to true faith and godly life. Whereas theology in a more abstract sense is working out of true the implications of the true faith and godly life.” A theology of the invisible must take seriously a trinitarian understanding of God, who is continually involved in his creation by his providence, presence, and power. It must take angels seriously, for they are God’s ministers on earth, and it must take Satan and demons seriously, for they are fallen angels seeking to keep people from turning to God in repentance, faith and obedience to Him.

Theology therefore refers to human reflections on who God is, and his dealings in the world. Revelation is the basis of theology. God’s word which is the Bible has its source from God and therefore is the most important tool for studying the Christian life and theology. Protestant Christians have similarities in their religious beliefs and practices. They worship a monotheistic God, manifested in Trinitarian form; they maintain belief that all humans are sinners saved from their sin only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, they profess that the Bible is God’s Word; they regard worship and prayer as important; they share in the ordinance practices and they attempt to lead ethical lives.

Christians believe in God who is omnipresent. This God is also known as immanent within the world and transcendent beyond the world, human knowledge and experience. There is one God, the Creator and preserver of all things, infinite in being and perfection, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are co-equal and Co-eternal... The Bible does not teach the Trinitarian formula of God, but teach that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one God. Erickson (2013:309) notes that “there has always been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and all of them have always been divine. There has never been any alteration in the nature of the Triune God.” Dabney (2002:181), also notes that “God is one and that not only the Father, but the Son and the Holy Ghost are proper God.” Chafer and Walvoord (1978:40) further explain that “the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead makes clear that they are not three separate gods, like three separate human beings.” Chafer and Walvoord (1978:40) argue that “the true Christian faith is not Tritheism, a belief in three Gods.” It means that in the uniqueness of the Godhead, there is no illustration or parallel in human experience. The Trinitarian doctrine has a central place in the Christian faith although the subject is beyond human comprehension and has no parallel in human experience. Chafer and Walvoord (1978:41) further state that “the doctrine should thus be accepted by faith on the basis of Scriptural revelation even if it is beyond human comprehension and definition.” Douglas (1989:14) concurs that “he who would try to understand the Trinity fully will lose his mind. But he who would deny the Trinity will lose his soul.” Kelly (1978:267) concludes that “the Godhead is one because the Father never acts independently of the Son, nor of the Holy Spirit.”

The exponents who place Jesus as ancestors have flown in their theological perspectives and have missed the point in believing the revelation of God’s written and Living Word. Palmer (2015:78) rightly observes that “the church fathers knew that for Jesus to be a complete Saviour, he would have to be fully human and fully divine. Only a human being can make a sacrifice for other humans and only God

can make sacrifice for all humanity.” Kato (1982:22) counsels that “Christians must hold to the uniqueness of the Christian revelation in the written Word and the Living Word.” Kato (1982:22) further emphasizes that “to seek salvation elsewhere than through the shed blood of Christ is heretical. It is the preaching of another gospel, which really is no gospel.” LaTourette (1975:50) concludes that “this uniqueness of Jesus and the revolutionary contrast of his teaching with the traditions of his people were the source of the much conflict which brought Jesus to his death.”

Jesus affirmed that “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Nicene’s contribution to biblical theology lies in its grounding in the person of Jesus Christ. Nicene brought an awareness to the reality that without a clear focus on this historical Jesus, fully God and fully human. It is interesting to understand that wherever the Nicene faith developed strong roots, the church survived and flourished, despite the most violent forms of persecution. Anderson (1972:41) points out that Athanasius concluded his argument by saying that “if Christ is not the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity incarnate, then our very salvation is lost, for no created being could redeem other creatures”

Gunton (1992:80) notes that, “the purpose of the incarnation is to prevent the good creation from failing to achieve its true destiny: that the father’s intent of love should not fail its purpose.” Torrance (1981: xiii, xiv), notes that “throughout the apostolic tradition Jesus is presented as acting out an unbroken oneness between Himself and the Father.” Athanasius, sound biblical-theological reasoning and application helped him stand firmly as a result of his courage and uncompromising character.

Theological principles that apply particularly to the questions raised in traditional Religious beliefs and nominal Christians must be grounded in a larger theology of God, creation, sin, salvation, and Christ’s return. There is always the danger in dealing with the pressing needs of everyday life to focus on one or another doctrine, and to lose sight of the gospel as a whole. What they need are biblically balanced answers to the existential questions addressed. They need to understand a theology of the invisible. Given the fact that the modern Christianity originated from the Middle East to Africa, its teaching must not be misrepresented. Turaki (2010:125) clearly documents that “Christianity predates Islam in Africa. It came in the first century, and Islam only in the seventh century. “This position must not be misinterpreted by the other faiths as having its origins in Europe. Turaki (2010:125) reiterates “While the second wave of Christianity came to Africa from Europe, the first wave spread from the Near East to North Africa, Ethiopia and Nubia.” Turaki (2010:125) affirms “The founder of Christianity was Jesus, a Jew who lived in Galilee.” This misunderstanding has done tremendous damage to the relationship between Christianity and other religious beliefs in Africa. Therefore, it is imperative that Christians recover an awareness of the invisible in this world. Eugene Peterson (1994:89,90) notes, “Most of the reality with which we deal is invisible. Most of what makes up human existence is inaccessible to our five senses: emotions, thoughts, dreams, love, hope, character, purpose, belief.” Peterson (1994:89) opines that “Even what makes up most of the basic physical existence is out of the range of our unassisted senses: molecules and atoms, neutrons and protons, the air we breathe, the ancestors we derive from, the angels who protect us.” Peterson (1994:90) concludes, “We live immersed in these immense invisibles. And more than anything else, we are dealing with God “whom no one has seen at any time.”

Until the invisible world becomes a living reality in the lives of Christians, they will not be able to deal with the daily questions about their old traditional religious beliefs they raise. They need to present God’s work in the whole of creation. This begins with a theology of cosmic history of God, the heavens, and eternity. This answers the ultimate questions raised by high religions regarding the ultimate origins, purpose, and destiny of all creation. It must include a theology of human history—of humans created in the image of God, the fall, God’s redemptive acts in the Old Testament, Christ’s death and resurrection in the New Testament, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. This answers questions about redemptive history. It must also include a theology of God’s work in the lives of individuals—of the meaning of life, desire for a good life, need for guidance, and longing for justice, and explanations of death, disasters, the unknown and evil in poverty, injustice, racism, and oppression. This answers the existential questions of everyday human lives. And holistic (whole) theology must also include nature—its design, its voice praising its Creator, its suffering at the hand of evil, and the new creation in which it will be fully restored (Rom.8:22; 2 Peter 3:11-13). Nature is the place where humans meet God and converse with him. Modern-day Christians are ready to see God’s hand in cosmic history, and, at times, in human history, but they see nature as an autonomous reality operating by itself according to

impersonal laws. Only as they see God at the center of nature will they root out the secularism that plagues the contemporary world. This is an important process in people's beliefs and practices in the light churches in the West as well as traditional mission contexts. The rapid shift to postmodernity, with its focus on self-fulfillment and ultimate narcissism forces a reevaluation (i.e., a need for an application of critical contextualization) of the Western, well-entrenched, and institutionalized church. It is not easy for modern Christians to recover a holistic theology. Implicit in English and other Western languages is a Neo-Platonic dualism that separates supernatural from natural reality, God from nature, and religion from science. Turaki (2011:154), concludes that "In the eighteenth centuries Western missionaries came to Africa with the gospel of Christ. Africans embraced Christianity and abandoned their pagan religions and practices. Today, African Christians see Westerners abandoning their Christianity. The rise of secularism, pluralism, relativism and postmodernism has dethroned Western ethnocentrism and Christianity; and created a religious vacuum." Some who sought to fill this vacuum by reviving the pagan gods their forefathers had abandoned has been what contributed to nominalism in the Churches today.

This dualism is not found in biblical thought. For instance, the word in Hebrew used for this world and its order is *bara*, "what is created," which includes angels, humans, animals, plants and matter. The word implies that these originate in and are continuously dependent on God for their very existence. Events in human lives cannot be divided into ordinary and miraculous. This affirmation of God's presence in all things is essential in answering the questions raised by folk religions as well as by modern man. In dealing with old religious beliefs and nominal Christianity, God's people need a theology of discernment. People seek signs to assure them that God is present, but apart from the fruits of the Spirit, there are no self-authenticating phenomena.

Miraculous healings, speaking in tongues, exorcisms, prophecies, resurrections, and other extraordinary experiences are reported in all major religions. The second is to adopt the process of critical contextualization.

6.2. Critical Contextualization

Nominal Christianity persists around the world despite centuries of instruction and condemnation by missionaries and church leaders. Sidney Williamson (1965:156) notes that "Most Christians live on two unreconciled levels. They are members of a church and ascribe to a statement of faith. But below the system of conscious belief are deeply embedded traditions and customs implying quite a different interpretation of the universe and the world of spirit from the Christian interpretation. In the crises of life and rites of passage the Church is an alien thing."

There has to be ways of dealing with nominal Christians is to develop apologetics in response by coming up with philosophical systems to confront their old religious beliefs. There are four steps in applying critical contextualization to stamp out nominal Christian practices in churches. The first step deals with the problems of new believers going back to their former religious traditions and still appear in church services. The second step deals with anthropology which is the core belief system of a person. A person has to critically study the social, philosophical, psychological, spiritual and personal dimensions of nominal Christians. In this study one seeks to understand their genuine nature on how they interpret their worldview, beliefs, values, and feelings to be able to contextualize the Christian faith effectively. In this process of "critical contextualization" is to examine phenomenologically the people's beliefs and practices in order to understand these as the people do. Therefore, in the process of "Critical contextualization" is to test the people's beliefs and practices in the light of biblical truth and tests of reality. This calls for a deep knowledge of the Bible and theological frameworks for understanding Scripture that serves as the criteria by which human social and cultural systems are evaluated and judged. Because nominal religious people are so diverse, no single set of theological answers will solve all the problems that arise. Specific theological responses must be developed for each context. There are, however, general theological principles that can be used to deal with the many theological questions that confront Christian churches as they emerge from nominal Christian religious contexts. Many people study Scripture and theology, but do not study the people. The effective communication of the gospel cannot take place, however, without a deep understanding of the language and culture of a people. This is done through ontological study of the scripture to say what it says about their nominal situation or issues at hand. The third step in critical contextualization to deal with nominal Christian life is membership's decision concerning how to respond spiritual attacks. The members critically, evaluate their beliefs and traditions in the light of God's teaching and apply solutions based on new biblical truth discovered in handling those spiritual attacks.

Pastoral leaders need to understand the religious beliefs and practices of the people to provide biblical answers to the questions they face, and to contextualize those biblical new truth within the church in the local setting. Good contextualization requires wise judgments, not an uncritical acceptance or rejection of old ways. Wise judgments, however, require a deep knowledge of local realities. Without such understanding pastoral and church organizational leaders often jump to false or premature judgments. Pocock (2005:337) noted that “In this step, the leaders help the faith community arrange the practiced and beliefs they have chosen into a ritual that expresses the meaning of the event.” This method can apply to almost every situation encountered. But the focus is not on developing a new theological system yet. Rather, it is on helping people deal theologically and practically with issues of the moment.

Escobar (2003:133) concluded with a counsel that “With the existence of new, young, thriving churches that possessed the Bible in their own language, the scene was set for the rise of vigorous, fresh theological debate for a dialogue between the old and new Christian churches.” J Terry (2000:483) opined that “The missionary effort to plant churches that fit naturally into their environment and to avoid planting churches that replicate Western patterns.” That is why inculturation is not limited to theology only. It is put to use in contextualizing. Schineller (1990:6) noted, “In the final analysis, therefore, inculturation refers to the correct way of living and sharing one’s Christian faith in a particular context.” Gomez (2010:174) argued that “Salvation addresses the individual’s social, economic and political concerns in addition to spiritual dimension.” The fourth step in critical contextualization is to develop new contextualized practice. Those who oversee congregations to help them practice Christian faith as a way of life to all situations good or bad. This is because many of the key issues facing young churches emerge out of real-life situations that are always in particular contexts. Each tradition presents a different set of questions that must be addressed theologically. Escobar (2003:133) concurred that “It seems that just as the possibility of posing the kinds of questions that Western theology had never raised because the subject of controversy.” This is why there usually certain elements of oppositions in contextualization when international graduates with theology or missiological disciplines returned to their home countries with adapted Western culture. Escobar (2003:133) affirmed that “The young churches needed to be able to respond to the pastoral questions that arose in their context for the penetration of their cultures with the gospel.” Although we can see the obvious need for contextualization, the actual practice of it is not easy. Blinded by our own ethnocentrism and ecclesiastical hegemony, we find it is very difficult to cultivate the art of listening and learning from those different from ourselves. But in a spirit of humility this is a fundamental requirement for contextualization. Pocock, explains this better.

Pocock (2005:333) explained “For example, Matthew was composed for a Jewish audience. John for an audience familiar with Greek categories of thought and Luke/Acts for a Gentile named Theophilus.” Indeed, contextual issues lived out in the lives of New Testament characters. That is why contextualization models that prioritize the pole of Scripture are typically called translation models. They take the Bible as normative and the role of the contextualization is to translated the message of the Bible so that it can fit indigenously in a new setting. For one tradition, it is polygamy, ancestors, and the spirit world, for another it is social oppression, injustice, ideologies, and massive social systems that stand in opposition to God. Wilbur O’Donovan (1996:291) clarifies on the matter of polygamy. O’Donovan notes that “The question is often asked, whether a polygamist who has turned to Christ should be baptized?”

O’Donovan (1996:291) explains that “The answer comes in a biblical understanding of the meaning of baptism. Baptism is a public testimony that a person has become a part of the body of Christ.” However, from biblical record would pastoral leaders deny baptism to someone who had been sexually immoral; an adulterer, or a thief before turning to Christ? Certainly not (I Corinthians 6:6-11). All such persons should be baptized if they have truly repented and put their faith in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). However, from Scriptural perspective, though a polygamist should be baptized, the polygamist must never become an elder in a local church (I Timothy 3:2,12). This is because God’s wants his plan of one woman for one man in marriage to be visibly seen in the lives of the church leaders. Again, Scripture does not leave the church in the dark that polygamy after conversion is very different. Because polygamy is not the will of God, it is clearly an act of rebellion for a Christian to take a second wife. The Christian who takes a second wife must be disqualified and disciplined by the local Church (I Corinthians 5:11-13). Pastoral care givers must address not only the issues that emerge out of the study of Scripture but also address those that emerge in the daily lives of people and churches. Thus, there is a need to draw some recommendations nominalism in the church of Nigeria and elsewhere in the world.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations drawn to address Christian nominalism in church membership in Nigeria:

(i) Regarding Second generation Christian nominalism in the church memberships in Nigeria, the majority of church leaders and members acknowledge the presence in their church memberships of people who appear to be or are regarded by others as true Christians but are not. The testimonies of former nominal church members imply that some church members and even church leaders have gone through the rite of water baptism and are “actively” involved in the church activities, but without genuine repentance and authentic faith in Jesus.

(ii) Christian nominalism is understood both as a condition of those who are not Christians at all and as a condition of those who claimed are Christians but who have not grown spiritually. The study shows that the churches in Nigeria understand nominal Christians more as church members not growing spiritually than those who are not Christians at all.

(iii) The pastoral leadership may be to blame for, among other things, not preaching the biblical gospel clearly, not doing appropriate discipleship and mentorship by not following up those who convert to Christianity and not being role models in their lifestyle. Christian nominalism in Nigeria church memberships have the following implications for the church and for the field of practical and pastoral theology.

(A) Much needs to be done for churches in Nigeria by pastoral care givers and leaders of Christian organizations to enable them to start effectively confronting Christian nominalism and its challenges. Churches should ensure that evangelism is done not only outside the church but inside it as well. Doing and practicing biblical Christianity is one mark of a healthy local church.

(B) Pastors need to exercise serious pastoral oversight of the flock to avoid filling the church with unconverted members. They will do this by feeding God’s people, being godly role models for them and watching over them.

(C) This article on Christian nominalism can also offer an opportunity for further discussion on, among others, the impact of a denomination’s doctrines on members’ understanding of what it is to be a Christian, the issue of “quick methods” in winning people to Christ, the relationship between the size of a local church membership and Christian nominalism and the influence of secularism and religious pluralism on the development of Christian nominalism. Before a conclusion is drawn, there are practical steps the church needs to apply allow biblical Christianity to stamp out nominalism among Christians in churches. These practical steps are: First, non-nominal Christian parents should return to teaching God’s word to their own children in homes. Howard G. and William Hendricks (1991:71), caution that “The great tragedy among Christians today is that they are under the Word of God, but they are not in it for themselves.” When Christian parents mature their children from the Word of God in homes, the church will benefit spiritual Christians who can do exploits to fulfill God’s kingdom on earth. Second, when Christians live holy lives, it drives superficial and nominal practice of Christianity to have Christ reflected in every aspect of life (Colossians 1:27). Third, nominalism is best addressed in the churches in Nigeria through intentional discipleship. Paul encouraged Timothy to encourage his new Christians to become reliably responsible reproducible Christians. Paul said, “The things you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). When this method of reproducible principle happened among people in churches of Africa, true Christians are produced. This will even allow newly established churches to go in collaboration with the native people in the communities where such churches are planted to mature others because the newly converted Christians will be disciplined to bring them to maturity in Christian faith.

Willimon (2000:116), affirms that “All disciples are commanded to take up the cross to throw away life for the sake of the Gospel.” Fourth, the call to discipleship shows involvement in bringing about God’s kingdom through a process of reproducible multiplication. Ogden (2003:16) argues in favor for contemporary application of discipleship as a solution to nominalism in the church. Ogden notes that “Disciple making, discipleship and discipling are hot topics today because we see such a great need for this focus in our churches.” Hull (1988:14) further argues that “The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product.” Hull (1988:19), cautions that “Choosing to be a self-sufficient and selfish Christian is choosing to live a spiritually anemic and impoverished life.” Ogden (Ogden1990:44) further notes

that “A person is a converted one whose life is created by and dependent on the living Christ.” Indeed, David Dawson (1982:48) concludes that “The need of the hour is people want what Jesus Christ wants and believe he wants to give them the power to do what he has asked. Nothing in the world can stop those people.”

In conclusion, the challenge before the contemporary church today, is for every church has a prophetic calling. It must proclaim the good news that creation will one day be restored to perfection; that sickness, loneliness, pain, and death will cease; and that all God ‘s people will spend eternity in his presence with unbounded joy and wholeness. This, truly, is the good life. The church must examine the socio-cultural context in which God has placed it, and speak out against sin, injustice, oppression, and hatred. The criteria for making judgments are not the values of the world, nor the majority vote of all those who call themselves Christian.

It is the Word of God, understood and applied by communities of committed believers, and proclaimed to the society in which they live. Particular responsibility is placed on leaders to help their congregations in this ministry (1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9). Churches must deal with the challenges raised by folk religions. If they do not, their public witness will be compromised by the private practices of their members. Only when all areas of life are brought under the lordship of Christ will churches have a vibrant life and winsome witness in the world.

Jesus said “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). The church of Christ has grown from a handful of disciples to what it is today. Those who seek the knowledge of theology must be part of this community of God’s people. Eternal perspective is the hope of theology. Christian theology is concerned not just with the present but also with the future. The Bible provides hope of a future where there will be peace, righteousness and justice. This future hope is assurance and eternal security of all those who have faith in Christ. Everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ’s atoning work are eternally kept saved due to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption.” Hence, the sanctification or the believer’s setting apart is “positional at the point of conversion, and progressive on a daily basis as we walk the Christian pilgrim way and ultimately which is experienced in the hereafter when each believer enters into the presence of the Lord.” Ladd (197:537) notes that the church is defined as “the new people of God or the community of believers.” The church as one, holy and apostolic. But Palmer (2015:124) notes that “it is regrettable that in history the church has often become unfaithful.” Palmer (2015:125) argues that “a true church is one that will conform to the ideal of Scripture. A true church will have true doctrine and godly lifestyle.” Boice (1986:576,585) equally alleges that a true church manifests, “joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity and love. If these marks are absent, a true church is certainly absent.” Indeed, nominalism is not expected to be part of the contemporary church in Nigeria.

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