

CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: A QUESTION OF MATERIALISM OR SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The flesh and soul are often described as the two opposing element facing human beings. This estrangement between the two spheres of life, the relationship between materialism and spirituality, is so complex. This paper examines Christianity in Africa; questioning whether it is of materialism or spirituality. Riches and wealth are placed by God on earth so that Christians can use them for the advancement of his kingdom; hence, Christians focus on the pursuit of material possessions instead of the pursuit of spirituality. It shows that they have deviated from the gospel; materialistic Men of God have departed radically from the preaching of the Lord Jesus which emphasized contentment and instead substituted greed and avarice into the social lexicon (materialism). This paper has been able to proof that Christianity practices in contemporary African countries are more of materialism than of spirituality. The paper revealed that materialism manifests in the church today in various ways, in forms of greed and covetousness and this has led to gospel merchandising. It is also obvious that materialism holds some serious negative effects on both the church and the Christian. The various Biblical responses to the challenge of materialism on Christian's spiritual life serve as eye openers to Christians who do not want to fall prey to materialism.

Keywords: Christianity, Africa, Materialism, Spirituality, Values

INTRODUCTION

The quest for materialism among Christians today is fast leading many to jettison the doctrine of contentment. It seems to have gotten to the extent that being poor as a Christian is now considered a sin among God's people. The biblical name for this quest is greed and covetousness which commences when Christians begin to compare themselves with the unbelievers in achievements and wealth, and such; they tend to lose their focus on Christ (Christian spirituality). Many pulpits preaching are no more centered on Christian spirituality, but on worldly achievements and material prosperity: houses and cars, success in business, money, health, and happiness (Michael, 2018). This shows that the focus of the church, both clergy and laity is now on material things and physical happiness.

Hence, many people follow Jesus today not because he is the bread of life but because they see him as the means to material prosperity. There are thousands of drifters who move from one church to the next, and from a 'crusade' to a 'revival' meeting in search of material blessings instead of Christian spirituality. The church seems to have forgotten the injunction of the Lord Jesus, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33), and have twisted the verse as Adeleye (2013) puts it "seek ye first the things of this world and their fullness, and the kingdom of God shall be added unto you." It seems that wherever the popular notion of wealth or materialism tends to be the focus of a religious faith, attention shifts from modesty to the acquisition of materialism whether through fair or foul means. Money, fame, and flamboyant lifestyles are extolled to the neglect of cherished virtues such as the sanctity of human life and the undying pursuit for the general good of all. The attitude of acquiring wealth, with its harmful effects, has become deep seated that nearly all areas of life in Africa have been affected.

The theology of materialism as noted by Asamoah (2013) seems to have gradually become almost an established doctrine of the Christian faith. At its core is the notion that "financial blessing is the will of God for Christians, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth." Thus the ultimate goal of the theology of wealth is material success represented by the overt emphasis on money, fame, good marriages, good jobs, visas to desired places abroad, and pregnancies. The quest for materialism at all cost runs contrary to the moderate usage of wealth long advocated by the Christian faith. Thus, Umoh (2015) rightly observes that the "prosperity Gospel is an aberrant theology, based on a non-traditional interpretation of the Bible and the teaching that God rewards faith and tithing with material well-being." The emphasis on wealth and healing among some African Christians is so acute that other values such as love, mercy, devotion to God, and faithfulness to one's God-given duty in life are neglected. He indicates that:

In recent times, a new wave of Christian message is convulsively sweeping through the world like harmattan bush fire. It reads: Wealth not poverty. Treasure not good deeds; flamboyance, not the humble cassock; prosperity and earthly comfort not patience in tribulations (Umoh, 2015:659).

True to Umoh's assertion, the theology of materialism continues to impact Christianity in Africa today. It seems to rewrite the principles of Christian spirituality stressing wealth, healing, fame, and flamboyance in place of the long-cherished virtues of the Christian faith - love, hope, steadfastness, self-control, reticence, contentment and simplicity. If the impact of the theology of materialism on Christianity in Africa continues unabated, there is a genuine fear that the center of Christian's spirituality in Africa will completely move from God to miraculous break-through geared toward materialism in all of its facets. Hence, I asked: what future does the theology of materialism have for the evangelization and discipline of prospective Christians on the African continent? Christian spirituality is biblically defined as the practice of the beliefs of the

Christian faith (Alister, 2018). Spirituality is a lived experience, the effort to apply relevant elements in the deposit of Christian faith to the guidance of men and women towards their spiritual growth, the progressive development of their persons which flowers into a proportionately increased insight and joy (Alister, 2018). He (Alister) asserted that:

Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as outcomes of that experience: Spirituality arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged in the crucible of the desire to live out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully (Alister, 2018:64).

Christian spirituality implies an understanding of God, the material world, and human identity (Alister, 2018). In other words, spirituality and beliefs are inseparable. Contrary to the instruction of the Lord and Master of the church in Matthew 10:8 'Freely you have received, freely you must give', some Christian clerics and gospel preachers go ahead to merchandise the gospel, presenting false teachings and deceptive practices in such a way that their followers would be compelled to patronize them. This phenomenon came into the Nigerian Christendom with the rise of new wave of Pentecostalism in the 1980s and it has become so common and extremely alarming nowadays. This assumption is supported by many scholars who lament that often there has been financial or commercial motive behind many gospel propagations in Africa. Ugwueye posits that 'religion is now business which borders on commercialization or financial endeavours' (Ugwueye, 2002). Corroborating the above assertions, Nwadiakor and Umeanolue (2015) noted that:

Materialistic gospel message entered into Nigeria through the several visiting of American materialistic gospel preachers and through their books, magazines, pamphlets and radio programmes. However, the question is, is it possible to drive away all those materialistic gospel preachers that have commercialized religion for their own interest in order to gain from it? These gains are evident in the selling of recorded cassettes of messages, prayers, counseling, performed miracles, testimonies, which they sell for them to have buoyant economy (2015:35).

Many of the church leaders seem to have abandoned the precepts on which the church and other religious practices are founded; instead, they now brazenly pursue economic or commercial-oriented interests and tendencies in the name of preaching the gospel (Nwanganga, 2017). Though the Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N) was formed as a political and/or watchdog organization to fight the anomalies, these churches seem to be stronger than the umbrella body who like the toothless bulldog, have not been able to fight much.

Riches and wealth are placed by God on earth so that Christians can use them for the advancement of his kingdom, it was to be used to honor Him hence it is therefore expedient for the materially blessed Christians to

use such material possessions for the kingdom's purpose. But when they fail to do this and rather focus on the pursuit of material possessions instead of the pursuit of spirituality, it shows that they have deviated from the gospel this is why Onukwufor and Inyima (2018) noted that it is not a sin for a Christian to be rich, but it becomes sin if such a Christian fails to use his wealth to meet the needs of the poor.

Materialism has proved itself to be a major deviation from biblical Christianity. Many Christians, and unfortunately some pastors, have decided to pursue material treasures over and against godly values. Materialistic "Men of God" have departed radically from the preaching of the Lord Jesus which emphasized contentment and instead substituted greed and avarice into the social lexicon (materialism). They offer fake holiness and continue to educate their followers with the doctrines of prosperity, albeit, prosperity at all costs. It is against this backdrop that this paper analyzes Christianity in Africa a question of materialism or spirituality, exposing Christianity practices in Africa. It also assesses the implications of materialism on Christian spirituality; it is pertinent to explicate the three major terms that constitute the subject matter of this article: Christianity, materialism and spirituality.

Materialism

Materialism according to Biwul (2015) has both theological and philosophical connotations. Philosophically, it is the denial of the spiritual or non-physical, holding that only the physical (material) exist. This however is not the usage of materialism in this work. This article views materialism from the theological standpoint. Within this framework, materialism is understood to be the overemphasis on material possessions. In other words, materialism is placing more value on material possessions over godly values. Materialism is not only used to refer a desire and acquisition of money, car, and landed properties, but materialism should also be understood to be comprising of other material possessions such as fashion, technology, artificial beauty, social status, political standing, etc (Onukwufor & Inyima, 2018). That is to say, materialism is not just physical or structural, materialism is also ideological. According to Maxey and Ozodo (2018) materialism is a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. Troeger (2016) stated that "Materialism is the religion that worships the acquisition of things." While Stefano (2017) revealed that the focus on material things and their use for survival has indeed led to a philosophical dependence and valuation of things above everything else. In materialism, all actions and attitudes flow from one's experience with things, how many things one has, and the acquisition of more and new things.

Spirituality

In contemporary society, spirituality in Christendom is generally defined as a set of beliefs, values, and way of life that reflect the teachings of the Bible, the holy book of Christianity. In Christian terms, spirituality is define or refers to the way our fundamental values, life styles and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God,

human identity, and the material world as the context of human transformation (Sheldrake, 2018). Tang (2018) defines Christian spirituality as the process of spiritual formation of a disciple of Jesus Christ for an authentic and fulfilled Christian life in the present world; involving bringing together the fundamental tenets of the Christian truths and the experience of living in God's presence, grace and love in one's daily life. It is Trinitarian, incarnational and grace-filled living. The word "spirituality" has become increasingly common. Its meaning is not limited to spiritual practices, such as meditation, but suggests the pursuit of a life shaped by a sense of meaning, values, and perhaps transcendence. Although the word is used in different religions, and by people with no religious beliefs, its origins were Christian and referred to living life under the influence of God's spirit. Hence our spirituality begins with God. John 3:3-8; and Acts 2:38-39 revealed that:

It begins with a divine call, rebirth and conversion and continues with sanctification or spiritual formation. It requires divine grace and our willing co-operation. It involves our inner and outward lives. It involves the integration of our lives as we are being restored by the Holy Spirit.

The goal is to become more like Christ as noted in Eph 4:13-1. Drigas and Mitsea (2020) out listed the essentials of Christian spirituality as; knowing God, experiencing God to the full, transformation of existence on the basis of the Christian faith and truths and attaining Christian authenticity in life and thoughts. The Bible provides the core themes, metaphors, and grand narratives out of which Christians make sense of God's revelation in Christ. The Bible, as the first and foremost witness in Christian revelation, serves as a primary source for Christian spirituality.

Firstly, Christian spirituality is biblically defined as the practice of the beliefs of the Christian faith (Drigas and Mitsea, 2020). It includes both knowledge and action. James 1:25 notes, for example: "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." From the earliest writings of the New Testament, the principle of integrated and authentic faith and action has been taught as essential to Christian spirituality. Secondly, Christian spirituality relies on the power of the Holy Spirit to live according to God's will. The Holy Spirit serves to lead us into all truth as noted in John 16:13, gives joy, and convicts when we sin as in Ephesians 4:30. For example, 1 John 1:5-8 asserted that:

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." True spirituality depends on the supernatural power God gives through the Holy Spirit rather than dependence on human strength.

Finally, the pursuit of Christian spirituality will result in what the Bible calls the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" as revealed in Galatians 5:22-23. When a believer lives by the power of God's Spirit, it produces godly qualities as well as brings honour to God. As Jesus taught: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Seen from this perspective, Christian spirituality is for the honour of God, personal maturity, and serves as a blessing to others, both through the good deeds that take place as well as a heart attitude that points others to God. The contemporary concept of spirituality refers not only to spiritual practices but also to a framework of values, often implicit rather than explicit, directed at a more intentional lifestyle. Spirituality concerns what is holistic, that is, a fully integrated approach to life.

VIVEKANANDA'S THEORY OF CHRISTIAN MATERIALISM VERSUS SPIRITUALITY

Vivekananda propounded that most Christians are dualists (Vivekananda, 2016). He noted that each human person is an immaterial substance, a soul, or at least, that each of us has a soul as part of us. Human beings are often described as having two opposing (and complementary) elements: Flesh and Soul. We all strive, to a certain extent and according to everybody's ability, to reach a level where we are satisfied with both elements. This satisfaction is actually an ideal, and seldom do we find people who have reached that level. This estrangement between the two spheres of life, the relationship between materialism and spirituality, is so complex (Vivekananda, 2016). He stressed the need for perfect synthesis of materialism and spirituality in life. The synthesis of materialism and spirituality has become inevitable to the modern man. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed many transitional changes due to globalization. Immense progress in science and technology and in economy has brought about more comfortable living conditions for man which has prompted man to strive more for material needs instead of true spirituality. Globalization and liberalization of economies have also played a crucial role in this regard. In the era of globalization, we are witnessing an attack of materialism. However, globalization has many good effects. Hence in the words of Stefano (2017:4):

Over thousands of years, globalization has contributed to the progress of the world through travel, trade, migration, spread of cultural influences and dissemination of knowledge and understanding ... yes, it leaves some people behind, but it helps millions more to leap ahead. Yes, it has made us materialistic, but it has also brought western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights equality, liberty, the rule of law democracy, free market and separation of church and state (2017:4).

But, in addition to these positive effects of globalization, we forget ill effects of it. Human beings, at present, are blinded by the glamour of

Materialism. Man wants to possess more and more material things. Money has taken the place of God, whose values supersedes other values. Compassion has been drained from modern life. Most Christians, even pastors have drifted more towards one opposing element (flesh) while the other (soul) suffers. Their target is pursuit of material wealth; their objective mainly is to increase their own gain. Christian spirituality is founded on “discipleship” (Vivekananda, 2016). This is expressed in the gospels as the task of extending Jesus’ proclamation of God’s Kingdom to the whole world (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49). However, Umoh (2015) revealed that it is too narrow to understand the call to proclaim the Kingdom simply as a verbal communication of information about God or of moral teachings. Proclaiming the way of Jesus was understood from the beginning as living “after the manner of Jesus Christ.” Thus, Christians extend Jesus’ mission by being a “living message,” through the kind of people they are and how they act in the world (Cor. 3:3). Spirituality concerns what is holistic, that is, a fully integrated approach to life. Historically the notion of the spiritual relates to the holy. Thus, spirituality seeks to engage with “life-as-a-whole” rather than with aspects of it. Second, spirituality involves a quest for the sacred. In religious spiritualities, such as Christian ones, the sacred relates to beliefs about God or the Absolute.

In relation to this theory it is obvious that materialism is a deviation from Christian ethics. It obscures the believer from having a functional faith in God to a destructive faith in material possessions. In light of this, Piper (2015) explains, “God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him in the midst of loss not prosperity”. This being the case, believers ought to seek comfort, satisfaction, self-fulfillment, contentment and meaning in God rather than in material possessions. This however should form no excuse for laziness within the Christian community as it is clear from scriptures that laziness is not an option for the believer (Prov 6:6–11; 2 Thess 3:10). It has also been established that the materialist is egocentric. Thus, materialism propels one to do things that are only of personal benefit, regardless of the wellbeing of others. In view of this, Zacharias (2018) in a sermon presented at Liberty University on their 40th Baccalaureate advised, “Never get too comfortable with comfort that it is the comfort principle that guides everything you do.” On the point of reason, Ravi clarifies that, “We move towards the direction of our comforts” and when that happens, one’s consciousness ceases to make judgments based on moral standards of right or wrong, nor on Christian ethics and theology. One’s consciousness rather aligns to a value judgment that is based on the amount of satisfaction such a person gets from the intended action. Thus, a believer guided by the ‘comfort principle’ will most likely end up being materialistic.

EXAMINING CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA: MATERIALISM OR SPIRITUAL

The Churches in Africa have drifted from soul winning which is primarily their initial foundation due to materialistic attitude of Christians in the church. Though this may not be completely true; hence some notable evidence could still be pointed out to the effect that the church is still in the real business of true evangelism and mission today. However,

Onyeidu (2004) expresses the need to consider strongly the value, orientation, motive, and aim of the early missionaries before we can see clearly the locus of diversion and perversion presently evident in contemporary Christian organizations in Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole.

A cursory look at the teaching of Jesus Christ will also reveal that the Christology behind the contemporary church's work of evangelism needs a theological healing (Ononogbu, 2012). Biblically, the philosophy of the theology of materialism has been criticized as propagating false teachings which gravely distort the Bible. Evidently, Asamoah (2013) asserted that some of the scriptural passages used as bases for explaining the tenets of this gospel, are often quoted and applied out of context. For instance, Gen 12:1-3 is used by proponents to teach that God's promise in the Abrahamic covenant, which is materialistic, applies to all true Christians. Hence all true Christians are expected to be materially rich because Abraham was materially blessed and prosperous. 3rd John 2 which states that: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" is used in this vain to lend credence to the notion that the divine plan for all true believers is that they become rich materially and in health. However, a critical study of Gen 12:1-3 suggests that the covenant blessings means much more than material success.

Sharing this view, Michael (2018) explains that "the blessing vouchsafed to him (Abram) would finally unite divided families on earth, and change the dread curse pronounced upon the ground because of sin into a blessing for all men. All further promises to the patriarchs and to Israel either clarified or amplified the promise of salvation offered the entire human race in the first promise made to Abram." Indeed, it is only a spiritual blessing that could cure the curse wrought by sin upon the entire humanity. Similarly, 3 John 2 illustrates that wholesome state of wealth or prosperity involves both material (physical) and spiritual well-being. Kasera (2018) indicates further: "here the reference appears to be to Gaius' spiritual life, which was strong. It was possible that his physical condition was not so good. He may have neglected the physical concerns of life for the religious. Such neglect is harmful; balance is essential to successful living." Thus, both passages have different focus than that being imposed on them by adherents of the theology of wealth. The blessings of God while including material success extends beyond it, it concerns itself with the ultimate, the restoration of the relationship between humanity and God (salvation). God's purpose for everyone is that all should be saved (John 3: 16). Ironically, the faith and doctrines of the church in Africa are divided within the numerous denominations that are looking for a platform to outwit the others in terms of population and material prosperity. The churches in Nigeria in particular are seriously embarking on materialistic evangelism. They spend a lot of money conducting revival programs, open air crusades, Bible study groups, house fellowships, personal evangelism, prayer, pastoral visitations, leadership retreats, church plantings, schools, and general investments. They also establish orphanages, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), medical outreaches, agricultural investments, etc. However, the motive of the

church towards social action today has changed. The materialistic attitude of the churches creates a doubt in the mind concerning the real purpose of the church.

This shows how donations are made as advertisements for showing of self. When they organize crusades, they attract crowds and create a kind of human marketing atmosphere during the offering, suggesting that making money out of the crusade is paramount. On PM News, January 5, 2011, Simon reveals that Christ Embassy Church in Lagos, South-West Nigeria, during her New Year's Eve crusade, forced members to pay a gate fee of N1, 000 each, and indigent members who could not afford the N1,000 tickets, were denied access and sent back by security men at the gate, with over N25 million collected. Lamenting further, Global News reports that during crusades, product sales go on such as books, video tapes, and CDs (N300 and N1,300), DVDs (N300 and 3,600). Pastoral visits have been turned into a clinic where people line up and pay a consultation fee to see the pastor. Prayers are contracted for a fee which attracts a kind of prayer team to handle the prayer (If you want, prayer team A to pray and fast over your prayer point, you pay more than you will do for team B). In today's Churches, the members pay for prophecies. In January, 2022, a Corp member serving in Anambra State but based in Uyo, who's monthly allowance is #33,000, was asked by her pastor to pay #25,000 in order to receive a prophecy of jeeps coming her way. This payment was to be made within seven days. Izuekwe (2015, May 6) reports how Timothy Gabriel, a pastor in Ejigbo, Lagos State, pretended to pray for a N10 million loan collected by one of his church members from a bank, but the pastor ran away with the money. Churches are planted and owned by pastors who presume that God through the Holy Spirit has called them to open their own ministry to the detriment of their former church. House fellowship is organized only in the houses of the rich with the aim of harvesting the money in their pockets. The success of evangelism in Africa today is based on the amount of money made in return, not the number of people converted. Forthwith, the altar of various churches has been turned into a theater art and a comedy show stage. The church is much more interested in building sophisticated and highly decorated mansions. Today's powerful evangelists are known for the number of cars, buildings, and wealth they possess, which is the reason leadership tussles, mismanagement of funds, immorality, magic, and falsehoods are thriving in the church today.

IMPLICATIONS OF MATERIALISM ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Research has shown that materialism has more negative effects than positive benefits for a true believer of Christianity and a materialistic individual. Since the materialistic Christian possesses no immunity to these negativities, the materialistic Christian also falls prey of all negative outcomes aligned with materialism. In Nigeria and most African countries today, many churches have become centers for exploitation and manipulation of people for making economic gain by pastors and prophets due to materialistic lifestyle. The root of gospel merchandising in Nigeria can be seen as what Kalu (2008) describes as the market theory. Kalu (2008) linked commercialization or merchandising of the gospel to the

market theory built around the idea that sees the religious space as being similar to the market place. He considered the Christian religion in the form it is being propagated today as a commodity because messages and other elements of the religion are being packaged as products in a competitive market place. Using marketing strategies, religious leaders find it very easy to dupe gullible consumers and adherents presenting their own 'religious product' as the best. When our contemporary church establishes a school, the fees suggest that the school is made for the rich and not for the poor masses whose financial contributions the church used to build the school (Iheukwu & Udechineke, 2018).

In fact, the manipulation of the gospel for the purpose of material enrichment is played out in uncountable ways by business-minded Gospel preachers, including but not limited to manipulation of the gospel message, divinations, selling of religious products, healings and miracles, subtle threat, etc. (Essien, 2010). These materialistic tendencies of most Nigerian churches create a doubt in the minds of people concerning the real purpose of the church. The erroneous teaching of some materialistic men of God has made Christians believe that God's children deserve the best of everything on earth. Gordon Fee agreeing with this position posits: "Because we are God's children we should always go first-class, we should have the biggest and best, a Cadillac instead of a Volkswagen because this alone brings glory to God."

This erroneous teaching tends to be the driving force of many Christians into being materialistic. So, when the church begins to teach that as God's children, they deserve the best in this world, they soon become greedy and covetous of what God has not graciously given. Another implication of materialism on Christian spirituality is the continuous shift from the holistic teaching of the truth of God's word to emphasizing wealth and prosperity teachings. Popular teaching in most of the African Nigerian churches and most churches in Africa has fundamentally shifted over the past generation. In many instances, it has shifted from teaching the necessity for spiritual transformation characterized by holiness to teaching a form of transformation based on the evidence of health and wealth. The church is, therefore sliding into materialism when the attention of the clergy is only based on physical prosperity and wealth creation. Some other begins with the reconstruction of the church auditorium not necessarily because of an obvious need (for more people to worship), but to fit modern taste at the expense of evangelism and mission (Maxey & Ozodo, 2018)

People are made to believe that what prospers them is not their hard work but the level of the seed sown. This is done with the use of certain terminologies like, 'sowing and reaping generously,' the 'hundredfold returns,' the 'seed-faith principle,' 'that thou mayest prosper,' 'give and it will be given to you,' 'to whom much is given much is expected,' among others. These terms are products of wrong Biblical hermeneutics of some Bible passages used in backing them up. Some of the Bible verses which materialistic preachers use include Mark 10:29 - 30; Gal. 6:7; 3 John 2; and Luke 6:38, among others. Some of these preachers assure members that these seeds are for the expansion of God's kingdom and for evangelism, they end up using them to enrich their pockets. The truth is

also being twisted to suit the ears of the people so that they can be willing to bring out their money just as it was found during the days of the prophets in the Old Testament.

According to Onukwufor and Inyima (2018) the congregation is also deceived by the way of divination where the so-called prophets make predictions for the future and make attempts to uncover the past. Kasser (2012) on another hand has clearly and succinctly stated this defect of materialism thus: When materialistic values dominate our society, we move farther and farther from what makes us civilized. We treat each other in less humane ways. We allow the pursuit of money to take precedence over equality, the human spirit, and respectful treatment of each other. That is to say, rather than extending the love of Christ to others, through material properties, a materialistic believer loses his or her sense of communal awareness and social responsibility, thus neglecting other members of the society, and acting in less humane ways. Such a person only focuses on personal gratification even at the disadvantage of community. Although the Bible condemns the attitude of merchandising the gospel in its totality, the phenomenon has many social implications both for the church and the society that are not altogether condemnable. At first, being materialistic blunts a living faith in Christ Jesus. This is portrayed by Eyre (2012:65) as:

Materialism blunts a living faith. A vibrant sense of the presence of God becomes dead orthodoxy. The reality of the Christian life becomes a shadow. Our experience of life in Christ becomes empty. If we can't see it, taste it, smell it or measure it, then we doubt that it is real, therefore, we come to doubt that God is real (p. 65).

Another effect of materialism according to Ajiboye (2014) is that it bred Christians that are materialistic in their approach to life while remaining spiritually bankrupt. This is because it is only a half-truth that negates the wholesome gospel of Jesus Christ which applies to all areas of life. More also, materialism makes the believer to become pre-occupied with this side of life with little focus on the hereafter. "All our time, energy and thoughts are focused on the physical aspects of life. Christians become practical materialists. They know that there is more to life, but the way they live shows that they have adopted the creed of the dragon of materialism. Supporting this assertion Biwul (2014) noted that being materialistic lead the believer into the worship of health, wealth and happiness, making physical things a god. Biwul (2014:128) argues that:

We know from the scripture that both persons and societies can put their faith in things and forces which their own hands have made. In their pursuit of prosperity, salvation, health, protection and so forth, people sooner or later create gods. But gods never leave their makers alone. Because people put themselves in a position of dependence on their gods, invariably, the moments come when these things or forces gain the upper hand [p. 128].

As Okwori (2008) noted: Your desiring the best of the two worlds, can only result in worldliness, since 'God and mammon' cannot be served at the same time. Your motive is selfish. Greed and covetousness become the qualities you exhibit in the name of faith in God. Furthermore, Maxey and Ozodo (2018:52) stated that the incompatibility of materialism and godliness shows clearly that:

Anyone who makes the pursuit of material things the basis of spiritual life has moved away from true Bible teaching. A primary search for selfish material prosperity cannot co-exist with the drive towards serving God. Making wealth the primary focus of teaching is fundamentally flawed and ultimately leads people away from God (p. 52).

Materialistic life style of some Christians has directly or indirectly promoted corruption and fraud in Africa especially Nigeria. Miracles are counterfeited and miracle workers are emerging in their numbers, using all sorts of dubious and corrupt means to make money from their followers. Impatience and insatiable hunger for wealth has led some junior pastors to oppose the leadership of the senior ones only to pull away and establish their own ministry or churches. One may call it the expansion of God's kingdom and proliferation of churches for effective evangelism, but as long as this is not established in love and mandate from God, it defeats the prayer and expectation of Jesus for the church which he founded and prayed that they may be one. This inordinate quest for miracle and prosperity has furthermore led many self-acclaimed pastors to clandestine activities. In order to outperform their contemporaries and colleagues in business and become more famous, some pastors have descended so low to the extent that they sought after native doctors for powerful charms with which to perform miracles or that will make the congregation do their bidding without hesitation. Ede (2019, November 24) reported the incidence of one Sunday Egbo, a 26 years old pastor and founder of Christ Deliverance Ministry, Nsukka, Enugu State, who admitted to visiting a native doctor for charms that would attract rich men to his Church. Several Churches have been razed down because human parts were found buried at the altar. On 16th August, 2017, Oluwagbemi reported that the Police in Ogun State on Wednesday arrested a 77-year-old pastor, Samuel Babatunde and two other suspects in connection with the discovery of suspected human parts buried inside a church. Naija Gist (2016, January 26) also reported that following the tip off by the residents, security agencies and soldiers stormed Ugwuaji village in Enugu State only to uncover fresh human parts and fresh bodies of humans buried alive in the foundation of a church building inside the bush. Christianity which was known in the Bible for high sexual morality has been devoid of sexual morality in the contemporary society following the materialistic and worldly attitude of church leaders and ministers. The Christian church has been immersed deeply into the immoral society born out of modernity. To this effect, Onukwufor and Inyima (2018) revealed that all kinds of churches, where the so-called pastors encourage people to come as they are because God looks at the heart and not the outward

appearance, are being established. This has made most of these church members to lose their sense of decency, decorum and virtue.

In summary, the Bible also affirms contentment. Several Biblical characters (like those mentioned above) who were victims of greed and covetousness disregarded contentment and suffered what they should not have experience. Looking at the case of Gehazi, after Elisha had queried the where-about his covetous servant he then remarked, "... Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?" (2 Kings 5:26 NIV) Meaning that, if Gehazi had been contented with what he had and lived in total obedience to God's injunction; his time would come to have possession of those things. Describing contentment, McIntock and Strong (2006) opines that:

Contentment (2 Cor. 9:8) is a disposition of mind in which our desires are confined to what we enjoy without murmuring at our lot, or wishing ardently for more. It stands opposed to envy (James 3:16); to avarice (Heb. 13:5) to pride and ambition (Prov. 13:10); to anxiety of mind (Matt. 6:25, 34); to murmurings and repining (1 Cor. 10:10) (2006:113).

A critical look at this description reveals that there is no way one can be materialistic without throwing contentment into the garbage bin. Contentment does not imply unconcern about our welfare, or that one should not have a sense of anything uneasy or distressing; nor does it give any countenance to idleness, or prevent diligent endeavors to improve one's circumstances. It implies, however, that one's desire for worldly goods be moderate; that one does not indulge in unnecessary care, or use unlawful efforts to better oneself; but that one acquiesce with, and make the best of one's condition, whatever it be.

CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed Christianity in Africa; questioning whether it is of materialism or spirituality. Christian practices in contemporary African countries are more of materialism than of spirituality. Materialism manifests in the church today in various ways, in forms of greed and covetousness and this has led to gospel merchandising. Practically too, the phenomenon of gospel merchandising obviously has done more harm than good to the Nigerian church and African society. It is essentially an aberration to the Christian tradition. It runs counter to the tenets of sacredness, purity and holiness of the Christian faith and profession. The worst of its implications include the promotion of corruption, fraud, and other unholy activities, and the resuscitation of obnoxious religious practices in the African society. Both secular and religious authorities in the African countries should therefore synergize to bring every tendency to gospel merchandising among Africans especially Nigeria to a stop as it has been discovered that it is not only anti-Christian but also anti-social.

It is also obvious that materialism holds some serious negative effects on both the church and the Christians. The various Biblical responses to the challenge of materialism on Christian's spiritual life serve as eye-openers to Christians who do not want to fall prey to materialism. It can,

therefore, be concluded that greed and covetousness are the driving forces for materialism. So believers should endeavour to uphold and live by sound biblical teachings, especially on contentment.

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