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## **THE HISTORY OF NONGU KRISTU U I SER U SHATAR (NKST) AND THE NEED FOR REFORMATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Century protest in Europe against the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church gave rise to Protestantism, a branch of Christianity that developed out of the Reformation. At first, three distinct branches of Protestantism emerged: Lutheranism

based on the teachings of Martin Luther in Germany; Calvinism based on the teachings of John Calvin in Switzerland; and Anglicanism-established by King Henry VIII in England. As differences in beliefs developed, new denominations were formed. This paper examines the doctrines of NKST Church whose Headquarters is Mkar, Gboko, Benue State, North Central Nigeria, that requires reformation. The NKST is a brainchild of the Calvinism branch of reformation. The paper adopting historical methods of research looks at pastoral call, discipline, and interdenominational marriage and concludes that reformation is a question of finding the right balance between diversity and Unity, between State and Church. It is logical therefore to see the Church as an indispensable Station between God and individual man.

Keywords: Reformation, Calvinism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, NKST.

## **Background Information:**

During the late Middle Ages, Europe suffered from both war and plague. Those who survived wanted to celebrate life and the human spirit. They began to question institutions of the Middle Ages, which have been unable to prevent war, or to relieve sufferings brought by the

plague. Some people questioned the church, which taught Christians to endure sufferings while they awaited their rewards in heaven. In Northern Italy, writers and artists began to express this new spirit and to experiment with different styles. These men and women would greatly change how Europeans saw themselves and their world. The Italian renaissance was a rebirth of learning that produced many great works of art and literature.

Trade with the East and the rediscovery of ancient manuscripts caused Europeans to develop new ideas about Culture and art. This period was called the “Renaissance”, which means rebirth. Martin Luther began a movement to reform practices in the Catholic Church that he believed were wrong. That movement led to the founding of non-Catholic Churches, of which the “Nongu u Kristu u I Ser U Sha Tar (NKST), is also one today, This movement that started in Italy caused an explosion of creativity in art, writing, and thought that lasted approximately from 1300 to 1600. Historians call this period the “Renaissance” (REHN.IK.SAHNS). The term means rebirth and in this context, it refers to a revival of art and learning. The educated men and women of Italy hoped to bring back to life the culture of Classical Greece and Rome. Yet, in striving to revive the past, the people of the Renaissance created something New. The contributions made during this period led to innovative

styles of art and literature. They also led to new Values, Such as the importance of the individual.

The Renaissance eventually spread from northern Italy to the rest of Europe. There are three advantages that made it the birth place of the renaissance: Thriving Cities (City States); a wealthy merchant class, and the Classical heritage of Greece and Rome. It was during this period of rebirth that Martin Luther undertake to reform the Church in a revolutionary way leading to Reformation.

By the tenth century the Roman Catholic Church had come to dominate religious life in Northern and Western Europe. However, the Church had not won Universal approval. Over the centuries, many people criticized its Practices. They felt that Church leaders were too interested in worldly pursuits, such as acquisition of worldly things at the expense of the gospel and the pursuit of political power. Even though the Churches made some reforms during the Middle Ages, people continued to criticize them. Prompted by the actions of one man, that Criticism would lead to rebellion.

By 1500, additional forces weakened the Church. The Renaissance emphasis on secular and the individual challenged Church authority. The printing press spread these secular ideas. In addition, the Church's political power was also challenged. In Germany, which was divided into many competing states, it was difficult for the Pope or the emperor to impose central authority. Finally, northern merchants represented paying church taxes to Rome. Spurred by these social, political, and economic forces, a new movement for religious reform began in Germany. It then swept much of Europe.

Critics of the Roman Catholic Church claimed that its leadership was corrupt. The Popes who ruled during the Renaissance patronized the arts, spent extravagantly on personal pleasure, and fought wars. Pope Alexander VI, for example, admitted that he had fathered several children. Many Popes were too busy pursuing worldly affairs than engaging in their calling.

The lower clergy had problems as well. Many Priests and Monks were poorly educated that they could scarcely read, let alone teach people. Others broke the priestly vows by marrying, and some drank to excess or gambled.

Influenced by reformers, people had come to expect higher standards of conduct from priests and Churches leaders. In the late 1300<sub>s</sub> and early 1400<sub>s</sub>, John Wycliffe of England and Jan Hus of Bohemia advocated Church reform. They denied that the pope had the right to worldly power. They taught that the Bible had more authority than Church leaders did. In the 1500<sub>s</sub>, Christian humanists like Desidemus Erasmus and Thomas More added their voices to the chorus of criticism. In addition, many Europeans were reading religious works and forming their own opinions about the Church. The atmosphere in Europe was ripe for reform by the early 1500<sub>s</sub>.

Martin Luther, whose parents wanted him to be a Lawyer, instead chose to, become a Monk and a Teacher. From 1512 and until his death, Luther taught Scripture at the University of Wittenberg in the German State of Saxony. All he wanted was to be a good Christian, not to lead a religious revolution.

In 1517, Luther decided to take a public stand against the actions of a friar named Johann Tetzel. Tetzel was raising money to rebuild St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. He did this by selling indulgences. An indulgence was a Pardon, It released a sinner from performing the penalty that a priest imposed for sins indulgences were not supposed to affect God's right to judge. Unfortunately, Tetzel gave people the impression that by buying indulgences, they could buy their way into heaven.

Appalled by Tetzel's tactics, Martin Luther wrote 95 These or formal statements, attacking the “Pardon merchants”. On October 31, 1517, the eve of all saints day he posted these statements on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and invited other scholars to debate him. Someone copied Luther's words and took

them to a printer. Quickly, Luther's name became known all over Germany. His actions began the Reformation, a movement for religious reform. It led to the founding of Christian Churches that did not accept the pope's authority.

Luther further advocated for a full reform of the Church and based his teachings on three main ideas:

- i. People could win salvation only by faith in God's gift of forgiveness. The Church taught that faith and "good works" were needed for Salvation.
- ii. All Church teachings should be clearly based on the words of the Bible. Both the Pope and Church traditions were false authorities.
- iii. All people with faith were equal. Therefore, people did not need priests to interpret the Bible for them.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Century protest in Europe against the beliefs and Practices of the Catholic Church, gave birth to Protestantism, a branch of Christianity that developed out of the Reformation. At first three distinct branches of Protestantism emerge Lutheranism- based on the teachings of Martin Luther in Germany; Calvinism- based on the teachings of John Calvin in Switzerland;

and Anglicanism-established by King Henry VIII in England. Protestantism spread throughout Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and later, the World. As differences in beliefs develop, new denominations formed.

The NKST Church which is the focus of this Chapter, as a Reformed Church is of Calvinism branch of Protestantism.

### **The NKST As a Reformed Church**

The Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) from South Africa on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1911 Started a Mission Station in Tivland of Central Nigeria, West Africa. This mustard seed has grown into what is today known as NKST. NKST is an acronym in the Tiv language written as Nongu u Kristu U I Ser U Sha Tar. This literally means Universal Reformed Christian Church. It is a dominant Church in the Tivland but also spans through other parts of the Nigeria Niger Republic and the Republic of Chad and the Cameroons of recent.

The mission of the Church is to glorify God through worship and proclamation of the Good News of Salvation and to responsibly and holistically care for humanity. The doctrine or standard of faith of the NKST Church is built on three main themes as a reformed Church: Heidelberg Catechism; Canon of Dort; And Belgic Confession. The core values of the Church include: Preaching the whole word of God, Upholding Doctrinal Standards, Evangelism, Accountability, Holistic Ministering ,Fellowship, Dedication, Community , Honesty, Good Christian Testimony and Effective Communication.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was composed in the City of Heidelberg, Germany, at the request of Elector Frederick111, who ruled the province of the Palatinate from 1559-1576. The new Catechism was intended as a tool for teaching young people, a guide for preaching in the provincial Churches, and a form of confessional unity among the several protestant factions in the Palatinate. An Old tradition credits Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus for being the coauthors of

the Catechism, but the project was actually the work of a team of ministers and University theologians under the watchful eye of Frederick himself. Ursinus probably served as the primary writer on the team, and Olevianus had a lesser role (CRCNA, 2022). The Catechism was approved by a synod in Heidelberg in January 1563. A second and third German edition, each with small additions, as well as a Latin translation was published the same year in Heidelberg. The third edition was included in the Palatinate Church order of November 15, 1568, at which time the Catechism was divided into fifty-two sections, or Lord's Day could be explained in an afternoon worship service each Sunday of the year (CRCNA, 2022)

The synod of Dort approved the Heidelberg Catechism in 1619 and it soon became the most ecumenical of the Reformed Catechisms and Confessions. It has been translated into many European, Asian, and African Languages including the Tiv language of Central Nigeria in West Africa. It is still the most widely used and warmly praised catechism of the Reformed period. It is in the

light of the above that NKST Church, being a Reformed Church also adopts the Heidelberg Catechism in its doctrines.

The Canons of Dort is one of the doctrinal Standards of the Reformed Churches. It is also called the Five Articles against the Remonstrant (CRC, 2004). These are statements of doctrine adopted by the great Reformed Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. This synod had international dimension, since it was not only composed of the delegates of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands but also attended by twenty-seven representatives of foreign Churches.

The Synod of Dort was held in view of the serious disturbances in the Reformed Churches, caused by the rise and spread of Arminianism. Arminius, a theological professor at the University of Leydon, and his followers departed from the Reformed faith in their teaching concerning five important points. They taught conditional election on the ground of foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace

and the possibility of a lapse from grace. These views were rejected by the Synod and the opposite views were embodied in what are now called the Canons of the Remonstrant.

In these Canons the Synod set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, namely; Unconditional election, particular atonement, total depravity, invincible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Each of the canons consists of a positive and a negative part, the positive part being an exposition of the Reformed doctrine on the subject, and the negative part a repudiation of the corresponding Arminian error. Although in form, there are only four chapters, occasioned by the combination of the third and fourth sections into one, we probably speak of five canons and the third chapter is always designated as Chapter III/IV. All office bearers of the Reformed Churches worldwide are required to subscribe to these Canons as well as the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, NKST Churches inclusive.

The Belgic confession is one of the oldest doctrinal standards of the Reformed Christian Churches. The Confession's chief author was Guido de Bres, a Preacher of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, who died a martyr to the faith in the year 1567. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the churches in Netherlands were exposed to terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as was laid to their charge, but law abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, de Bres prepared this confession in the year 1561. In the following year, a copy was sent to King Phillip, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would "offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, and their whole bodies to the fire", rather than deny the truth expressed in this confession.

Although the immediate purpose of securing freedom from persecution was not attained, and de Bres himself fell as one of the many thousands who sealed their faith with their lives, his work has endured and will continue to endure. In its composition, the author availed himself to some extent of a confession of the Reformed Churches in France, written chiefly by John Calvin, published two years earlier. The work of de Bres, however, is not a mere revision of Calvin's work, but an independent composition (RCA, 20127). In 1566, the text of this confession was received at a synod held at Antwerp. In the Netherlands, it was once gladly received by the Churches, and it was adopted by national synods held during the last three decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The text, not the contents, was received again at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and adopted as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office-bearers in the Reformed Churches were required to subscribe. A part from the three basic standards of Doctrine of the Reformed Churches, which NKST has subscribed to (the Heidelberg Catechism,

Canon of Dort and the Belgic Confession), the Church has its doctrinal practices, also. These are related to pastoral call remunerations, discipline; Inter-denominational marriages of members; Discipline of members; and the concept of Evangelism among others which in the opinion of this paper, requires reformation too.

**Pastoral Call, Discipline:** An ordained Pastor of the NKST Church can be called to service by any congregation of the NKST through the process of election. The Church elders shall write to the Chairman of the Classis to request for the approval of the Classis, which is the next higher body to the NKST Synod. The Classis shall acknowledge receipt of the elder's communication in writing and within 28 days notify the elders of the day the Executive Committee of the Classis shall visit the congregation for the election of a pastor to service. The elders shall then inform all communicant members of the congregation to be present for the election. On the day of the election, the Executive

committee of the Classis together with elders shall converge in the elders' conference room and nominate three names that are neutral to the Church Congregation, the elders and the executive committee of the classic. If probably they discovered that any of the nominees has campaigned or has been campaigned for, such name shall be disqualified and a new name will be nominated. The chairman of the class executive becomes the head of the electoral process. The names are presented to the communicant members of the church for election, the person with simple majority votes by show of hand emerges the pastor elect for the church. The Secretary of the elders is then directed to write a letter informing the candidates elected of his election. The letter is to be delivered to the pastor elected by the secretary of the Elders within 24 hours of the date of the election. The pastor elect is expected to acknowledge receipt and indicate his acceptance or rejection of the call within 30 days. He is expected to write a letter of acceptance; state the date of resumption of duty. He will then be installed on the agreed date by the Executive committee of the classic.

By the provisions of the NKST constitution, the council of the elders is the highest ruling body of the church congregation chaired by the pastor. The power to take a valid decision rest with the council of elders who are elected by communicant members of the church in the September conference held every year to mark the end of the church year and perform the holy sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion. The elders hold office for two years and may be re-elected for a second term if the congregation is satisfied with their performances.

Though the council of elders are responsible to the congregation and the pastor is responsible to the Elders in principle, the Elders can in a meeting presided over by the pastor, suspend the pastor for an offence, the trial, discipline of the pastor, Elders and Deacon are constitutionally beyond the preview of the Council of Elders. While the classic executive committee determines the final appeal of the Deacon and Elders, the NKST synod determines the final appeal of the pastors. There is only one resident pastor in a congregation who is elected and paid by the congregation. He can only leave

the congregation on grounds of misconduct and attains the mandatory requirement age set by the NKST synod for pastors.

The salary allowances and fringe benefits of the pastor are determined by the council of elders using the NKST salary structure and conditions of services. He is paid from levies of church member's donations, and other church economic activities.

The NKST doctrine on married requires members to maintain one wife. A female member who married outside the NKST enclave but within the protestant family has no problem but when she marries in the Roman Catholic Church, such member will be excommunicated by the church. But interestingly, when a male member of the NKST church marries from the Roman Catholic Church, the NKST accepts the wife and thereby tutored her the NKST catechism to become a member of the NKST family.

On evangelism, the church looks at it as preaching the gospel. The church ignores the less privileged and in most cases looks at them as having no economic value to the church instead of looking after them as enshrined in Acts 4: 32-36.

## **Areas of Reformation**

In keeping with the circumstance that leads to the reformation during the days of Martin Luther, the renaissance, the current global realities and the teaching of the Bible, it is the position of this paper that there is a need for reformation in the following areas of NKST doctrine.

- i.** The Holy Spirit should be the basis of election. A person to be elected as a pastor should, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Theological and secular education should be secondary consideration in the election of a pastor, evangelist, elders, deacons or church leader as specified in 1 Timothy chapter three.
- ii.** Pastors should not be allowed to remain in one place for life. Transfers should be made every five years as

may be directed by the Holy Spirit from time to time. This will reduce the burden of overbearing pressure by some pastors. It will also entrench efficiency and encourage the growth of evangelism.

**iii.** The discipline of the pastor should be in the hands of the senior religious leaders of the denomination.

**iv.** Marriage should be liberalised in the spirit of ecumenism. Since all Christian are one in the body of Christ, discrimination on the basis of denomination should be removed. The primary basis of marriage should be based on the person that have the fear of God.

v. Attaching money to or monetizing the Holy Communion is anti biblical and should be referred to meet the current realities and the teaching of the Bible. The practice and No payment of budget, no holy communion should be abolished.

## CONCLUSION

Reformation is a question of finding the right balance between diversity and unity, between state and church. But one thing is for sure religious instincts is too strong to be left alone. History, and also the world around us today, tell us how important it is to have it canalised into civilised and tolerating forms. The church reformers wanted a break with what they saw as a centralised authoritarian and corrupt institution and the political leaders have an open eye for the church as the owner of big territories and gigantic fortunes. It is therefore only logical to see the church as an indispensable station between God and individual man.

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