

# **THE HISTORY OF THE PENTECOSTAL DENOMINATION IN NIGERIA**

Edited by G.S.Chukwuemeka

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I dedicate this book to the Holy Trinity.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE NEW METHODS OF SELLING OF INDULGENCES: THE STUDY OF SELECTED CHURCHES IN NIGERIA**

By

Akintunde Ojo Sunday,

## **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity is a religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. The Christian faith is essentially a belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and as Saviour and Lord. Almost all Christians believe in the Trinity, which teaches the unity of Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit as three persons of the Trinity (in one Godhead). Most Christians can describe their faith with the Nicene Creed. As the religion of Byzantine Empire in the first millennium and of Western Europe during the time of colonization, Christianity has been propagated throughout the world. The main divisions of Christianity

is in accordance with the number of adherents: Catholic Church, headed by the Pope in Rome.

Miguel (2011) observes that the concept of the sales of indulgence which has been an inherited practised by the Roman Catholic Church was criticized, denounced and regarded to be harmful by Martin Luther and other Reformers of his time is now been widely practised even by the Pentecostal the modern church movements that emerged as a result of various protestant activities against the condemned acts of the Catholic church regarding the sales of indulgences. Presently, preachers of the Gospel are devising many means or packaging various means of exploiting the congregation without anyone seeing anything wrong with it. This paper, therefore, is concerned about the practice of the sale of indulgences as it were during the sixteenth-century Reformation and its relevance to the contemporary time. It is also meant to look critically into the modern possible

methods in which the doctrine of the sales of indulgence has changed and possibly graduate in the Pentecostal churches. The paper, therefore, begins with an introduction, historical background of the sales of indulgence, the modernization of the practice cum theological implications in the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, practical suggestions as to get it reduced or eliminated as a way forward, conclusion and possible recommendations for further research are detailed on this article.

### **Historical Background of Sales of Indulgencies**

“Indulgence” has its etymology from Latin word *indulgentia*, which means to be kind or gentle Lea (1896) and Schiller (1972:199-200). Its original meaning was either kindness or goodwill; while from the post-classic Latin it metamorphosed to mean remission in tax payment. From the perspectives of Roman rule cum Old Testament Vulgate (Isaiah 61:1) it meant freedom from confinement or discipline. Theologically, the word



sometimes was used primarily to connote God's mercy or His kindness. However, indulgence is meant a plea for forgiveness to satisfy the guilt of sin committed, even though temporal. Other alternative words used in history to describe indulgence include Pax, Remissio and Donation. Quoting from the Roman Catholic Church Encyclopedia William Kant (1910) defines indulgence as an extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due, to God's justice as a result of sin that has been forgiven, which remission is granted by the Church in the exercise of the power of the keys, through the application of the superabundant merits of Christ and of the saints and for some just and reasonable motive.

Sales of Indulgence developed from the third-century persecution of the early church. Christians who denied their faith as a result of the persecution were made to show genuine repentance by confession of their sins known as the lapsed. According to Peters, Edward

(2017); the Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, who was also a victim of persecution, advocated that the lapsed should be readmitted when there is evidence of sincere repentance. The repentance initially included fasting, manual labour and other penance to be made under the guidance of the Catechumens. The process later developed into complicated demands from the Confessors by the clergies. Some penances were been exchanged through payments or replacements. Later it became a tradition to exchange penances for less demanding works like prayers, alms, fasts and even the payment of fixed sums of money depending on the various kinds of offences (tariff penances). While the sanctions in early penitential such as that of Gildas were primarily acts of mortification or in other cases complete ex-communication. Monetary fines were later introduced as a borrowed culture from the secular world. Close to the tenth century, some penances were not replaced but merely reduced in connection with pious

donations, pilgrimages and similar meritorious works. Then, in the 11th and 12th centuries, the recognition of the value of these works began to become associated not so much with canonical penance but with the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin. A particular form of the commutation of penance was practised at the time of the Crusades when the confessors required the penitent to go on a Crusade in place of some other penance. The earliest record of a plenary indulgence was found in Pope Urban's II declaration at the Council of Clermont in (1095) that he remitted all penance incurred by crusaders who had confessed their sins in the Sacrament of Penance, considering participation in the crusade equivalent to a complete penance. In consonance with the above, Ludwig (1950: 356) affirmed that the Faithful asked that indulgences be given for saying their favourite prayers, doing acts of devotion, attending places of worship and going on pilgrimages to be considered as penance for indulgence. Others included

putting on good performances during processions of which associations demanded that their meetings be rewarded with indulgences. Good deeds included charitable donations of money for a good cause and money thus raised was used for many righteous causes, both religious and civil: building projects funded by indulgences include churches, hospitals, leper colonies, schools, roads and bridges.

In the Reformation era, however, Sales of Indulgences had risen to a consolidated stage, whereby we had professionals whose duties were to administer fines to those who have sinned. The fines collected were to be used in the Saint Peter's Basilica Cathedral in Rome. Some of the professionals whose sole duty was to administer the sales of indulgences included: Albert of Mainz-Magdeburg and Johann Tetzel with the aid of their appointed indulgence' commissioners complied with a team of sub-commissioners and salesmen. The salesmen

were preachers with experienced who commanded high respect. According to the duo scholars Mee, Charles (2000:177) and Kiermay, Reinhold (1986:307) painted the dramatic display of the Holy Father's entourage and the didactic display of the welcoming procession with their lighted candles to the boundary of the town. There they met the visiting preacher and his entourage would be led to the church with the papal bull at the front to be held at the left on a velvet pillow. Then the congregation would sing a hymn and pray throughout the town. Finally, the preacher would mount the podium with an open speech, while on the altar there lays a large Red Cross and Pope's coat with its arms suspended on it.

The trio scholars Olin (1070:453-454), Loffler (1910:189) and Scotti (2007:183) were right when they observed that the most outstanding among the salesmen was Johann Tetzel. He was Dominican, seventy-three years and had been an indulgence salesman since 1502.

He started granting indulgences to the dead when broke from the Papal's authority. He advocated that dead relatives in purgatory (dead Christians who are kept in between heaven and hell waiting for their fate) indulgences can be purchased for them. His famous slogan is: "As soon as pennies in the money chest ring, the souls out of their purgatory did spring," touching "a chord with many who had loved ones who were deceased." Furthermore, Tetzel threw a bombshell when he reveals that the buyer of indulgence was also free from sin as well as the one penance was been made for.

Martin Luther was not happy with the process of sales of indulgence, especially with the role played by Albert and the Pope in allowing these practices. Modern Lenses on the Practice of the Sales of Indulgence in the Church in Africa: The practice of the sales of indulgence originated from the Roman Catholic Church. The above practice has metamorphosed into modern methods of indulgences.

Some scholars are of the view that the practice has not completely left the Roman Catholic denomination but has taken new dimensions which include the Confession of one sin to the Priest but the process of averting the sin does not carry weighting punitive measure compare to what it was in the past. For instance, Ikpeyan (2017) one of the Roman Catholic faithful's commenting on modern approaches to indulgences said that: Whenever a Confessor come to a Priest because of a sin committed, the former will be subjected to spiritual rehabilitation through relevant scriptural citation and prayers. If the offence is a serious one, manual labour will be added to it. The Priest has the right to forgive the communicant after all the above formalities have been carried out. The above current position of the Roman Catholic Church affirmed that the subject of indulgence has taken a different dimension from what it used to be. It seems that the monetization is no longer pronounced as it were but rather the monetary aspect has been taken over by other

denominations.

### **Early Resistance to the Selling of Indulgences**

The Reformation (also known as the Magisterial Reformation) led by Martin Luther which took place in the 16th Century was the culmination of several previous attempts at handling certain theological, doctrinal, liturgical, and administrative issues in the medieval teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as the 10th Century, there were groups such as the Albigenses, and the Waldensians which began the campaign against issues like the authority of the Pope and the use of indigenous languages in conducting Mass. By the 14th Century, John Wycliffe (between 1276 and 1379) writing in Oxford, took an opposing position on many issues which include the Church's role in temporal matters, corruption of churchmen, and sought for Scriptures to be published in indigenous languages (rather than the approved Latin). He also denied the transubstantiation of the consecrated Host and Wine. He was responsible for



the translation of the New Testament into English (finished in 1380). He died in 1384, (Hurlbut 1970) even though his work is thought to be among several sacrifices that prepared the way for the Reformation of Luther. John Huss (1369 – 1415) was another person whose work contributed immensely to the Reformation. Influenced by Wycliffe's writings, he preached his doctrines (especially against Papal authority). He was made Rector of the University of Prague and for a time garnered influence throughout Bohemia. For his work, he was excommunicated by the Pope and the city of Prague was placed under an interdict while he remained there. Huss retired and went into hiding where he wrote and sent out letters reaffirming his views. Two years later he consented to go before the Council of the Roman Catholic Church at Constance, in Baden on the Border of Switzerland, having received a pledge of safe conduct from Emperor Sigismund. But the pledge was later violated upon the principle that "faith was not to be kept

with heretics”. Huss was condemned and burned at the stake in 1415. His death aroused the reforming element in his native land and influenced Bohemia for centuries (Hurlbut 1970). Jerome Savonarola, a monk of the Dominican order at Florence in Italy - born in 1452 - was another reformer who campaigned against the social, ecclesiastical, and political evil of his day. He was an eloquent speaker and an endearing, crowd-pulling teacher, excommunicated by the Pope, imprisoned, condemned, hanged, and his body burned in the square of Florence in 1498, nineteen years before Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the Cathedral door at Wittenberg. All these activities demonstrated that Martin Luther's Reformation did not happen all of a sudden, it was rather the result of centuries of sacrificial attempts to correct the corruption of the medieval church. Hurlbut (1970) has observed that the Renaissance, the invention of printing, nationalism, and other socio-political factors also contributed to the success of the Reformation. Luther did

not only condemned the authoritarian actions of the Papacy but also displayed his opposition to doctrines and practices not countenanced by Holy Scripture (“Protestant Reformation”, <http://en.wikipedia.org>). Parallel to events in Germany, a movement began in Switzerland under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli. These two movements quickly agreed on most issues, but some unresolved differences kept them separate. Some followers of Zwingli believed that the Reformation was too conservative, and moved independently toward more radical positions (such as forbidding the use of images and other paraphernalia in worship), some of which survive among modern-day Anabaptists. Other Protestant movements grew up along lines of mysticism or humanism, sometimes breaking from Rome or the Protestants, or forming outside of the churches (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012). In 1520, Luther publicly burnt a papal bull (from bulla in Latin meaning “seal” summoning him to appear for trial and punishment

together with some copies of canons or laws enacted by the Roman authorities at the gates of Wittenberg University. This act was seen as Luther's formal renunciation of the Roman Catholic Church. In reaction, the Pope excommunicated him. In 1521 he was summoned before the Diet of Worms on the Rhine. The new emperor Charles V gave him the promise of safe conduct. Despite concerns by his associates that he could face the same fate as John Huss, he appeared before the Diet on 17 April 1521; the emperor was presiding. He refused to retract his views, and despite mounting pressure to arrest him, the emperor allowed him to leave Worms. On his way home he was taken by soldiers (sent by Frederick the Wise) who took him to the Castle of Wartburg and held him for his safety. While there, for a year and living in disguise, storms of war and revolt were raging in the empire. Luther kept himself busy all through, he made his translation of the New Testament into pithy German (a work regarded as the foundation of

the German written language (Hurlbut 1970). When the danger to his life appeared less severe, he returned to Wittenberg and resumed leadership of the movement for a Reformed Church, just in time to save it from extravagant excesses. Hurlbut (1970) reports that the division of the German states into the reformed and Roman branches was between the North and South; the North followed Luther while the Southern princes, led by Austria, remained loyal to Rome. A Diet was held at Spires in 1529 in the hope of reconciling the two parties. It was a vain exercise; the Roman rulers, who were in majority, condemned the Lutheran doctrines while the Northern princes upheld them. The teaching of Luther's doctrines was forbidden in the South and Northern states were required to allow Catholics to practice their faith. Hurlbut (1970) states further that the Lutheran princes made a formal protest against this unequal ruling, and from then on they were known as Protestants and their doctrines as the Protestant religion. This is the origin of

the name Protestant. Following Luther's break from the Roman Catholic Church, the wind of Reformation spread to other lands like Switzerland, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland. The resultant reforms gave birth to several Protestant church denominations which include Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, African and several other Pentecostal churches over the long period of time.

The following were the likely reasons for the reformation:

The Church hierarchy failed to give spiritual direction to its flock; rather it was corrupt and more concerned with enriching itself and its allies. The false doctrine behind the sale of indulgences is an example of the Church's desperate measures to amass wealth at the expense of the masses.

The Church's leadership was preoccupied with political

power and its privileges rather than providing spiritual leadership and guidance. The sale and use of images, relics, and symbols which were used in worship were seen as a doctrinal anomaly. Some reformers viewed the use of images in worship as idolatry (citing passages in the Bible (such as Ex 20:4 and Lev 26:1) which forbid creation or worship of idols and images) and forbade them in their gatherings.

The doctrine of the Eucharist was another controversial issue. While the Church taught transubstantiation (the notion that the bread and wine at Mass change in substance to become the blood and body of Christ), the reformers taught that this was not the case; they proposed consubstantiation (the argument that in the communion, the body and blood of Christ, and the bread and wine coexist in union with each other). The manner of celebrating the Mass was another issue, whilst the Church taught that only the priest could partake of the

wine at the Eucharist, thereby making only the host available to the rest of the congregation; the reformers taught that both the bread and wine should be given to the whole congregation.

The use of Latin instead of the people's indigenous languages in Mass was also a major concern. The Roman Catholic Church also forbade the lay people from having direct access to the Bible; it rather approved the distribution of Church officials' interpretations of it. Issues like praying to the Saints and to Mary (the Virgin Mary) and confession of sins to priests to obtain forgiveness were also opposed by the reform movement. Luther for instance taught that all believers are priests and needed no priests or saints to approach God. Most of these issues are doctrinal; some are administrative, while others have political undertones. Overall, however, the quest for reforms was intended to revive a Church that had become almost overwhelmed by false doctrines and



the vanity of the world. The inability of the Church to appropriately respond to these calls for reform led to the schisms in the Roman Catholic Church and the various Churches that have emerged since then. It is interesting to note that after the Reformation, the controversies in doctrine and practice continued and so also did the fragmentation of the Churches. Today, the Online Etymology Dictionary (2013) states that in the Protestant inclination alone, there are over 33,000 denominations around the world.

### **New Methods of selling Indulgences in the Christian Community**

Revelations from the activities of several various churches that abound affirmed that the subject of indulgence has taken a new dimension dressed in vague ideologies. Some of these modern ideologies which fit into modern indulgence include charges for intended wedding couples, the outstanding levy for burial

ceremonies, payment for healing, fines for lateness to church services and weddings and absence from associational meetings.

### **Charges on Anointing Oil**

The modern-day Christian denominations have devised several ways of raising funds in order to meet either their spiritual leader's personal needs or the needs of the church in general. One of the means is through the sales of anointing oil. According to the advocates of the use of the anointing oil; when prayers are offered on the latter it is believed that the power of divine healings and miracles are transferred into it and it becomes automatically efficacious. The usual biblical reference is found in James (Chapter 3: 13-15). The genesis of the use of anointing oil in Christianity in Africa started with African Self-Initiative Churches intending to make Christianity truly African by contextualizing the physical elements that the eyes can behold. However, initially, the above Christian movement regarded the anointing oil as a

symbol of the Holy Spirit that can heal and as well ward off evil spirits and demons without monetizing it. The danger in the use of anointing oil is the temptation of transferring magical powers to the oil instead of Christ. That is why Akpoigbe (2013:41) cited Turner (1967:36) with a warning to symbolists that “one must learn to go underneath the symbol to the reality which it represents and which gives its meaning.” This is where both African Traditional Religionists and some Christian denominations in Africa have erred. The monetization was a later development when African Pilgrims to Israel started attaching magical powers to the anointing oil they purchased from the Holy Land. The latter oil, after mixing with the African ordinary oil through multiplications, is in return sold to the Christian faithful at exorbitant prices. From this humble beginning, anointing oil along with mustard seeds from Israel metamorphosed into the means upon which African prayer houses were founded by self-appointed

clergymen used to exploit the poor parishioners in the Christian circle in Africa. Furthermore, services and vigils are specifically dedicated to anointing services as a common phenomenon in Africa Churches. The Punch Newspaper (2017:10) reveals the following as what takes place in such services: “where attendees will receive fresh anointing to break yokes of marital delay, debts, financial bankruptcy, project stagnancy, academic delay, joblessness and rejection”. The amount to be paid for the anointing oil depended on the gravity of the problem individual clients are passing through. Some other times, the monetary value is tagged on the status of the recipient. The wealthier the status, the more amount of money to be paid, while the less privileged are to pay less amount of money to collect anointing oil. Sometimes when the evangelist is not willing to collect funds for the prayers and oil, the client will usually ask him how much he or she should pay for it. This attitude from the clients on what to be paid sometimes has made praying on

anointing oil monetization a compulsory practice by several Christian denominations in Africa.

### **Charges for intended Wedding Couple**

The modern-day church has been accused of placing a greater burden on the would-be couple before the Priest will accept conducting such wedding in the church. Again a pool of interviewees observed that in some denominations intended couples have some fixed amount of donations to be given to the church and pastor separately before marriages can be conducted in the church. Such contributions are generally tied to project materials or monetized.

### **Outstanding Levy for Burial Ceremony**

In many churches just like the Catholic and other Protestant churches, in some quarters, when a member dies, records are been referred to ascertain whether the departed fellow is in good standing with the church,

especially financial obligations. If it is discovered that the member in question is not currently in tithing and other financial obligations, his family will be made to pay before the church will accept the responsibility for a befitting burial. There are also diverse opinions on the above action. Some denominations have even made it a constitutional matter. Even though the advocates of this scheme believe that the church needs to task the family of the deceased (who defaulted) before burial rites can be performed since in the secular world, clubs and societies have financial commitment among themselves and they can hardly default because they are committed to their societies' ideals. And if for any reason a member could not meet up his or her obligations, he or she has to make it up before society can fulfil any obligation to them. The conditions are spelt out. On the part of the church, members take her for granted because of a misconception of love. Otherwise, she should take stringent rules in order to compel her members to be financially

disciplined towards the church. On the contrary, this is regarded as a modern way of indulgence because the burial rite is the last respect and obligation the church can perform for its departed members and the denial of same is a disservice on the part of the church and to the deceased person. The fact remains that churches use the opportunities of burial ceremonies to change church furniture, painting of church buildings, completion for church buildings and mission houses by tasking the deceased family, especially those who are well-to-do. The students of Church History regard the above as not only exploitation but a modern indulgency. While we should not subscribe to the financial irresponsibility of church members, excessive exploitations in the name of burial ceremonies should be avoided.

### **Charges for Healing**

It is obvious that there are several denominations where some General Overseers demand fees during the prayer

of deliverance and breakthroughs in prayer houses. Consecrated olive oil and water attract monetary charges depending on the gravity of the problem one is facing. Even when financial demands are not attached, when prayers are answered, members do voluntarily donate huge amounts of money to the church and the deliverance that the pastor conducted

Such activities are seen as exploitation and modern indulgence because there should have been other alternatives outside financial exploitation to correct the bad moral habit of priority setting. Secondly, the financial fine will not be able to compensate for the missed fellowship and the spiritual benefits. So it is financial exploitation of members without solving their spiritual vacuums.

### **Theological Implications of Selling Indulgences**

**Charges on Anointing Oil:** The use of anointing oil



during prayers is in agreement with Christian practice, it is biblical and a welcome idea. However, the two basic problems that are associated with it in the church in Africa and other continents are monetization and attributing healing power to the anointing oil itself instead of Christ who is the ultimate healer. Instead of the anointing oil becoming a channel, it is substituted as the real means upon which the healing and protection have been affected. This again makes it look like African Traditional Religion rather than Christianity. This is the danger of over-emphasis on the physical object instead of the real object it represents which is Christ.

### **Outstanding levy for Burial Ceremony**

If the church holds the deceased relations responsible for unpaid tithes and contributions at the time of burial rites, who will God holds responsible for the deceased's negligence" Is it the church or relations" Are the relations closer to the deceased or the church" If God found the

decease guilty of his negligence to His church, will the payment of the unpaid levy after death prevent God's judgment“ The clear theological implication to the above questions is simply that the burden placed on relations will eventually keep them from the church and the latter will receive a bad testimony in a community of unbelievers.

**Charges for Healing:** Divine healing and one's obligations to God's services are purely spiritual demands by God and God alone. To place financial demand for healing that only God can give, the theological implication is that one has decided to take the place of God who is the ultimate healer.

### **Suggested Alternatives to Selling Indulgences**

The following practical alternatives are hereby suggested as the way forward namely:

i. **Devotion to True Spirituality:** Many churches have

redefined modern-day Christianity in Nigeria to lack genuine spirituality but is strictly built on materialism and blessings. In order to foster true spirituality, the church needs a revival like the generation of John Wesley and early 1960 Pentecostalism in Nigeria whereby repentance used to be accompanying with genuine tears of regret for sins and promising never to go back into it. In order to achieve this clergymen may need to prioritize their emphasis on the spiritual state of the congregation far and above another thing else.

**ii. Discipleship Training of Church Members:** The greater percentage of various churches lack proper discipleship that can breed Christian maturity, good moral conduct, discipline and the ability to overcome temptations at the time of trials. The only way to succeed is for them to design discipleship programs as a way of spiritual schooling for building the church into maturity. This will make Christians to be stabilized and solid in

their Christian faith. Also, it will make them spiritually alert and able to discern what is right from wrong.

**iii. Adequate Pastoral Training for Clergymen:** The necessity of training in any profession before practising cannot be overstressed. One of the reasons why Christianity is experiencing a decline in spiritual maturity today is a result of the negligence of some denominational leaders over theological training. Some belief in the Holy Spirit alone without formal training always quote the Apostles of Christ out of context. They have forgotten that zeal without knowledge may end in a greater error. Commenting on the above, Akpoigbe (2016:52) reveals that: It is only in Christianity you find self-made leaders without formal training. Every other professional field of endeavour has a prescribed level of training before practice. If the state of spiritual decadence in the church in Africa must be corrected, pastors must have formal theological training aside from their spiritual

gifting. An untrained pastor may do more harm to his congregations than half backed medical doctor. This is because, the mistake of an unknowledgeable medical doctor may send his patient to death and if he or she is a Christian may go to heaven, but an un-informed pastor may send his parishioners to both death and hell.

Based on the above submission in the resume, the paper will like to repeat that devotion to true spirituality; adequate pastoral training and discipleship of church members are the possible solutions that will go a long way to better the practice of true Christianity in Africa. The above will serve as a preventive mechanism for the reoccurrences of the sixteenth-century indulgence saga.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has done justice to the topic by establishing the historical narratives of the sales of indulgence right from its inception to the contemporary time. It has also

related it to how it has been modernized and suggested possible alternative approaches that can be used to attract spiritual and faith growth in the Pentecostal churches. Some of the suggested alternative approaches include: devotion to true spirituality, adequate pastoral training and discipleship for church members will go a long way to better the practice of true Christianity in Nigeria by preventing the reoccurrences of the sixteenth-century narrative.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the depth of the study from the aforementioned analysis, I wish to present the following recommendations and hope that it will be given careful attention as a cure to the modern disease of indulgence in churches in Nigeria.

First, is that various churches should endeavour to have constitutions with their missions statement well defined

and communicated from the bottom-down; vertically and horizontally with the view of prioritizing missions and spiritual development of church members as the uppermost in their hearts.

Finally, in order to regulate the influx of wolves operating as shepherds in Nigeria. Honest implementation of the above recommendations will improve the moral status of the churches' clergy and enhance better quality of the Christian congregations.

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