



## CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF WORSHIPPING THE “ANCIENT OF DAYS” IN MODERN TIMES: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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### Abstract

*The gradual but steady decline of religion across all human societies of the world in an increasingly secular world cannot be denied. Religious beliefs and dogmas are among the most radical and changeless world-views which form the building-blocks of major aspects human morality, culture and traditions over time. However, due to the fact that human culture is very dynamic and open to new forms and adaptations deriving from cross-cultural interactions, the religious foundations of morality and culture necessarily come under pressure and are undercut through the unrelenting progress and widening spectrum of human civilization, and the subsequent larger horizon that the forces of globalization afford to people to encounter new things in modern times. Using mainly secondary sources of information gathering and analysis of works written on this and other related topics, this work enquires into the challenges inherent in trying to maintain the orthodox teachings of Judeo-Christianity among the younger generations of Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere, against a background of the permissiveness occasioned by the moral and cultural leanings of the modern secular world. This paper surmises from its findings that the fundamentalism inherent in religious orthodoxy, which gives no room for doctrinal compromise and adjustment, is one of the major causes of the declining interest of the youth in church activities in Nigeria, and in the general decline of Christianity and faith-based culture and traditions in the modern secular world. Thus, the continued tension and stress generated by the imperative of change through the preferences of the secular culture constantly facing off with the unchanging nature of God and religious beliefs would likely continue to work against the progress of religion in modern times, and aid the further decline of Christianity in the Nigerian society and presumably, in other parts of the world.*

**Keywords:** Christianity, Challenges, The Ancient of Days, Modern times, Nigeria.

### Introduction

The Christian religion evolved from and derived its major pillars of its identity from Judaism. One of God's many prominent names in the Judeo-Christian scripture which Christians use frequently in their adoration of God is the *Ancient of Days*, as revealed in the Book of Daniel 7:9. In other words, the *Ancient of Days* refers to the one who lives in all the ages, and also implies the one whose laws and precepts remain supreme and relevant in every generation of human existence. Berkhof (1958) intimates that “The Ancient of Days” or “Head of Days” in the original Aramaic is *Atik Yomim*; in the Greek Septuagint, *Palaios Hemeron*; and in Jerome's Vulgate, *Antiquus Deorum*. Used first in Daniel 7:9 and subsequently in verses 13 and 22 of the same chapter, the name refers to God in a Judeo-Christianity perspective as being eternal, denoting the Creator's aspects of eternity combined with perfection, perfection to which nothing can be added in terms of improvement, growth, or development.

Some Judeo-Christian scholars suggest that the concept of the *Ancient of Days* refers to God the Supreme Being existing before or prior to the existence of time or days as taught in Judeo-Christianity, which the creation account in Genesis agrees with, whereby the first day of



creation included the creation of light, and the separation of light and darkness into day and night. In Judeo-Christian teaching, the *Ancient of Days* is one whose words have been settled and made firm from the foundation of the created order, (Psalm 119:89). One thousand years are like a day to Him because in His infinitude as God, all times and all things past, present and future are ever concurrent before Him without differentiation. He does not reckon time as humanity does because being both divine and transcendent, His ways are higher than man's ways. He is believed to have created and set times and seasons, and can never be constrained to operate within the finite construction of human time frames. God's unchanging nature defines His other attributes, because an infinite but changing God is inconceivable, as well as presenting a contradiction in definition. Consequently, it is an aberration with underlying heretical implications in Judeo-Christianity for man who is part of the created order to assume that God the owner and controller of the created order, could ever be outdated in His ideas, or outmoded and out of touch with any of His requirements in virtue. Both Orthodox Judaists and Christians hold that God's word and culture are the most primal of all, and can never expire or lose potency in successive ages and generations of man.

### **The Concept of the Immutability of God.**

God can never change, and His changelessness is a necessary support to His being self-originated. Being perfect in His nature, purposes and promises, He is devoid of all change. In virtue of this attribute, He is exalted above all 'becoming', and is free from all progression or diminution, and from all growth or decay. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. With a perfect God, changing for the better or for worse, or improving and deteriorating are all equally impossible.

According to Berkhof (1958), divine immutability should not be understood as implying immobility or rigidity as if there were no movement in God. He moves among His creation in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform, without changing His character in transit. The Judeo-Christian Bible teaches that God enters into manifold relations with man and as it were, lives their lives with them, despite the changing and untrustworthy nature of man due to sin. He created time and, therefore not bound within the confines of time. As change is measured over time - something used to be one way and has now taken another form- God cannot be expected to participate in changing times and standards. It is granted that change within time also constitutes something qualitative or quantitative - a thing can get better or worse, grow bigger or smaller. But because God is perfect, He is complete and there are no attributes or virtues left for Him to acquire, and were He even slightly to lose any of His attributes, He would cease to be God. Such are the high demands of divine perfection which the *Ancient of Days* has fulfilled since the beginning of time, according to Judeo-Christian belief.

Among human beings, the acquisition of new information, knowledge or experience is part of what prompts adjustment and change. But since God is omniscient, there is no new knowledge or understanding that can excite Him and prompt Him to change. While the unchanging nature of God is a huge source of confidence for those who worship Him, because He can always be trusted, His inability cum unwillingness to change also constitutes a point of departure for revisionists and modernists who crave the constant updating of everything that appertains to human life, including religious beliefs and practices, in a world where the only constant thing is change. Along this perspective, Weinandy (2000) highlights the difference between the Christian God and the gods of mythology elsewhere in other religions, gods susceptible to emotional fluctuation, overcome by a variation of moods – one minute they are given to lust



and the next fly off the handle in a fit of rage. This was the case with the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon who could be swayed by the volume of sacrifices offered to them. But by contrast, the Christian God does not undergo successive fluctuating and contradicting emotional states; nor can circumstances of the created order affect or alter Him in such a way to cause Him to suffer any need of modification of mood, loss of concentration, or rascality of action.

### **The Interface between Christianity and Civilization**

The Christian religion has been intricately intertwined with the history and formation of Western society and culture, which spread much of the modern civilization to other parts of the world. Throughout its long history, Christianity has been a major source of social services like schooling, medical care, and inspiration for arts, culture, philosophy, politics and religion. Regarding the relationship between religion and civilization, Johnson (2000) intimates that during the Middle Ages, the church rose to replace the Roman Empire as the unifying force in Europe. While the medieval cathedrals remain among the most iconic architectural feats produced by Western civilization, many of Europe's universities were also founded by the church at that time, and evolved from the cathedral schools, which were a continuation of the interest in learning promoted by monasteries. Christian theology also greatly influenced the trajectory of Western philosophers and political activists. Riches (2000) avers that the teachings of Jesus such as the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, are argued by some to be among most important sources of modern notions of "human rights" and the welfare commonly provided by governments in the West. Long-held Christian teachings on sexuality, marriage, and family life have also been influential in fashioning the morals of the people they have colonized over the past centuries.

However, as generations evolve and kingdoms rise and fall with the march of civilization and the *Industrial Revolution*, human culture and learning develop into higher levels and forms. Newer patterns of living emerge. Newer tools are employed, newer gadgets are enjoyed, and newer philosophies that tickle and excite man's finite intellectualism but add nothing to God's infinite wisdom are adopted. Even religion and spirituality are not spared the constant pressure to change. For instance, in the Enlightenment period of the Middle Ages, biblical criticism sprouted and blossomed as more people became more 'civilized' and more educated. However, for all its visible advantages and most cherished gains, it is observable that civilization and the giant strides made in scientific discoveries have not succeeded in changing man's natural inclination to evil, which is the problem that most religions set out to address. Rather, civilization has helped to broaden the challenges to religious observance in modern times by the new frontiers and opportunities for experimentation, re-interpretation and re-assessment of morality that it presents.

Through the giant leaps by mankind in science and technology, one's religious and moral convictions could easily be influenced, moderated or outrightly adulterated through the readily available contents of social media. An example is internet pornography, where various scripturally-forbidden sex acts emanating from different sexual orientations are put up for public consumption from the utmost privacy of one's android handset or personal computer. One can also choose to join in the spiritual devotion or meditation offered by adherents of other religions online, or access and read occult literature hitherto outlawed through the bias of the Christian religion, or watch films or live sporting activities on the go.



People of a particular cultural background in modern society are allowed to get new friends through the available social media apps and platforms to boost the processes of socialization with their consequent acquisition of new cultural trends and moral persuasions. Civilization through the agency of globalization draws a lot of spiritual and moral distraction in its wake as it interfaces with the people's culture, religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, those who fall in love with what civilization has to offer in their own generation have lesser and lesser time for their devotion to the object of their worship through attendance to church services and other religious activities. These factors have helped to push back the frontiers of the Christian religion and made devotees to begin to doubt the very existence of the spiritual essence – God, that forms the object of worship in religion. Thus, in this manner, civilization contributes to the decline of the Christian religion and other religions of man in the society.

### **The Influence of Biblical Criticism**

According to Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Bible criticism is the use of critical analysis to understand and explain the Bible without appealing to the supernatural. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it began as a historical-biblical criticism, it was based on two distinguishing characteristics which includes the scientific concern to avoid dogma and bias by applying a neutral, non-sectarian, reason-based judgment to the study of the Bible; and the belief that the reconstruction of the historical events behind the texts as well as the history of how the texts themselves developed would lead to a correct understanding of the Bible.

Against a backdrop of the Enlightenment-era skepticism of biblical and Church authority, scholars began the study of the life of Jesus through a historical lens, breaking with the traditional theological focus on the nature and interpretation of his divinity. This historical turn marked the beginning of the “quest for the historical Jesus”, which would remain an area of scholarly interest for over 200 years. With the dawn of globalization, a broader spectrum of worldviews and perspectives was introduced into the field of biblical criticism and other academic disciplines found new methods of biblical criticism.

Soulen and Kendal (2001) aver that biblical criticism has permanently altered the way people understand the Bible and made the study of the Bible more secularized, scholarly and democratic, leading to an increased level of opposition to Church authority and an increase in religious tolerance. Consequently, old orthodoxies were questioned and radical non-conformist views tolerated, leading to the decline of faith-based Christianity. Along the same line, Tyler (2013) affirms that biblical criticism became, in the perception of many, an assault on religion, especially Christianity, through the “autonomy of reason” which it espoused and with a legacy that led to the decline of biblical authority and the Christian religious devotion itself, making many Christians to virtually transfer their faith from the words of the Bible to those of the influential Bible critics, as the societies of the West continued the process of modernization. Thus, biblical criticism constituted a significant threat to the Christian faith that was once solely founded on non-verified acts of simple faith-propelled trust in God. One of the far-reaching implications of this is the liberal attitude that all that is taught by the Christian scripture, including the church doctrines and dogmas, need not be necessarily believed as literal religious imperatives that must wholly apply to the realities of human life in modern societies.

### **Secularism and the Decline of Religion**

Religion has ceased to be the moral centre of the social order in Western society and elsewhere in the world. Across the globe, the roles that religion plays in societies are in a constant state





of change and diminution, and being challenged and modified by the complex web of social and cultural forces that shape our contemporary world. The new reality of the secular world is most pronounced in the aspect of the decline of religious life and morality. In this setting, people see religion as having less importance in their everyday life. Lyon (1985) states:

Secularization is not mainly about religion declining. It is a process of conventional religion getting cut off from society, having to compete with other worldviews and lifestyles....People rarely justify what they do with an appeal to biblical teaching or church tradition. From the marketplace to the marital bed, activities are seldom judged in a Christian light .... The social space is shrinking in which religion is supposed to survive (p. 26).

Clancy (1960) attempting to proffer an explanation with regard to the tension between religion and the tastes of secular society charges that religion becomes irrelevant to secular society when it entertains too absolute a view of its transcendence and withdraws from the “the world”, leaving it to whatever fate men’s sins may merit. This implies that secularism sees the Church as being wholly absorbed in expounding moral principles and losing sight of historical contingencies while prescribing formulas the world no longer understands. Clancy also points out the other extreme of the Church compromising its standards in aid of secular culture and therefore losing its originality and relevance *inter alia*:

Modern history is also filled with examples of the opposite danger - the danger of religion seeking too close an identification with politics and secular culture. In its desire to communicate with the age, religion may lose its character and become another agent of conformity, a mere yea-sayer to the slogans that pass for wisdom in a particular generation (p. 54).

The most distinctive aspect of ethics is the idea that all human beings are subject to certain categorical imperatives binding on them, no matter their various orientations, generations and interests. However, in modern times, there has been a very strong skepticism about the authority of such imperatives and their universal acceptability. Larmore (1996) laments that the process of secularization has included the relieving of God from the task of being the ultimate explanation for the order of nature and the course of history. This has consequently led to moral rules prescribed by religion being regarded as laws imposed by a legislator. He concludes that one of the most significant legacies of the Enlightenment inheritance is the project of locating the source of moral norms no longer in God but like man. With this prevailing perspective, not very few have pushed God’s image of a legislator farther to His being a dictator, and this has encouraged a brave new morality devoid of religion, and driven by the whims and caprices of modern man.

The need to “flow with the times” is a huge emphasis in the secular society and those who want to identify with modern trends have the willingness to allow secular agenda to influence their religious beliefs. Ellul in McGrath (1993) laments:

What troubles me is not that opinions of Christians change, nor that their opinions are shaped by the problems of the times.... What troubles me is that Christians conform to the trend of the moment without introducing into it anything specifically Christian. Their convictions are determined by their social milieu, not



by faith in revelation; they lack the uniqueness which ought to be the expression of that faith. Thus, theologies become mechanical exercise that justifies the positions adopted, on grounds that are absolutely unchristian. (p. 121).

Hunt (2002) also traces the influence of modern secularization of society on the decline of religion to the result of the Enlightenment, stating that the hope for a secular society began as an academic response to the overwhelming dominance of the Christian church in the Western societies of medieval times. This further developed into a reaction against religious authority by those who are inclined towards atheism in the increasingly free societies of the world. Hunt charges that in good tradition, many sociologists view religious belief as an intellectual error which the progress of science and rationality would ultimately weaken to the point of disappearance.

Tschannen in Hunt (2002) avers that with the advance of rationalization, perceptions of reality lose their sacred character to be replaced by a rational-causal explanation of the world whereby human knowledge, behaviour and institutions once thought to be grounded in divine power are recognized to be merely human creation. This further moved on to the stage of differentiation, when members of the society gradually disengage from religion, which in turn consequently withdraws into its marginalized enclave and becomes a thing of private concern. This is one of the major factors that make religious doctrines, symbols, practices and institutions to lose their prestige and significance in modern societies. Hunt then surmises that the increase in 'worldliness' which prioritizes and focuses on attendance to worldly cum physical problems at the expense of belief in the supernatural also contributes immensely to the decline of religion in modern times.

Mostofa (2023) postulates that in the light of the challenges posed by these intervening factors, religions are also modifying their teachings to cope with the challenges of 'secular religion'. As secularism values reason, scientific evidence, and a separation of church and state, religions may modify (and are constrained to adjust) some of their beliefs, practices or traditions to remain relevant and address contemporary issues. For example, some religions may adopt (and some have adopted) more inclusive or liberal stances on moral and social issues such as LGBTQ rights, women's rights, and environmentalism in a bid to appeal to younger generations and maintain their relevance in an ever-changing world.

### **The 'Anachronisms' of Heaven**

Some of the major beliefs and teachings of Christianity which its followers deem changeless and uncompromisable, pose a challenge to modern rational minds, and these contribute partly to the decline of interest in faith and participation in religious practices among many erstwhile followers of the Christian faith. An analysis of this reveals that despite the mouth-watering promises of eternal reward for believers in heaven, rational minds find the concept life in an unidentifiable geographical location utopic, as well as viewing the teaching of the everlasting torment for non-believers in hell as both irrational and unrealistic. For instance, in line with the concept of the immutability of God, the biblical teachings about heaven the abode of God as contained in the Judeo-Christian belief reveal that nothing in heaven is subject to change. The white robe which has been identified as the prominent dress code of heaven runs through the books of the Bible, and still obtains in heaven for those believed to be in Paradise. It would still be in vogue after the rapture and the consummation of time on earth, and would continue



to be the habit of both saints and other heavenly beings forever. A robe is a loose-fitting long gown, and robes are hardly paraded on the fashion runways of the world. Little wonder then that those who are deeply engaged in the world's fashion industry may not like the idea of a heaven where people are restricted to white robes, sandals and golden crowns - crowns which presumably for them, may still not make up for what they regard as a poor sense of fashion. For modern minds, the biblical Judeo-Christian heaven would be so boring fashion-wise, without miniskirts, sagging pants, tight-fitting, shape-enhancing attire, and seductive see-through materials that propel the if-you-have-it-flaunt-it mantra of the modern fashion world.

In the established churches in Christianity, priests, vergers and choristers who are in and nearest to the priests and the altar customarily wear robes that do not reveal much of the physical body during worship sessions. Apart from worship times, the habit of the religious are also attuned to the supposed heavenly dressing culture which is the hallmark of decent dressing, at least in Judeo-Christianity, serving as a pointer to what God stipulates as the acceptable dressing code. Going by the biblical teaching in Judeo-Christian tradition, in heaven with a specified dress-culture, presumably, there will be no availability of and craving after costly dresses, no blending of intricate exotic colours on fabrics, no expensive crocodile-leather shoes and handbags, manicure and hair salons, jewelries, make-up kits, costly perfumes and designer-collection wardrobes that are the hallmarks of human fashion as we know it here on earth.

Another area that sounds anachronistic to secular thinkers in Christian teaching is the mode of Jesus' appearance on the day of God's final judgment. Whereas the usage of animals as a major means of human transportation belongs to the past ages of human civilization, the white horses that would bear Jesus and His heavenly armies during His second coming as taught in Christian eschatology according to Revelation 19:11-15 would probably not be changed to a squadron of F-35 or Sukhoi 57 fighter-jets, or some the high-tech supersonic space ships, the types seen in science fiction movies, in order to impress our present civilization, or for Jesus' second coming as taught by Christians to make more sense to the present digital age. Going by the changeless nature of God's word (as preached by Christians), and the futuristic implications of John's visions in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is still expected to appear by means of horse transportation that was revealed to John the Divine when the time comes.

Christians believe that the architectural configurations of the biblical eternal mansions and other landmarks in the "New Jerusalem" the city of gold are light-years ahead of any edifice that exists or will ever be built on planet earth. Against this back-drop, Judeo-Christian orthodox teaching is not ready to concede the possibility of the *Ancient of Days* condescending to 'update' some of His already perfect laws and decrees to suit the cravings of modern man, even as the pressure from the increasingly secularized modern societies of the world persists. On the contrary, fundamentalists of orthodoxy in Christianity frown on theological cum biblical revisionism of the scriptures believed to have been inspired and given by a God whose laws and precepts are immutable.

Also of great significance in Christian eschatology is the place and role of archangel's trumpet that Christians believe would be blown like a referee's final whistle to signal the end time as we know it and of all physical existence on earth. Koester (2001) intimates that in Christian end-time teaching, the archangel's trumpet is an instrument that would be used to build anticipation and alert or warn people that a spectacular event is about to take place – in this context, the final judgment of God for all humanity. Supposedly manufactured in heaven



countless millennia ago, and may be, without the sophisticated shape of any of the modern trumpets as we know them, Christian teaching states that the archangel's trumpet has the capacity to out-perform the most advanced public address system of this age, since it is believed that through supernatural means, it would be heard simultaneously by all peoples from one corner of the earth to the other when it would be blown. To many modern intellectual minds, these teachings of Christianity are not credible enough when subjected to the scrutiny of reason, and so, many major beliefs and teachings of the Christian religion are being called to question and disbelieved in an increasingly secularized and multi-faith world.

### **The Role of Biblical Revisionism**

*The Free Online Dictionary* defines “revisionism” as advocacy of the revision of an accepted usually long-standing view, theory or doctrine, especially a revision of historical events, doctrines or movements. Biblical revisionism obviously developed from the gains made by biblical criticism on scriptural interpretation and the changing Christian worldview. In the context of this paper, revisionism refers to the agitation in the Christendom for the revision and modification of the teachings of the Church on morality to accommodate modern scientific research and tolerate new world-views and behavioural orientations and preferences in the Church. For example, in the area of human sexuality, biblical revisionists work for every sexual preference and orientation to be accepted in Christianity without discrimination, based on the appeal to fundamental human rights of the sexual minority group whom they believe should be granted the freedom to express their variant sexuality, and fighting against what they call ‘homophobia’ (fear of homosexuals), and the stigmatization of homosexuals in the Church.

In all ages, it is natural for the younger generations to think of the elderly as having passed their prime and out of tune with new trends in their much younger world. Hence, old age is readily identified with the 'old school', which should not interfere with energetic young blood experimenting on the pleasures and prospects afforded by their modern environment. Thus, in the secular world, many people believe that some of the laws and moral requirements of God are too ancient and outmoded to make sense in the 'post-modern' society.

Berkhof (1958) acknowledges the fact that the books of the Bible were written thousands of years ago in cultural backgrounds different from today's world. But generally, the writings focus on principles that Christians believe to be universally true, having been inspired by God. Though the modern reader may find the cultural world and language of the Bible somewhat strange and quite unfamiliar, however, it is important to note that, according to what Christians believe, the Bible was not written as a book of science. Its teachings involve universal truths that subsume the realm of science, and remain relevant in every age because they deal with people's physical and spiritual needs, which never change in essence. The main goal of modern biblical revisionists is to alter the scriptures to match with the social and cultural realities of modern times. In attempting to achieve this, they enhance their dissent against the orthodox teachings of the church from a perspective of human rights. Rebels and non-conformists all over the world usually claim that they fight for 'freedom', which may entail freedom from wrong and sometimes right ideologies, relationships and moral obligations. Carson (2008) explores the notions of freedom and human rights in the secular world as they relate to religion and moral obligations states:

Freedom is far more than a political theory. One may be “free” from constraints of the state, but one may also be “free” from traditions, free from God, free from morality, free from inhibitions, free from





oppressive parents, free from wise parents, free from assignments of various kinds, free from sin and much more (p. 128).

Paradoxically, the 'freedom' and 'independence' often achieved tend to be counter-productive and morally self-destructive in the long run. Revisionists see constraints including some religio-moral constraints that help man to maintain moral rectitude as bad, viewing such limitations as impediments against the worship of their hallowed idol of personal freedom.

Revisionists in all religions develop new theologies to back up their new tastes in scriptural interpretation, and uphold new 'orientations', morals and behavior patterns in the secular society to back up the new morality inherent in their newer outlook and secular approaches. This is in direct opposition to the changeless moral requirements of scripture as it applies to Judeo-Christianity and in fact, to all religions with written scriptures. One of the outstanding examples of the afore-mentioned is that homosexuality for which orthodox Judaists and Christians generally believe the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated by divine punishment as narrated in the Bible has now been widely accepted and is being celebrated by an increasing number of people in a supposedly 'modern' era, with annual gay pride parades in many cities of the developed countries. For the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer Plus) persons and their supporters, the ethical requirements of the *Ancient of Days* are largely out-dated, belonging to ancient past, and no longer applicable and useful to modern sexual realities. All these contribute to the decline of orthodoxy, and in fact to the decline of religion and its related beliefs and activities in the modern world.

Many liberal Christian leaders are lured into adjusting and presenting their teachings to flow with the secular tide, and by so doing, achieve relevance and fame. Such people appeal to the unrelenting pressure from the dynamics of modern civilization on society as the moral justification to 'modernize' the word of God. Hence, we now in Christianity, the so-called 'modern' pastors, 'modern' messages and 'modern' congregations where material things are preached and given precedence over the conservative and orthodox ethico-moral teachings of the Christian religion. In such congregations, all the trappings of secular culture are allowed to attract more members. Free-style liturgy and all manner of secular music, entertainment from comedians, and various music and dance steps are employed in worship. All manner of dressing, hairstyles, costumes and make-up are allowed, and 'Christian' lottery, fashion parades and beauty contests are organized as extra-liturgical activities to attract and entertain 'modern' worshippers. In such congregations, the so-called oppressed sexual minorities like members of the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-sexual, Queer, Intersex and Asexual) movement find a safe haven of full acceptance and integration. And in their large numbers, other liberal Christians are attracted to such 'modern' places of worship. Hence, the modernity of ministry and pastoral care is measured by the readiness and the ability of the Christian minister to attract and tell 'modern' worshippers what they want to hear, and afford them the liberties of living and worshipping as they like, liberties that are inherently lacking in the denominations that hold dear the tenets of orthodox Christianity. In other words, it is like if the *Ancient of Days* must continue to receive worship from 'modern' people, then it must be on their own modern terms and at their own pace and convenience.

### **The Decline of Christianity in Nigeria**

Wikipedia states that Christianity initially arrived to Nigeria in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through Augustinian and Capuchin monks from Portugal. It grew and developed over the centuries that



by 2020, it accounted for an estimated 46.18% of the Nigerian population. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2011, Nigeria had the largest Christian population of any country in Africa, with more than 80 million people in Nigeria belonging to various denominations. Christianity is the majority religion in the Southern and central regions of Nigeria. The 2021 *Afrobarometer Survey* found that 54.2% of Nigerians were Christians, and 45.5% were Muslims.

The majority of the country's over 80 million Christians are either Roman Catholics or Anglicans, but a diverse group of other denominations claim significant membership, including Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, the Aladura churches (Spiritualist Independent Churches) and a host of other Pentecostal churches, sects, and pseudo-Christian groups that have continued to emerge over the decades. However, the numerical growth of church denominations in the country does not imply that the Christian culture deriving from the basic orthodox teachings of the religion is not declining, as there is very little commensurate growth of interest in church activities by the majority of the mainly nominal members of the churches.

Para-Mallam (2019) states that the church in Nigeria has one of the most dynamic evangelical and missionary movements in Africa and indeed the world, with about 7,200 missionaries and missional presence in about 196 countries. However, despite this vibrancy, the future of Christianity in Nigeria is at stake because of systemic persecution. Identifying persecution of Christians as one of the major factors in the decline of Christianity, especially in the Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria, Para-Mallam intimates that in the rural areas of the north, Christians are being killed and dispossessed of their ancestral lands, with their homes being burnt and many being internally displaced. These attacks, coupled with the official government marginalization of the minority Christians by the Muslim politicians in power pose an existential threat to the church in Nigeria, leading to many young Christians being discouraged and consequently making some to compromise their faith and return to idolatry, ATR, masquerading, drugs and occultism. And as this continues unchecked, the decline of Christianity could gradually go on unabated in the northern region of Nigeria and in other areas.

Another factor militating against the growth of Christianity in Nigeria is the noticeable disunity among Christians along ethnic and denominational lines which sometimes creates a conducive atmosphere for persecution to thrive thereby aiding the decline of interest in Christianity. This lack of a co-operation among various groups makes the up-coming generations of believers to lose motivation and interest.

Oloye (2020) from his own perspective attributes the decline of Christianity in Nigeria to doctrinal factors which include:

- The rising numbers of preachers of the erroneous prosperity gospel who present God as a money-doubler thereby presenting Christianity in a similar light to one of the popular sports betting company *bet9ja*, where money is won by stakers, and if the money and prosperity do not come, then the blame is squarely laid on the worshipper who is charged with not having enough faith.
- The prevalence of tradition over scripture, stating that apart from the Roman Catholic Church known for this, some Protestant denominations feature proverbs of the prevalent culture and motivational preaching higher than even the details of the scripture in their sermons.



- The third factor is identified as the politics in the churches, which has become identical with the patterns of secular politics in the government of the country, replete with the same corruption and undemocratic practices in the processes of electing church leaders. This has led to people being recognized in the churches only if they are rich or influential, in direct contradiction to the teachings of Christianity.
- The last factor is that most Christians who possess nominal membership in the churches do not have a deep knowledge of what Christianity means, and they tend to settle for the barest minimum when existential problems in a continually poor national economy occasioning hardship are prioritized over spiritual ones, which is the main thrust of Christianity and other religions.

Commenting on the challenges faced by Christian youth in modern times, Gwyneth (2024) thinks that the decline of organized religion across the world leaves many young Christians feeling like a cultural minority. The peer pressure to flow to secular culture, coupled with the discomfort of expressing faith in the public domain, can be enormous, noting that even a basic act like praying before taking lunch can attract curious or judgmental stares from those who have disconnected from religion. Also, the make-believe reality presented on social media platforms bombards young minds with unrealistic aspirations and expectations, in which relentless negative posts serve as a sort of cultural ‘cyber-bullying’ that compels young minds to realign their religious priorities to be more in line with the prevailing secular culture. This distraction from technology and the constant notifications, pop-ups, and other compelling attractions and demands of the digital world can easily crowd out spiritual priorities, as finding time for the normal daily prayer and devotion, and attendance to church amid incessant pings and buzzing screens can be quite difficult.

Gwyneth (2024) sums up that navigating the complexities of relationships and sexuality is also a major challenge for all young people in the modern secular society. This includes Christian youth who face the added pressure of upholding traditional values in a culture often dominated by liberalism and permissiveness. For instance, while Christian youth in Nigeria and elsewhere are expected to maintain orthodox Christian values of sexual purity, the unrelenting bombardment of sexualized content through the social media and peer pressure invariably makes Christian teaching questionable and less attractive for them, as well as reducing their motivation to live out the ideals which the church stands for.

Babatunde-Ikotun (2020) postulates that one of the reasons why the Christian religion is declining and young people are leaving the churches is that some of the doctrinal teachings of the church do not apply to their reality, as many of such teachings are unrelatable and inapplicable to their circumstances of existence. This is due largely to the fact that what the members of the older generations experienced growing up is extremely different from what is going on in the present time. For example, the prosperity gospel being preached by many churches in Nigeria today is hardly applicable to the masses of unemployed youth and so, adds no value to them, as well as suggesting that the Christian religion is a scam. Also, part of the cause of the declining interest of young people in Christianity in Nigeria is the lack of practicality of some of the major teachings of the Church. For instance, young people would want to see how the finished work of Jesus on the cross tallies with the circumstances of their lives in the harsh economic realities of present-day Nigeria. The many Christian denominations in the country seem to be failing in their task of bringing the avowed potency of the gospel message to bear on every aspect of the lives of the impoverished masses in the society. This is



in terms of the wide gap that has always existed between the Christian promises of divine intervention cum prosperity and their actual fulfillment in the lives of the people.

Babatunde-Ikotun (2020) surmises that the notable inconsistencies in the teaching and practices of churches are also a strong factor in the declining interest of the youth in church activities, citing that some teachings that apply to one culture or continent and not in others create confusion. For example, the inconsistency of women wearing trousers in Europe and America and women of the same church denominations in Nigeria not being allowed to do so in effect, builds disillusionment. Young people view this as one of the serious contradictions that make the church insensitive to their enlightened tastes thereby making the church less attractive to them.

Udodiong (2018) points out the rising preference of some people choosing to have no religious affiliation to any religious group whatsoever, opting to be identified as “nones”. This detached attitude to religion, which used to be identified mostly in the developed countries of the world, has become an observable practice in Africa and other parts of the developing world. These are people who are neither Christians, Muslims, African Traditional Religion devotees, nor even atheists in the society, simply refusing to side with any religious group. Interestingly, some people who previously belonged to a religious group disconnect themselves from such affiliations to become religious neutrals, with former Christians constituting part of these persons. This invariably helps to explain the increase in the number of people leaving the churches, along with so many who choose to be nominal members but hardly step into the church from year to year. Similarly, Tommey (2024) highlights the relentless pursuit of success and the glorification of material wealth in modern Christian preaching as one of the factors contributing to the decline of Christianity. This is because people who fail to succeed or acquire the much-advertised miraculous wealth are bound to feel short-changed and unfulfilled, and begin to question the value of the Christian gospel.

Furthermore, the church has shifted its focus from fostering a deep personal relationship with God in members to maintaining a checklist of religious activities and programs, making people to feel as mere participants in a religious routine. Tommey (2024) surmises that when the church focuses more on drawing crowds into their services and camping programs rather than equipping the people to live out Christian ideals in their daily lives, it creates more spectators than disciples. This rise of ‘consumer Christianity’, where services and sermons are tailored to entertain worshippers and raise funds rather than transform lives, has left many people still yearning for the spiritual void to be filled in their lives, and still seeking more viable alternatives of fulfillment. This consumer mindset, coupled with the longing for prophetic words, miracles, and emotional religious experiences, has crowded out the main Christian goal of making mature disciples of Christ to impact on society. The obvious negative effects of this loss of the Christian vision and goal on the Nigerian society are perceivable, with corruption and moral laxity holding sway in a country heavily populated by Christians.

Following the sweeping influence of globalization along with the explosion of information technology, playing football or watching soccer matches live on television and other electronic gadgets have been taking a large chunk of time off the schedule of many young people. It is obvious that sports entertainment especially through following football’s major leagues and tournaments especially in the Western world have become more important for a majority of the young adults in the country. The fact that football competitions and soccer viewing and betting





centers are more regularly frequented than church services, evangelism crusades and other religious gatherings through the months of the year lends credence to the fact that soccer has become a parallel religion to Christianity, devoid of dogma and providing a viable outlet for engagement and relaxation to young people and many adults in Nigeria, where a large chunk of the population that is abandoning the churches are Christians, at least at the nominal level.

### Conclusion

In modern societies of the world, it is clearly perceivable that religion and its related beliefs and activities are on the decline with the rise of science and technology. Whereas it is the tradition of historians in all human generations to brand the time-spheres allotted to man on earth as 'primordial', 'ancient', 'modern', 'post-modern', 'civilized', 'enlightened', 'post-Christian' etc., adherents of the Christian religion believe that human interpretation or branding of time does not make any difference with the moral demands of God the *Ancient of Days*, who cannot be contained in time. Christians even believe that it is God who inspires and permits all the advances of human civilization in science and technology, and grants every generation the opportunity to enjoy the exciting privileges and comforts that modern life affords, also believing that every age and its peculiarities and prospects have been laid out in the historical timeline and road map of the Creator.

Judeo-Christianity holds that neither God nor His word, His will and ways can be improved upon, updated, modernized, adjusted, or changed, as He is changeless. Every individual Christian in each successive generation, age, and civilization is expected to fully obey God as the creator of the universe. Christian theology acknowledges the fact that God created man as a free moral agent with full liberty to exercise his will and make moral choices regarding His commandments, but also cautions that this privilege should not be taken for granted. However, this work notes that many Christians in present day Nigeria believe that the orthodox teachings of the church have not helped them to fully understand why they have to face many existential problems in the constantly adverse political and economic realities of the country which constitutes a part of the creation under the sovereign sway of God.

In conclusion, one of the strongest arguments of Christian orthodoxy against theological liberalism and moral revisionism is that a perfect and intrinsically changeless God cannot prohibit certain things for certain generations and later on concede a relaxation or outright abrogation of such prohibitions for subsequent generations because of the evolving nature of human culture. God's laws and precepts are categorical divine imperatives that apply to human beings in all ages, in spite of the accelerations of civilization and globalization with the resultant sharp tilt towards secular values in modern times. This uncompromising stance of Christian orthodoxy to burning issues of humanity in modern societies contributes to the decline of Christianity in Nigeria, especially in the down-turn of youth interest and involvement in church activities, as members of the younger generations are constantly bombarded by the new morals of modernity and lured and pressured to make compromises on the established moral imperatives and cultural recommendations being handed down to them, which have largely emanated from religion, and have been sustained by same, especially Christianity, over the many decades of its arrival and influence in Nigeria.

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