

The Camouflaged Altar: A Review of the Hidden Interests in the Church and Their Implications on the Society at Large

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Abstract – In present times, the word church has different meanings for different individuals. This is according to their experience and institutions. The fact that the church has been affected by modernity has changed its actual face. As humankind increases in earthly knowledge, the purity of the altar is totally compromised. The altar has been used to promote hidden interests from a few malicious individuals. Each and every day, we wake up to negative news from the media about the church; proving the fact that the altar, acting as a connecting point between humankind and God has several evils, inter alia, greed, all manners of immorality, leadership wrangles, dirty politics and corruption, cultic operations, fiction and stage-managed signs and words, but covered with white linen that portrays holiness. Simply, this can be referred to as a camouflaged altar, where different faces of the clergy can be discovered, all hidden in the name of God. This paper therefore discusses this problem through reviewing of existing literature on different issues pertaining to the subject in context, and the implications of the same to the larger society. The study concludes that the current state of most churches indeed raises concerns of spiritual misguidance and confusion about the reality of God, implying that the society at large may end up lacking a guiding factor if the trend continues.

Keyword: Politicking, Altar, Leadership Wrangles, Corruption, Cultic Sacrifices

I. INTRODUCTION

Mention the word church at any point in a discussion and people will raise a lot of questions and concerns. As a matter of fact, freedom in issues related to religion has brought confusion in the modern society at a worrying rate. Reflecting at what religion was initially, the difference can only be argued and not changed. Acting as a link that completes the relationship between the people and God, the church is a force and an institution that has got authority and power to impact the society and dominate positively (Dolamo, 2001). Just as God told the first man (Adam) in creation, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion...” implies that the plan of God was to have humankind as the final point of contact between Him and His creation (Genesis 1:28). From that point to date, religion has unfolded and expanded to what is now a questionable phenomenon. Among the intriguing questions in Christianity is why there are various denominations that are guided by different doctrines and yet still point to one God. Questionable however, is the actual intention of the splits that have been witnessed in

Christianity thus portraying a malicious intention behind the altar that is deemed to be linking the congregation to God regardless of the denomination (Craig, 2010).

Sunday gatherings as a norm to most denominations in Christianity have got both faces of truth and lies, freedom and slavery, asceticism and greed, blessings and curses, just to mention a few. True to this is the fact that most of the members still hold the church to its sacred state as opposed to the reality in the hearts of most of their leaders who have varied interests as they serve on the altar. As understood by many and conceptualized by a few, the altar should clearly serve the interest that it was originally meant to, that is; connecting people to God. Most of the activities if not all that are done on the altar are always for the purpose of reverence to God. This is because, from the beginning, God appreciates an attitude accompanied with such. To some, this approach of reverence and humility that is always portrayed towards the altar is just done as a norm but does not reflect the true image of the heart. In relation to the warning of Jesus in Matthew 7:15, the appearance is ironically compared to that of a sheep, but in actual sense, it is a wolf. This paper reviews empirical evidence of the fact that the altar has been made up of a multiplicity of faces just covered with white linen (Craig, 2010).

II. PURITY OF THE ALTAR

The altar serves as a place where offerings are given, covenants are made, cleansing is done and blessings are passed to people. In the setting of a church, most altars have a condition that only people who are mandated to serve can have access to them. Therefore, this gives an access to very limited numbers of people to this place that is respected. Furthermore, the only people who are holy and pure are supposed to access the altar. However, with the dispensation of the New Testament where God operates on the basis of grace rather than law, human beings have neglected the aspect of purity. Furthermore, some churches have just but remained as buildings since they do not practice the true tenets of the Christian faith. However, this sometimes may be so without the knowledge of the members.

Carrying the image of holiness, the altar should remain a place that is very much revered and segregated for its true purpose. However, in the modern society, everything is changing so

fast that one would wonder if the church of the past was wrong or primitive, given that Christians are still using the same bible but different approaches to key issues. For instance, the attire that people are using on the altar may depict some sort of nature that is not the reality of holiness. Worst still, the way the altar is being used presently exposes the true nature of humankind to an extent that the church has been tainted with confusion of the highest order. As the confusion escalates, the hidden interests of the so-called top church leaders come out clearly through their entire presentation (Makokha, 2020).

III. HIDDEN INTERESTS

Perfection of secular standards is causing great imperfection to the church, obverse to how it should work. Issues that were once deemed by believers as secular are now totally part of the church and the situation is getting worse. Being portrayed on the altar currently is a mixture of the work of God with human interests that are nurtured by the greediness of the heart of humankind. The word “mafia” was never thought to become part of the church but unfortunately, it has. Culminating from secret and cultic kind of operations, it has become difficult to point out which church is not a mafia-like syndicate, although it is easy to point out which one is. There are a number of hidden interests that can make an individual to refer to the church as more of a mafia-like syndicate with the dictation of operations on the altar (Bekithemba, 2019).

a) *Politicking on the altar*

To begin with, the church has been used to promote politicking since it is one of the places where people congregate, making it easier to reach them. Some churches have been pocketed by a few influential people (Kalembe 2012). Amounting to this is the fact that the church ends up dancing to the tune of the politicians. Somewhere in the presentations, one may find a preacher or a programmer promulgating political agendas which seem to sink into the minds of people because of the influence spiritual leaders have over them. Most of the times, the politicians come into the church pretending to worship but ultimately end up politicking on the altar. Church leaders mostly benefit from such endeavors since the politicians give them money for allowing them to use the pulpit for politics. Funny enough, the politicians utter derogatory words on the altar at the expense of the congregation, but the church leaders pretend as if nothing is happening (Dreyer, 2015).

The church has been used by politicians, not only for selling out their political agendas but in the promotion of corruption (Kalembe 2011). Masquerading as well-wishers, proceedings from corrupt dealings have found their way to the altar. To an extent, the church has mostly been involved in the money laundering process; a crime that only the clergy are aware of. The greedy nature of some clergy has left the church vulnerable to manipulation by political mafia. Prevalence of money laundering in the church has been escalated by the fact

that it is among the institutions that the government has very little supervision over its activities (Gogo, 2011).

b) *Business Mindset*

The altar of God has been converted to what can be referred to as a resource-base for a few within the church. Most often, the teachings and preaching are geared towards gaining and giving resources. Anchored on the promise that God rewards the hand that gives, preachers who are con men and women have masqueraded on the pulpit as angels of light pulling massive resources towards themselves (Rosane, 2017). Privy to this are the preachers who evade the chain of command by establishing their own ministries which are managed and controlled by single men and women rather than a hierarchical order of leadership. In this case, they make decisions based on what they feel is good and when their malicious interests are a priority. Having discovered the power of the media, most of the preachers have escalated the gospel of health and wealth through popularizing themselves through it so as to gain ground. As a result, the adoring Christians who subscribe to their ideas find themselves trapped in their cycle to an extent that they respond swiftly to their requests by sending money electronically (Chaves, 2010).

During his ministry, Jesus at one point kicked out people who had converged at the house of God to a business venue. By doing so, he warned them that the house of God was to be a place for prayer and not a den of robbers (Mathew 21:12). However, in modern times, new religious movements have taken captive of the people by brainwashing them and psychologically manipulating their minds to achieve their goals. Most of the time, the preachers who trade in the house of God have been heard testifying on how they have come from poverty or nothingness to achieve the prosperous status they are in. Flaunting their flashy lifestyles, they have always unknowingly revealed that they are misusing people’s resources for their gain (Lauterbach, 2016). True to this is the fact that most of them cannot actually account for the wealth they have without tracing it back to the proceedings from the altar. Gaining from offerings, selling of deliverance items, booking for spiritual checkups, paying for miracles, dedication money and even conning people directly, most of the preachers in this category have achieved a status of being gods to some people (Kwakye, 2015). Their motives are revealed when problems encompass the inner cycle of the leadership where they end up exposing each other even to the point of death. For instance, a pastor in Kenya killed his wife and took his own life on the altar in front of the congregation due to a dispute over wealth he claimed to have made from the church, but the wife had hijacked it and divorced him (Makokha, 2020). Such is just but an iota of what the modern church goes through as a result of rogue church leadership which ends up in devastation.

c) *Leadership Wrangles*

Battles for supremacy in the church dismay in the sense that, people are fighting in the name of the Lord. The hidden

interests held by some of the church leaders have been revealed through the endless and escalating fights that they have persistently engaged in. Gaining support by creating splinter groups in the church just as it is in the political field, church leaders use the members to fight their interests. Interestingly, some members have joined hands with the leaders to fight wars that they are not aware of why they are fighting. The biasness being experienced in the modern church is more related to the benefits of the leaders as opposed to that of the members (Otieno, 2019). Although leadership wrangles were experienced in both the Old and the New Testament periods, they have worsened in the present times. The fact that some churches pay lucrative salary to its leaders especially preachers triggers anything to take place among the leaders and those aspiring to become preachers. Coupled with politics of ethnicity, educational background and propaganda, the church leaders have gone to the extent of administering poison, blackmail and witchcraft towards each other just to get to the top (Albert, 2003).

Presently, with technological advancements, leaders have found a platform to speak negatively about their competitors. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have all been a resting place for arguments about who is good and who is not. Just as the political class in the world has done, the church has also formed groups on social media just to promote the agenda of their bosses (Otieno, 2019). Rumors and gossip, being the main aim of such forums, members and leaders have discussed each other more than they ought to at the expense of the word of God, and ways of building each other. True to the fact that every human being has weaknesses, the fights in the churches have taken advantage to the point of tearing into each other. Furthermore, church leaders who are within the same vicinity but aligned to different denominations end up fighting because they feel threatened by each other. With the focus of most preachers on attracting big congregations, pastors have consulted witchdoctors so as to gain an upper hand and control in this area. In retaliation, the fights end up on members who either shift allegiance or run away from the church (Afolabi, 2011).

d) *Cultic operations*

Cultic operations have been in existence for a long time. These have been characterized with sacrifices which are made for their continuity (Uzi, 2017). Reference has been made to some churches as “devil worshippers” or “satanic churches” especially the NeReMos. Although most of the time the claims cannot be substantiated, the conduct and activities of some churches remain questionable. Characterized by secrecy of issues and the doctrines they relay, such churches have pulled members who believe in freedom of worship and connection to some aspects which may not clearly reflect Christianity. Most of the time, such acts have been associated with the dark world, to some degree. Among the issues that raise eyebrows in the modern church are matters related to dressing code, types of sacrifices being offered, types of prayers, the

doctrines being taught, use of symbolism just but to mention a few (Hjelm et al, 2009).

For instance, some churches ask their members to put on a given dress code like red-colored attires for a given Sabbath day or black for another. Opinions from people who study color patterns indicate that colors carry varied meanings depending on the context of application. Some colors denote association to given gods and obeying the dress code of such colors has a given implication. Christianity is anchored on the doctrine of Jesus Christ but in modern days, strange doctrines have crept into some churches as exemplified by prosperity. Furthermore, some pastors have promoted symbolic kinds of approach to their services where they request their members to come along with padlocks to unlock the future, soils from specific places, water drawn from specific places, specific types of drinks which they use for washing and cleansing, amongst other funny objects whose use is totally questionable. All these are used for the benefit of a few, who stand on the altar to portray the worship of God of heaven but the way they carry out their activities leaves everything doubtful (Uzi, 2017).

e) *Immorality*

The bible indicates that in the last days, wickedness shall be on the rise. However, it is astonishing to see that the church is contributing to the increase of wickedness in the face of the world. As mentioned earlier, the church is meant to connect human beings to God but the aspect of immorality has become a hindrance. Evidenced by the reports from the mainstream and social media, and even witnessed in grassroots, news of the pastors, priests, bishops and church elders engaging in malicious activities has never ceased but rather increased (Adorinde & Aboside, 2014). Astonishing is the fact that sexual immorality has happened even inside the church, where servants of God have engaged in love affairs with married and single women. On several occasions, sensitive reports have emerged of preachers who have been caught while involving in sexual affairs in church buildings. Marriages have broken among church members as a result of the preachers disrupting the peace of family members through sexual affairs with female members. Furthermore, to some extent, female youth in the church have delayed to get married because some of them are friends to the preachers. As a matter of fact, some engagements have broken because of interference from the preachers (Adeola, 2010).

IV. IMPLICATIONS TO THE SOCIETY AT LARGE

Politicking in the church implies that the political cycle has become more powerful and influential to the extent that the church is under its mercy. Politicians are outdoing the church leaders in promoting their agenda on the pulpit. Factoring in the issue of financial influence that comes along with politicians, the church is slowly turning into a slave to the political empire thus making Christianity to be doomed (Oderinde & Abosede, 2014). Furthermore, given the corrupt nature of some politicians, the church has slowly become the

destination of corrupt dealings through fundraisings and heavy donations from politicians just but to get grounds to facilitate money laundering processes. In the real sense, politicians are meant to attend the church without influencing people with political manipulations of any sort. Since the church has members that support different political candidates, this leaves them divided implying that it totally loses its role of uniting people and promoting partisanship. Furthermore, the promotion of money laundering and sharing of cash from corrupt dealings implies that the affected churches have become part and parcel of criminal syndicates (Kalemba, 2012).

Leadership wrangles imply that the focus of the church is shifting gradually from God to self-interests, and this is an indication of end times. Fulfilling the scriptures from 2 Timothy 3:1-2 which states; “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...,” Leadership wrangles have given the altar of God men full of malicious interests in their hearts. Additionally, leadership wrangles in the Church imply that; it is praying less and talking more, reading the word of God less and speaking more of their minds, the church has abandoned love and ventured into hatred, gossip and pursuing of self-satisfaction. In the same line, the church has experienced turbulent times where the courts come in to solve cases resulting from leadership wrangles. The fact that the church has turned to courts in sorting out their issues implies that it is no longer an independent institution that can mediate between its members but rather a battlefield of the mighty (Kajilwa & Muthoni, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, failure on the part of morality in the church has implications that are beyond discussion. For instance, the preachers who are meant to help the members as role models have failed. This implies that the weak members who are looking for motivation have no one to learn from, except emulating the negative aspects they see (Masimo 2017). Paul encourages the church in Corinth by saying; “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1st Corinthians 11:1, NKJV), implying the power of mentorship. Rotten morals of a mentor have a direct influence on those who are to be mentored. In most cases, the people who support immoral leaders will end up staying and polluting the church, while those who are against end up breaking away causing diverse effects on the growth of the church. Individuals who are victims of church leaders taking their spouses for sexual affairs end up losing faith in any church system, implying that such souls get lost completely in matters to do with spirituality. Furthermore, some end up committing suicide.

V. CONCLUSION

Emergence of more religious movements especially in Christianity has harbored confusion of the highest order in the church. Combing through the facts discussed in this paper on what has befallen the church in the contemporary society, it is vivid that the altar has different colors hidden within the color

of white linen. Honestly speaking, the face of secularization has been formed already, and saying that the influence of the church is fading away and that it is turning into a shell that houses explosive objects, is true since it is the exact opposite of what it once was. The church initially acted as a mediator within the society, however, this has changed. The church now needs mediation and call for unity of purpose than any other institution since its mandate is sacred. Honestly, the image that the servants on the pulpit portray is different behind the scenes given that level of hypocrisy is increasing daily.

The study concludes that the current state of most churches indeed raises concerns of spiritual misguidance and confusion about the reality of God, implying that the society at large may end up lacking a guiding factor if the trend continues.

The study recommends that a strong body governing church activities should be created by the government in efforts to help draft and oversee the guidelines of the church operations. By coming up with the guidelines, the current confusion in churches would be well managed and help the innocent congregants from the issues of cruelty, conman ship, prejudice and hypocritical approach to issues from their leaders.

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