



Tradition, Memory, Vs Novelty in the New Christian Movements in Nigeria

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Abstract

This is a well-documented study of the role of tradition and memory in maintaining the wholeness and integrity of the Christian faith. The author gives an elaborate explication of memory, tradition and of their sustaining forces in human life, institutions and practices. He uses these theories to explain the difference between the stability, durability and spiritual/moral integrity of the Catholic Church and the often anarchistic and opportunistic proliferation of the Pentecostal Churches all over Africa but particularly in Nigeria. The core of its argument is that without tradition as the life-sustaining principle, Christianity at the hands of these new breeds becomes merely rootless pseudo-spiritual opportunism and the Churches mere business centres.

Key Words: Tradition, Novelty, New Christian Movement, Pentecostal Churches

Introduction

Deep within every reality is a structural system that holds and sustains the basic facts of that reality. Without this system upon which the reality operates, the essential elements of the reality itself can collapse and eventually lead to a catastrophic dismantling of the system. In other words, a reality without an underlying system is standing on a shaky or sandy foundation and will sooner or later collapse. In the context of the human community, the structural system of that community underscores a deep reality within the system. This reality includes the religious, ethical, cultural, social, economic, and political, aspects of the life of the people. In fact, these aspects of the life of the people constitute the life wire of the structure of every human community. This essay affirms that these aspects of the structure of the human community form the tradition of that community. Consequently, tradition simply defined, is the life of a community inasmuch as it embraces and permeates every aspect of the community. One could argue further that any community without tradition is a dead community. But tradition as the life of a community is as unchanging, timeless (stable) as it is dynamic.

It is worthy to note here that to stress only the unchanging and timeless nature of a tradition against its dynamic character is running on the rail to conservatism, in fact, extreme conservatism. On the other hand, to sacrifice the dynamic and an always changing nature of tradition on the altar of its stable and timeless dimension leads ultimately to extreme liberalism. In fact, by clutching



tenaciously to the dynamic character of a tradition (a phenomenon common among the New Christian Movements, like the Pentecostals), one could cut oneself off from the root or tradition of his or her community. Such a person has failed to see in this case that there is a common line running through the entire system and that there is always that element of something stable and unchanging in tradition. It goes without saying that this element is what holds and ensures the continuity of the tradition of a people. It gives a particular people or community its identity and enhances its continuity as a unique group of people. Over and above all, it upholds and promotes the timeless and unchangeable values of the human community.

Just as a tree's root system does not only hold the tree firm in the soil, but also is responsible for nourishing the tree, whereby the soil nutrient is responsible for all the changes noticeable in the tree, so it is with the stable and unchangeable elements of tradition. The continuity and change observed in any tradition inevitably stems from the stable or what we may rightly call unchangeable elements of that tradition. These stable elements are the memories that inspire the tradition. Hence, under any given tradition lies a corresponding memory, and on any memory(s) lies a corresponding tradition whereby, the tradition becomes a manner of preserving the memory(s) that inspires the tradition.

The New Christian Movements in their pursuance of novelty and innovation seem to have cut themselves off from the living tradition of the Church. Little wonder some of these movements hardly stand the taste of time. They spring up in the morning only to disappear at noon because of what modern hermeneutics philosophers/theologians like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wolfhart Pannenberg would call *traditio quaerens intellectum*- tradition seeking understanding.

In the light of these, the undertaking to study the role of memory and the rediscovery of the significance of tradition becomes very important in our contemporary situation of extreme Pentecostalism. In doing this, this work adopts a descriptive-analytical method of study. Consequently, the work has been conveniently divided into four sections. Section one focuses on tradition and memory, while section two deals with the reality of change as it relates to the tradition of a community. Section three dwells upon the New Independent Christian Movements of our area and era. In conclusion, section four critically evaluates the New Christian Movements under the binoculars of the scientific studies of hermeneutics thinkers on tradition.

Tradition and Memory

Thus, the tradition of any given community is the life of that community. In fact, just as the human person is made up of body and soul, whereby the soul is the animating principle of the body, tradition in like manner is the animating principle of the community.

Even in the careful study of the human soul, it is obvious that the animating principle of the body is not only the principle of motion in the human person but also the principle of posture and walking uprightly around. It has never been known that the human body maintains any natural



posture of walking uprightly around once the soul is out of the body. It follows logically that once the human soul goes out of the human person, the body collapses and corruption sets in and the body is destroyed. This is precisely what happens to a community that separates itself from its tradition. One could firmly assert here that no community stands unless it has a tradition underlying it since it is the tradition that animates it and the community lives its tradition.

Another important consideration to be noted with respect to tradition as the life of a community is that insofar as life is not strictly a stable reality, tradition, is not strictly an unchangeable reality. This is very true because human life is as dynamic as it is unchangeable. It progresses from vegetative through instinctive to the rational. But it is the same life that is involved in the evolutionary process. Thus, tradition as life is as dynamic as it is stable or unchangeable. One could even argue that in its dynamism there is permanency. This is why Maurice Blondel would say of tradition that it is life, and of life that it is action. And according to Y. Congar, quoting M. Blondel, tradition is; a principle of unity, continuity and fecundity, which is at the same time, the beginning, the anticipation (of future movement) and final. It precedes every reconstructive synthesis and every reflective analysis¹.

Finally it is important to note that what is conveyed in tradition is more than ideas, beliefs, convictions, notions and opinions capable of being ordered in a logical form; “Tradition incarnates life” which embraces covert and overt sentiments, thoughts, beliefs, customs, attitudes, aspirations and actions. This is to say in a simple manner that tradition is life as we are going to see in the next section.

Tradition as Life

The above caption suggests that tradition has never, all the time, been life of a community. But such a statement is open to being misconstrued, because, strictly speaking, there was never a time when tradition was never lived, even in its process of becoming.

Tradition and Community are so intimately inter-woven that it is difficult to assert when tradition becomes life. Nigerian cultural festivals similarly preserve communal life by transmitting inherited values and identity across generations (Edem, 2024). What can be however asserted is that tradition and community exist and operate together in such a way that what affects one affects the other. But an investigation into the foundation of tradition reveals that memory inspires tradition and that tradition is anchored on memory. It further reveals that tradition is a concrete articulation of memory. What becomes evident here is that in the process of articulating the memory of a people, tradition exists in the process of becoming. But, once articulated, it becomes life of that particular people.



The point is that tradition has always been life in such a way that a mother has always been a woman. But there was a time when a mother as a woman, was in the process of becoming a mother. The fact here is that the link between tradition and life has been a subtle one leading the entire process into a serious treatment of the role of memory as we are going to see in the next section of the work.

1.3 Memory and Tradition

By way of definition, memory is the faculty of remembrance. It is that faculty of keeping facts in the conscious mind and of being able to call them back at will². It is memory that helps in the preservation of past experience for future use. In other words, memory not only connects us with our past, but also keeps us alive in the present, preparing us for the future. As indicated above tradition has to do with opinions, beliefs, customs, etc. which are passed on within the community from one generation to the next. But the reality is that no community stands on its own unless it has some traditions underlying it, since it is these traditions that animate the community. Tradition on its part is animated by memory. A Community therefore that lives its tradition is ultimately living its memory, which is its life. Hence, Bernard Haring understands tradition as “a stream of life and truth passed from one generation to another”³

This understanding of tradition and memory indicates a fundamental relationship between the two concepts: Tradition as a concept is the life of a community. It is an answer to the question: “why this way of life of a particular community?” the reason given as the answer to the “why?” of the question is embedded in the memory of the community personified by the elders of that community.

The Jewish Passover feast, for instance, stands out as a vivid illustration of the relationship between memory and tradition. The author of the book of Deuteronomy 6:20-25 presents the reasonableness of the celebration of the Passover feast, which it is told that the youngest member of the family asks the eldest: “why are we doing all these things?” The eldest member of every Jewish family will then have to go down the memory lane to recall the phases of the history of Israel, namely, their being a nomadic people, their slavery in Egypt, their election and consecration on the part of Yahweh, and the gift of the Torah and the promised land, in the context of which the



tradition of the Passover was situated. In this context, to every interrogation or question there was a corresponding memory of the various phases of the history of the Jewish people. This memory on one hand creates a tradition. On the other hand, it opens a new way to an ever greater understanding of the future and the deeper meaning and grateful understanding of the present. Thus the Jewish people since then cannot separate themselves from their tradition, which is now their memory, a way of life of gratitude and thanksgiving to Yahweh for constituting them a unique group of people - a special chosen people. For them to cut themselves off from their tradition would mean a great loss of identity, treasure and hope in a brighter future as a unique group of people.⁴ It leads ultimately in most cases to the destruction of the people as a community, a serious crisis in life and a funny identity of members of the community. In the end, this has shown that it is in tradition that the people as a community lives, believes, and re-reads their own past and situate themselves in the present with an openness towards a promising future.

Similarly, it shows as well that memory is kept alive in the tradition of the people. The act of remembering itself serves to actualize the past for a generation far removed in time from those former historic events in order that they themselves can have encounter with the great events of the past, such that although separated in time and space from these events, through memory the gulf is spanned, and the “exiled” people share again in the same one history. Henri J. M. Noumen has aptly summed up how memory is kept alive by tradition in these words:

It is central to the Biblical tradition that God’s love for His people should not be forgotten. It should remain within the present...a love which is not simply a wistful recollection of a bygone past but a living force which sustains us in the present. Through memory, love transcends the limit and offers hope at any moment of our lives.⁵

The pages of the Gospels evidently illustrate the fact that the Eucharistic tradition, nay other Sacramental tradition are memorials. But the sustaining power of memory becomes most mysteriously vivid in God’s definitive revelation in His son Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is in memory that we enter into a nourishing and sustaining relationship with Christ⁵. Christ had made it unambiguously clear that when the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will lead us to the complete truth by reminding us all, that He had taught. Christ here reveals that only in memory



will real intimacy with Him be possible, that only in memory will we experience the full meaning of what the Apostles have witnessed. J. M. Noumen has gone on to articulate that “the memory of Jesus Christ is much more than the bringing to mind of past redemptive events. It is a life-giving memory, a memory which sustains and nurtures us here and now and so gives us a real sense of being rooted amidst the many crises of daily life.”⁶

It follows from here that tradition and memory cannot be divorced from each other. In a way, tradition is created out of memory, and tradition itself lives in memory, in remembrance. As a matter of fact, the whole tradition of the Church (the sacraments) instituted by Christ was embedded in the memory of His Apostles and in the early Church. In fact, all the teachings and traditions of the early Church were based on facts recalled from memory. Even the teachings of the early Apostles and the traditions of the early Church were based on remembering their lived experience with their Master. This in the final analysis brought out the logicity and the consistency of Christ’s promise of the advocate, who would remind them all, that He had taught them. On the whole, the Church as a community (of believers) is built on tradition. Like the Church, cultural festivals sustain communal identity by preserving shared values and collective heritage (Edem, 2022)⁷. This tradition is the embodiment of the sacraments - the life of the Church - the synthesis of all Christ’s teachings being re-lived by the Church through the graceful assistance of the Holy Spirit. This however does not exclude the dialectical structure of tradition which is the next point of our consideration in the next section of the work which examines the major characteristics of tradition.

Major Characteristics of Tradition

1. The dialectical structure of Tradition

The dialectical structure of tradition has to do with its dialectic of identity, namely; the permanent structure of tradition, and its dialectic of difference, namely; the non-permanent structure of tradition, and the dialogue between these two dialectics also known as the dialectic of continuity and change. Consequently, since development is informed by creativity, it follows that there is creativity in tradition in as much as tradition undergoes stages of development. This is very well articulated by Avery Dulles, when he notes that there are two key points in the Vatican 11 teaching on Tradition. In the first place tradition consists not merely in the transmission of words, but also in “ways of living and acting”. What is handed on by the Church is “...all that it is and all



that it believes” (DV no.8). Secondly, the Vatican II council clearly acknowledges development - creativity in tradition by stating that: “this tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.”⁸

It is on this foundation that Avery Dulles has built a plausible theory of creativity in tradition which draws on notions of creative intuition derived mainly from artistic experience and theory. Theologically, this notion is summed up in “creative appropriation” as distinct from the merely “passive reception of tradition”. This means that there is room for creativity in tradition. And this implies that when an element in tradition does not enhance the dignity of the human person and our human salvation in Christ such an element has to be replaced with the new way of life that God has given us in Christ. This brings our discourse right into the anthropological structure of tradition.

2. Anthropological Structure of Tradition

In this section we would like to emphasize that tradition is an anthropological reality. This means that tradition is life. It is life in a comprehensive sense of the word, embracing the whole range of factors, from “unconscious” through shared symbols, to official written documents, to faithful action. In this light the specifically Christian tradition is the life of the historical community of believers in the Lord. This believing community has the word of God to offer to the world, thereby giving to tradition an epistemological dimension or structure.

3. Epistemological Structure of Tradition

This is discernible only through reflection on the historical reality of a particular tradition. The epistemology of the Christian tradition, for instance, may be explained as a process in terms of a general knowledge of tradition, but must acknowledge the unique historical reality of Jesus Christ.

4 Community Structure of Tradition

Tradition has a fundamental community structure. This means that it is passed on in the community from one generation to the next. It shapes the community, and it is in turn shaped by the community. And in this case, authority becomes a necessary and internal element of tradition. In the Catholic tradition, for example, this authority is vested in the *Magisterium*. This means the authority of the Pope in communion with all Bishops of the world when teaching the faithful about faith and morals. The sources of God’s revelation of Himself to the world in the Catholic tradition have always been: the scriptures and tradition. The word tradition in this context is a living and developing concept as in other Christian denominations would also agree upon.

In fact, in the Christian sense of the word, tradition as life must be understood as a living tradition, and therefore as changing and developing. Hence, change and development are both characteristics of tradition. The living tradition has, however, permanent structures. The change within tradition is not brought about by a series of break with the past (as was thought and taught



by Martin Luther). It is the permanent continuous element that provides the basis for change. However, new questions in the tradition would always bring about new argumentations and new ways of looking for solutions to the problems. This raises the issue of the argumentative structure of tradition.

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Change and Tradition

1 A Tremendously Fast Changing Society

We are living in a rapidly changing world. There are changes taking place everywhere and in every field, in politics as in Economics, in religion as in science and Technology. Hence, the contemporary individual is not ignorant of the stupendous transformation apparent in all phases of his or her material existence. Our new age has witnessed the introduction of automations not excluding the AICS (Artificial Intelligence Computers), the smashing of atoms, the utility but not without the control of atomic and nuclear energies, and the human person’s daring adventures into the space. All these epoch-making achievements are unmistakeable indications of “a new era - a new world”.

These material progress and innovations with their consequent challenges do not frustrate the Christian into running away from the world and abandoning the world to its relentless fate. Nor should the contemporary person allow himself or herself to be swayed by these “bubbling and transient” innovations. The Christian should rather act in full accord with God’s exhortation at the



dawn of creation, namely, “to till and subdue the earth” (cf.Gen.1:28). But to till and subdue the earth we must hold fast to the essence of Christ’s teaching as was transmitted to us by the apostles following the Christian tradition. In doing this, we must also fashion out modes of transmitting this tradition in the light of our tremendously changing world if we are to make any impact. This is well articulated by Bernard Haring thus:

In such an eventful hour of history it would indeed be deplorable if the Christian, prompted by various concern for personal salvation, would abandon to the corrupt and subversive this new world so full of adventurous possibilities and threatening tensions. Furthermore, a stubborn adherence to empty forms and conventions would prove no less detriment in such a momentous epoch in history because only those things which are truly, vital and deeply rooted shall survive the upheavals of transition periods. The Christian should free himself from all undue attachment to failing social systems and from all inordinate desire for innovation for the sake of mere change...The Christian’s way of life stands the test of time only to the extent that it is lived in agreement with the word of God.¹

We should be able to adapt to changes, but at the same time able to discover and hold fast to that which has become stable in the wave of changes. However, the tempest and storm of our contemporary innovations and adventures has brought the wind of change into a situation that has affected the meaning of tradition and the role of memory. This is our major preoccupation in the next section of the work.

2 The Negative Consequence Of Change

The immediate result of our tremendously fast changing society is the tendency to break away with the past. We have mentioned above that it is in upholding of tradition that the people as a community lives, believes and re-reads their past and situate themselves in the present with an openness towards the future. Tradition therefore, permeates time in all its dimensions of the past, the present and the future. To understand tradition within the context of any one dimension of time alone is to break the continuum since tradition flows from the past through the present to the future in a cyclic manner.

The act of breaking away with the past whereby, tradition is understood only within the context of the future, in such a manner that the past has practically nothing to do with or offer to the present and the future has always had dreadful and horrible consequences. It is in this sense that modernity which was inspired by rationalism a philosophical system was and is still seen as an attempt to break with the past and with tradition. The meaning of rationalism simply put in this study is the doctrine whereby reason is made absolute as the ultimate authority in religion as in other fields of study. By this, we mean that whatever cannot be subjected to the categories of reasoning is rejected. The object of study must necessarily correspond to the cognitive faculties of



the knowing subject, not the subject adapting itself to the object. The object is known not on the basis of the extent to which it manifests and unfolds itself to the knowing subject, but on the basis of the extent to which it is penetrated by the cognitive faculty of the knowing subject, that is, to the extent which the object adapts itself to the categories of the knowing subject.

In the rationalistic manner of thinking, everything is subjected to the critical analysis of the cognitive faculty. Hence, any tradition which does not have the test of such critical scrutiny is abandoned. In this mode of thinking, tradition is always on the move, seen in a futuristic light independent and against the past. This is one of the consequences of modernity. It has an overwhelming influence in our contemporary society. As a result of the exaggerated rationalism of certain thinkers, a more radical position to issues of tradition has been developed and a philosophy separated from and absolutely independent of tradition has emerged. Tradition which, for the ancient and the medieval thoughts, was in both theory and practice, a profound unity, producing knowledge capable of reaching the highest forms of speculation has been destroyed by the modernists which has espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from tradition and meant to take place of tradition.

The most influential of these radical positions are well known and high in profile, especially in the history of the western world. It is evident that the development of modern philosophy inspired by rationalism has seen itself (modern philosophy) further away from tradition, to the point of setting itself quite explicitly in opposition to tradition. This process had reached its peak in the 19th century with some idealists and rationalists seeking in not a few ways to transform tradition and its contents into a dialectical structure, which could be grasped by reason and only by reason. In this manner of thinking tradition was regarded as alienating, whereby, clutching tenaciously to tradition not only opposes but all the more damages the development of a full rationality. This form of thinking did not hesitate to present itself as a new tradition, serving as a foundation for projects which, on the political, social and religious plane gave rise to a totalitarian system which have been disastrous for the entire humanity.

In the field of positive sciences, for instance, not a few of our scientists have not only abandoned the traditional (Christian) vision of the world, but more especially rejected every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision of life. Hence, these scientists lacking any ethical point of departure and reference (guaranteed of course by tradition), are in danger of putting at the centre of their concern something other than the human person and the entirety of the person's life. Even more, some of these scientists sensing the vast open-ended opportunities of technological progress seem to succumb not only to a market-based logic, but also to the temptation of quasi-divine power over nature and even over human beings. This has ultimately led, as Saint Pope John Paul II noted, to nihilism- a philosophy of nothingness. It is held that the search is an end itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth².



By Fredrick Nietzsche's announcement that the "old God is really no longer alive; he is thoroughly dead", he consciously brought to a terrible explicitness the question that the new age has been able to avoid, though in a bad faith, namely; that the world does not need a creator to explain itself. All these expressions do not only touch on the cultural and social dimensions of life, but have also inevitably influenced the religious sphere of life. Furthermore, from the beginning of the 19th century, the progressive entry of technology into social life has made modernity an indispensable criterion of any understanding of the self to the point of becoming, for many, the criterion for measuring the progress of human life.

On the other hand, the inseparable link between rationalism and modernity clearly emerges in the recognition and understanding of modernity as the predominance of reason over tradition, (practically evident in the French Revolution of 1789); and to the various forms of atheism deriving there from.³

In the same vein, modernity could be understood as the continual and progressive conquest of a critical consciousness reached by the human spirit through its effort to free itself from the clutches of the slavery of the past, so as to be open to the discovery of a new and rational truth. It is within this context that one can understand the door that was opened first by Feuerbach and by Karl Marx, namely; the uselessness of the hypothesis of God. Thus against the classical understanding, whereby tradition was the unquestioned validity of truth, where the authority of the human reason was validated by the authority of tradition; tradition emerged in modernity and Enlightenment period as something which is constructed by and subjected to the lordship of human reasoning.

Generally speaking, the rejection of tradition itself by the rational way of thinking of modernity has plunged the human person deep into the abyss of nothingness. This is the unfortunate prize of breaking away with the past from the perspective of the history of human thought. In addition to this unfortunate situation of the contemporary era, Martin Luther from the backdrop of the Church had already in his own time broken away radically from tradition by emphasizing the Holy Bible as the only source of God's revelation in Christ - *Solar Scriptura*. Moreover, he also called for the purification of the Church by issuing the 95 theses against the Catholic tradition. For him human beings may attend Salvation only by their faith and not by deeds. This reformation of Martin Luther took place in 1517 and since then his followers in faith had abandoned the significance of tradition and its role in matters of faith and morals.⁴ It follows then that for a period of more than five centuries the significance of tradition has been thrown to the wind. And with this historical development, the role of memory which as indicated above is the treasure house of tradition was severely distorted.

According to Gerald O'Collins, there was a rediscovery of the importance of tradition in 1963 during the Faith and Order conference in Montreal. In this conference, Gerhard Ebeling argued that the proper task of theology should also be concerned with 'the proclamation that has



already taken place'. For him 'the task which theology is given to do is identical with the gift it receives from tradition'. Hence "the task of handing on this tradition is clearly constitutive of theology".⁵ It is worthy of note here and of course very surprising that a theologian who was so consciously loyal to the reformation of Martin Luther as Ebeling could now come to approach theology in the spirit of 'tradition seeking understanding' - *traditio quaerens intellectum*.

In his long essay "'solar scriptura" and Tradition', Ebeling according to Gerald O'Collins is said to have stated clearly that 'the scripture-principle necessarily involves a doctrine of tradition'⁶. This became the dawn of a new era after a long period of more than five centuries. The change witnessed here was partly due to the contribution of one philosopher/theologian, Hans-Georg Gadamer, (1900-2002). This philosopher/theologian incorporated tradition right into the sciences of interpretation (Hermeneutics) and explained it not as an obstacle but as a necessary context for the recovery of meaning. Consequently, tradition has been considered since then as 'the way we relate to the past' and the way 'the past is present'. It has now become clearer that 'we are always situated within traditions'; and tradition 'is always part of us'.⁷

In addition, Wolfhart Pannenberg another hermeneutic thinker has accepted and reflected in his teaching the significance of the philosophy of Gadamer through his attitude to the principle of tradition.⁸ In the final analysis, it is the Faith and Order conference of 1963 that really unveiled so many lines of convergence with the Catholic positions on tradition which were eventually incorporated into the Vatican II document - *Dei Verbum* - in 1965. However, this wind of change that advocated the inclusion of tradition in the practice of the faith has not been taken seriously up till now by many of Christian denominations, especially, by the new independent Christian movements. Our next section of the work is a focus on these new independent Christian movements.



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The New Independent Christian Movements and Tradition

1 The Emergence of the New Christian Movements

There is a spectacular rapid growth of the new independent Christian movements in Africa, especially, in our country Nigeria. They multiply like mushroom daily and attract people from all walks of life. According to the scientific study done by Kenneth Enang in this area, there are two major types in Nigeria. The first type according to his study is the Ethiopian type. And the second one is the spiritual-healing type. The first group is said to have emerged at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. It came as a response to the unfavourable Church policy of the mission Churches. The second group, namely, the spiritual-healing group landed in the 20s. They came up as praying groups seeking divine help for the evils of this life. These groups normally would emphasize healing, spirit possession and its manifestation and the sole authority of the bible though this has been corrected by the hermeneutic philosophers/theologians. The peak of this baffling phenomenon according to Kenneth Enang came in Nigeria at the end of the fifties and during the sixties¹. Since then these movements are found in houses, ware houses, halls, living houses, buses, lorries, taxi, etc, and their doctrines are being sold to the vulnerable public.

Confirming these activities of the newly emerging independent religious movements in the area, Joseph E. Ekuwem has aptly noted that:

Sign-posts and roofs of living homes and genuine companies hardly out-number registered but fake Churches whose proprietors brew nothing but poisonous doctrines with which they enslave the unwary whom they profess and claim they are out to liberate and save².



What has resulted from this unfortunate trend is the booming and humming sound oozing out of their sound system strategically mounted to out sound the others. There are many reasons advanced by the founders/presidents of these independent Churches. Some of the reasons include: propagation of the Gospel to all the ends of the earth in faithfulness to the injunction of Christ; citing Mark 16:15 as their biblical footing, saving of souls, specially called and chosen by God. Little is said of the majorly business and financial aim underlying the founding of these churches. One newspaper cartoon has vividly captured this scenario as “divine business” and as “most lucrative business” of our times, capping it up at the end as a riskless and tax less business, in spite of the ephemeral nature of the various religious movements.

2 The Transient Implications of The New Independent Christian Movements

While religion seems to be losing its influence to secularism in the western world, in Nigeria as in other parts of Africa, it is flourishing in a spectacular way as it is evidenced in the rapid growth of new independent Christian movements. On one hand, some people are afraid of them and would not want to have anything to do with them because of their exclusive and self-righteous attitude of life cited only from the sacred scriptures. On the other hand, others admire them and see in them the work of the Holy Spirit and genuine expression of spiritual renewal of life.

According to Kenneth Enang, many people are attracted to them by their offers of healing-bodily and spiritual blessings of whatever kind, or by their promises of instant solution to all problems. It has been noted that the principal reason for people becoming permanent members or for joining them for a short duration of time whenever need arises is for this healing ministry in their movements. Those who have received healing from these independent Churches turn out to become founders of their own independent Churches in order to offer healing in their own turn to other people as well who are sick among them³. In summary, the following are the most commonly known reasons that these new independent Christian movements have been using in attracting people to themselves:

Healing and the care of the sick

Belief in prophecies and tongues

Purported ability to deal with evil spirit, witches and wizards

Search for palpable salvation

Desire to know the scripture and the word of God better



Attractive and persuasive preaching- the Pentecostal style of preaching

Quest for spiritual women experience

The fact that adherents are quickly given challenges and responsibilities.³like women being given leadership roles and the recognition of charisma of other members of the movements. (cf.) Other reasons for joining them⁴.

It is good to note that the group mostly at the risk of being attracted is not only the youth looking for the security of knowledge, health and wealth, but also those who are in some difficulties with the Main Line Churches. The women are the most vulnerable in this case because of the appeal that the founders of these religions make to their emotions (emotionalisms) and the added fact that women as indicated above are easily admitted to the most influential offices⁴ in the movements based entirely on the critical convictions of the founders.

3.3 THE BASIC FOUNDATION OF THE NEW CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS

An interesting aspect of these churches is that each claim to have been authentically instituted by God. But they hold tenaciously to the aspects of Christ's teaching that appeal to them - most especially the miraculous aspect of Jesus' teachings. This aspect most often appeals to peoples' sentiment and emotion especially, the most vulnerable. It is not uncommon nowadays for one to tune on his television or radio set or turn to the pages of dailies and magazines and not be greeted with advertisement announcing crusades and miracle galore for all who would attend. There are all manners of miracles promised in these crusades. But as many as that attend such crusades return not better because everyone believes in miracle but to believe too much in it is to be unrealistic about life.

In other instances, people's emotions are so worked up that in their emotional frenzy; they tend to forget about all their problems, so much so that as long as the emotion is stirred and sustained all problems seem to have evaporated. But they usually return to their former condition since the alleged miracle was based merely on the fantasy of emotion.

The question to be asked is whether an aspect of Christ's teachings could be so over emphasized as to neglect or reject the other equally important aspects of the teachings on which the tradition



is based. The “Christus totus” is the Christ of three mysteries: Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries. This is the total Christ and here is based the authentic Christian tradition witnessed and lived by the Apostles. Christ in His teachings either by His life or His actions and words did not over emphasize one or the other aspect of His life. He synchronized all into a whole in such a way that though they are different and may be considered separately but can never be actually dichotomized. It is amazingly surprising and pitiable that these new independent Christian movements have exalted and emphasized only a particular aspect of Christ, namely; His glorious ministry, a cross less Christ, and by so doing have cut themselves off from the totality of Christian tradition.

Biblical tradition is very clear on the fact that Christ is not only the Christ of miracles but He is also the Christ of sorrows⁵. These movements create a dichotomy between the Christian tradition and the tradition of the scriptures. They appear not to know the fact that the Christian tradition stems from the sacraments that are biblically instituted by Christ. They seem also not to take the history of the Church in its entirety into consideration.

The first Christian community was the apostolic community with her unique role of memory of the master: “what I received from the Lord I give unto you”, 1Cor. 11:23. The tradition of this community was based not only on the teaching of the Lord and Master, but also on their lived-experience of the Lord. It was this tradition that was later codified in THE BOOK-The Sacred scriptures (precisely the New Testament but even more in the Acts of the Apostles). But this is a living tradition, hence it behoves Christians of all ages and places to re-interpret the tradition and apply it to their various circumstances and situations. Consequently, there are biblical commentaries and patrological studies, in which the Christian (Catholic) tradition is also documented. This tradition is a memorial today established to remind people of the past events - the paschal mysteries - and make these events present to them. It is a total not fragmented or partial memorial. And since these past events are unique and irreparable in the manner they took place in the past, it follows that the experiences of the Apostles who witnessed these events are unique and irreplaceable. Little wonder people like Scott Hahn who missed this essential link to their roots have worked themselves back home by saying in the video of what made him a Catholic (conversion story): “I have turned down pride and found mercy”⁶.



This statement was made by him when he asked someone on the street called the Pride where to locate Mercy hospital in the city he was visiting. The person told him, “Turn Pride you will find mercy”. This episode reminded him of how the reformation epoch of the Church made him to embrace the Presbyterian faith and after studying theology, he came to discover the treasure of tradition and God’s mercy. The central message of the answer he got from the person he asked for a direction in the city according to him is that if we turn away from pride we can rediscover the significance of tradition. For us in Africa, this could mean if those in the new independent Christian movements could turn away from confusion and ignorance, they could find a way of re-establishing themselves in the authentic tradition of their religious practices or a way to their true home. Such a returning home is really a rediscovery of the significance of tradition which is the central argument in this work.

It follows from here that to break away from tradition is to cut ones’ self-off from the fundamental events of our faith and as such to cut ones’ self from his or her source of life. This was the problem of the reformation theologians in the 15th century as argued above which the hermeneutic philosophers/theologians had corrected in 1963 in Montreal in Canada emphasizing that - *traditioquaerens intellectum* - tradition seeking understanding. This *traditio quaerens intellectum* - tradition seeking understanding - of the hermeneutic thinkers has underscored the fundamental fact that the new independent Christian movements have radically cut themselves off from the memorial that is at the basis of the Christian tradition. The truth in the final analysis is that there is a way that we relate to the past and the way the past is present to us. Thus, to rediscover meaning of the past in the present and to have a better vision of the future, there is need for a radical return to tradition in the deepest sense of the word.

END NOTES

- 1.Kenneth Enang, *Nigerian Catholics And The Independent Churches: A Call To AuthenticFaith*,(NeueZeitschrift fur Missionwissenschaft Immensee/Switzerland, 2000), P.175.
2. Joseph Ekuwem, *Foreword to The Divine Deceit: Business in Religion*, (Enugu-Nigeria: Optimal Publishers, 1998), P. ix.



3. Kenneth Enang, *Nigerian Catholics and the Independent Churches: A call to Authentic Faith*, P. 131-132.
4. Kenneth Enang, *Nigerian Catholics and The Independent Churches: A call To Authentic Faith*, P. 119-140.
5. Christ's sorrowful mysteries (His birth, rejection by His people, passion and crucifixion).
6. <https://www.catholiceducatin.org/en/religion-2ndphilosophy/apologetics/the-scott-hahn-conversion-story.html>

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 EVALUATION

It has become a convincing fact that tradition as the life of a community – economic, social, political, religious, etc - is that life which is shared by the members of the entire community. In this sense tradition is a concretization of the memory which the people share in common. Consequently, one could validly argue that tradition has a fundamental community structure. It is not and cannot be separated from the community just as a living person cannot be separated from the life he or she lives on earth. The living tradition is a re-calling which not only brings the past into the present thereby, connecting us with the past, but is also a necessary condition for connecting the future with the present and the past.

In addition, tradition as a living memory is dialectical. There is in it substance and evidence, stability and dynamicity, immutability and changeability, constancy and variable, continuity and change. While the substance, stability, immutability, constancy and continuity are the memories that inform the tradition, their opposites are the concrete expressions of the memories as documented in the tradition down the ages and at various circumstances and situations. The short-sightedness of this link between tradition and memory leads to the either extremes of conservatism or liberalism, whereby, tradition is exclusively understood as either being faithful to the events of the past in such a way that it does not admit of re-interpretation; or as dead events of the past, which is to be abandoned in favour of the search for innovations and novelties.

Unfortunately, with the confusion caused by radical secularism together with the separation of Martin Luther of the role of faith from tradition, the balance tilts dangerously to the latter and



the situation has become complex with the new independent Christian movement. These new Christian movements are swayed by the material progress and innovations of the human spirit. In Nigeria for instance, they are motivated by a more liberal approach to issues of faith as presented by the Orthodox Churches, quest for healing, miracles and integral well-being in the face of abject poverty. Consequently, to hold steadfastly to the evidence rather than the substance, variable rather than constancy, change rather than continuity, all these have led to a serious drifting away of these movements from tradition. In doing this, they have gradually broken away from the past, namely, the memorials of the mysteries of Christ. This is the terribly pitiable yet redeemable situation in which the New Christian movements have found themselves. It is our hope that our prayers for them, pastoral work and research like this study will be of help to them for a return to the question of tradition seeking understanding - *traditio quaerens intellectum* - or a rediscovery of the treasures of our faith hidden in the authentic Christian tradition.

This return or journey home (Scott Hahn) is significant because a present without a past is futureless and a futureless present is catastrophic. When that is the case, it means that the new independent Christian Movements are like Sheep without Shepherds and anchorless and compass less Ship at the mercy of sea wave, moving wherever the wave carries them, and can sooner or later be swallowed by the wave itself. But tradition in as much as it is a reliving of the community's memory holds the community - religious, political, economic, social etc - and directs it safely ashore. The vital fact here is that we cannot run away from our past. We can never break away totally from our tradition. Our tradition is our root, for cut off from our root, we wither. Thus the author of *The Gifts of The Jews: Hinges of History* has rightly noted that being unable to name one's ancestors is to forget one's past and this makes one an orphan.

4.2 CONCLUSION

It is on record that Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is characterized by a vast and baffling number of sects and religious movements of diverse origins. While some of these sects and religious movements claim to be Christian in origin, others on the other hand could be said to be in a clear opposition to Christianity because of their total rejection of the significance of Christian tradition. Some of them are particularly set against the mainline Christian Churches, especially,



when it comes to matters of doctrines and morals of the Church which they find very difficult to understand and to live them out in their concrete life situations. These New Christian Movements are so diversified in nature in our area. Some could be regarded as “ecclesial bodies”. There are those who call themselves Pentecostals, while others seem to have all the characteristics of sects properly so called. It is good to note at this juncture that many of these new independent Christian Movements cut off from the Christian tradition, have difficulties in consistency and clarity when it comes to doctrines and morals.

This could be said to have come from their cutting themselves radically off from the life giving tradition. The basic and fundamental belief they all have in common is to “be saved” “to be in the right”, “to be born again”. This is to be taken with a grain of salt because this concept of being “born again” has been used by many as an excuse to disassociate oneself from the community life of the people especially, when bitterness and hatred are used as an excuse to cause sharp division in the family and community under the pretext of founding a new Church. This situation is so serious in our area that it has become very hard to have a common platform in a family or community on which we can stand together as a people to look at the realities of life from our common background and take a collective decision to move ahead together as a team from the same background pursuing a common destiny. In addition to this, the new independent Christian movement can be very exclusive in their attitude towards non - members whom many of them think are “on the path of damnation”. This particular attitude of condemning others or of self-righteousness has been drastically dropped in the mainline Churches since after the second Vatican council, especially, in the Catholic Church. The general attitude today is not that of condemnation of others but of inter-faith/inter-religious dialogue. It was this spirit that hovered over the Montreal conference of 1963 which significantly led to the rediscovery of tradition by the hermeneutics philosophers/theologians and the effect of this was seen in the drafting and formulation of the *Dei Verbum* document of the Catholic theological tradition. With this rediscovery, tradition teaches us that there is a way that the past is lived in the present. It makes the present even much more meaningful and engaging, pointing ahead to us a brighter future. Thus, the cutting away of oneself



from the past namely, tradition, family/community, is to live like an orphan in the world. Above all, it is like a ship without a captain and a captain without a compass.