

What Is Missing in the 21st-Century Church?

Eric Amankwa¹, Justina Sarpong Akoto²

¹Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, USA

²Counselling Centre, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

Email: amankwaeric@yahoo.com, EAmankwa@my.gcu.edu

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Abstract

The Church and Christianity have maintained throughout history in a dichotomous relation to various eras such as pre-modernism, postmodernism, modernism, and philosophical movements. Science influenced each period to the extent of impacting the interpretation and comprehension of the Bible. Similarly, Christianity has not been immune to influences from the western globe. The purpose of this research is to explore the current challenges affecting the management of the Church in the 21st century, the impacts of these challenges on Christianity, and the potential solutions that could be integrated to achieve the mission and goal of Christianity. The study examines several issues influencing the Church and how they have contributed to that which is missing in the contemporary Church, Christianity and Church in the 21st century, and the future of the Church and Christianity.

Keywords

Spirituality, Religious Freedom, Contemporary Church, Total Quality Management

1. Introduction

As humanity evolves, more concepts become intertwined and it is becoming ever more important for the church to embrace these new changes and integrate them into its growth. Management in the church faces a variety of cultural, religious, sociopolitical, and ethical issues in the 21st century. These issues extend beyond Christian denominations and other differentiating social factors. It is crucial to understand these underlying challenges to provide a foundation for the development of effective management strategies that can propel the church further in its missions. This paper addresses issues that are missing in the 21st Century Church. Most importantly, what factors have influenced the church and how they have contributed to that which is missing in the management of con-

temporary church? Solving these challenges of the church today requires a comprehensive examination of all the variables involved and widespread commitment to this goal while also being cognizant of the contemporary trajectories. The journal proposes a broad spectrum of issues that seek to help in the comprehension of the issue in discussion. These issues are connected to and aimed at increasing spirituality and promoting Christianity as a religion.

2. Context: Contribution to the Management of Religion and Spirituality to the Society

The management on religion and spirituality specifically addresses issues associated with the science of interconnectedness, spirit at work, and inner leadership that help providing education for conscious awareness. Management of religion through the help of religious leaders and church-based organizations can make a significant impact in the world. Religion and spirituality based on faith has always permeated the globe. Through managing them, they play an integral role in providing an ethical and moral compass for many individuals. Beyond the religious practices of a person depending on the individual's adherence to the doctrines of their denomination or church, spirituality has moved into the public sphere thus impacting on the various aspects of social and economic life. Religious people and their leaders are increasingly becoming vital partners in firms, organizations, and corporations that tackle various sets of challenges across the world. Koenig (2012) explains that this signifies the sign that religious and spiritual leaders tasked with managing these aspects including the incorporation of communities have been involved in bringing about social change.

According to Vitorino et al. (2018), there are ways in which the management of religion and spirituality via the churches and Church-based organizations has positively impacted the society since religious belief holds a critical place in public life including renewing the collective comprehension about religion in the contemporary society. Koenig (2012) adds that religion, faith, and spirituality continue to be widespread thought they cannot necessarily be paired with a commitment particularly towards an organized form of religion. Through leaders, managers, and executives, they can help in illuminating areas through which management of religion and spirituality can make the difference not only through influencing stakeholders and shaping mindset but also mobilizing communities. This article therefore targets to identify potential challenges in the management of the 21st Century Church and how they can be mitigated to ensure that the church achieves its global mission.

2.1. Issues Missing in the Management of the 21st Century Church

The declining state of membership in churches more so in America and Europe is increasingly becoming serious. Also, the alarming rate at which denominational churches are dying should be a concern. It calls for the need to figure out what is causing such problems and issues that are missing in the 21st Century

Church and see if the situation can be corrected. The primary issue of concern oscillates around factors leading to the decline in membership, as well as the closing of several churches in the west. Could it be something that the church is doing or engaged in or not doing that is resulting in the phenomenon described above? Is it an issue in the society that individuals are feeling that the church is irrelevant or outdated to them or is it that something that was previously considered vital is missing? Such occurring serious trends should never be ignored. It calls for the church to reexamine itself and figure out that which should be done to fix the problem. Continuing to ignore these glaring signs could result in the death of the church in the future.

The focus of churches today including those that attend them has been lost with regards to the mission of the church including the desire for carrying out the mission. Churches are increasingly becoming inwardly focused institutions or organizations obsessed with themselves. This self-obsession is an attempt towards merging the dream for prosperity, as well as easy living with Christianity rather than reaching out to marginalized and neglected individuals in communities. There are big comfortable buildings for individuals to worship in, safe Christian places to live in, Christian schools for children of followers to attend, and more has also been done that isolate people from the world than they have done to live and dwell in the world. A lot is being done to ensure sinners are out of the church than they get invited and lead to Jesus. Consequently, it has resulted in the rest of the society not having an absolute trust in the church. They feel and perceive that the church has nothing for them. Quite a significant number of Christians view the church today as a social club and grouping those only cares for its members and does little to those who are not. It has made the church to be seen and perceived more as a private social club instead of a church.

The goal of this project entails helping the church and Christians realize what is missing in the 21st century Church besides helping to rediscover its purpose or mission on the earth. There is the need for the church to move away from its inward focus about itself and look to individuals outside that need or require help. According to Griffith (2015), the church has rediscovered that this is the area that it needs to focus on. However, such a task can be quite complex since the church is so steeped on rituals and traditions. The gauge of spirituality is weighed on the frequency with which one goes to Church including their outward appearance. It is a transition process that must commence with Church leaders who should be firm and admit that the Church is increasingly losing its focus since a lot is missing in the contemporary Church. Rediscovering the teachings of the Bible concerning the mission and responsibility specifically of Christians would be considered vital.

2.2. The Church from 16th to 20th Century

There was a tremendous transformation of Christianity from the 16th to the 20th century. Bäckström (2011) explains that established Christianity has ended in

the old sense, leading to widespread and rapid expansion in the history of the Church and Christianity. The evangelization of Africa, Asia, and Australia and the Christianization of Americas provided the geographic substance to Christian title or topic known as ecumenical. It is vital to understand that growth in numbers and areas should never be considered to be equivalent to change with regard to influence. Christianity was seen to have retreated on several fronts regardless of its continued growth in the modern period, and it lost much of its authority and prestige intellectually and politically. In the contemporary history of the West between the 16th and 18th centuries, the Church took part in much political expansion and cultural movements.

Missionaries would follow those that explored the globe. The Roman Catholic and Protestants' leadership were prominent in letters and science, and politics. In as much as rationalism associated with the Enlightenment led to the alienation of individuals from faith in Christianity, particularly among the intellectuals between the 17th and 18th centuries, the alienated individuals would always keep their loyalty and faith to the figure of Jesus including the Bible teachings even in cases where they did not adhere to the doctrines and life of Christians. They would cite and enumerate theological conflicts of both the Reformation and the political battles that resulted after the revelation of evidence of the problems of religious intolerance that embodied Enlightenment representatives to gradually introduce toleration, disestablishment, and liberty in religion into many countries of the West. Christian individuals and groups would join such movements as they advocated for religious freedom from concern about the free decision concerning personal faith rather than indifference to dogmatic truth. During the centuries illuminated above, Christians' State of life and faith reflected and resisted the Spirit.

Despite the Reformation of the Protestants absorbing and incorporating some of the reform energy within Catholicism, there was a serious revision on the morals and theology in the counter-reformation of the Roman Catholic. As a way of demonstrating lessons learned from history concerning countering Reformation, including avoiding earlier mistakes, the papacy fought off the attempts by many nations to establish national Catholic Churches. On the other hand, Protestants would discover that separating from Rome never inoculated them against the issues that it had denounced from the Roman Catholic.

According to [Hirsch et al. \(2012\)](#), the democratic revolutions that characterized the 18th, 19th, and 20th century inclusive of the Spirit of Enlightenment, played an integral role in aiding the process of undermining Christianity. Also, the initial discoveries of science led to clashes of old and cherished notions that different leaders of organized Christianity supported passionately. The age of revolutions regarding political, intellectual, economic, and technological has always been considered that part of crisis for the Church and Christianity. Moreover, the criticisms that emanated from modern scholarships that would frequently attack traditional ideas from Christianity also played a vital role in the production of editions of documents associated with Christian faith. Notably,

this is within the context of the Bible and the writings of the reformers that resulted in unprecedented interests for many scholars and groups on the history of the Church. As for the 19th century, it is considered the great century characterized by the history of missions of Christians. The sheer force of attacks of the Roman Catholics and Protestants upon Christianity helped the critics in arousing new apologists for the faith who would creatively interpret Christianity regarding its relationship with science and philosophies associated with the modern period (Koenig, 2012).

3. Christianity and Church in the 21st Century

The Church has had to tackle challenges emanating several technological advancements to function in the current age of technology. However, not all of them have the capabilities of advancing rapidly as others. Bäckström (2011) agrees that the Church has become a different place than it was decades ago. For instance, worship services have changed since the onset of the advancement of technology. Several traditional elements have been changed courtesy of technology. Also, worship has been significantly enhanced by technology to a certain degree. Styles of worship have been transitioning from time to time, and Christians have gone from using hymn books and singing songs to having lyrics of songs on screens and walls while worshipping. Griffith (2015) warns that changing times is a good thing, but praise should be given where it is considered. Worshipers must continue having the conviction that God is praised and not the technological advancements such as computers. Technology should only serve the role of increasing more excellent organization, making communication expansive and services quicker. Hylton (2011) notes that video industries and televisions have caused people to be tied to a little box. As a result, in as much using services such as that of the internet in the Church services and activities, the main concern should encompass ensuring that there is the creation of relationships among people.

McCracken (2021) reiterates that technology offers the checklist concerning where the Church should be but they have to remain watchful of its negative consequences. They lead to additional challenges of the 20th century Church to the cause of Christianity with regards to issues such as totalitarianism, indifferences of religions, and resurgent of world religions. It also led to the demand for reconsidering the relationship between the missionary programs, the Church, and the State. Also, the 20th century was also characterized by the renewed efforts towards healing schisms but within Christendom. Anglicanism and Protestantism commenced the ecumenical movement which would eventual include some of the Orthodox churches (Eastern) including the sympathetic attention to the Roman Catholic too.

3.1. Total Quality Management (TQM) Theory

According to Evans (2002) total quality management is a management approach

that emphasizes improving the quality of services and products across all management levels with the goal of achieving customer satisfaction. Implementing this approach requires the involvement of the organizational culture and associated processes for long-term success rather than short-term financial gains. The concept was developed in the late 20th century (between the 1970s and the 1980s) following Japan's increasing capacity to cost-effectively produce high-quality goods in comparison to the established developed countries in the period (Dahlggaard et al., 1997). Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States experienced significant losses and started imported most of their products. In response, the US introspected on their quality control activities, where they fell short, and how to improve on them for optimum results. This foundation ultimately set the basis for the development of total quality management as a quality control approach.

Total quality management is primarily centered on customer satisfaction with an emphasis on progressive improvement within the organization. It encompasses the integration of communication, strategy, and data into the organizational structure and culture (Abbas, 2020). Ultimately, the customer has a significant influence on the level of quality. Consumers determine if the company's efforts are satisfactory or if there is need for further improvements in terms of employee training and organizational processes. Another important aspect is employee involvement. For an organization, it is crucial that employees are united by common goals to enhance employee commitment and motivation (Dahlggaard-Park et al., 2018). Employee commitment is further enhanced by establishing a positive work environment where employees are empowered enough to take on different responsibilities and are rewarded for their efforts accordingly. The vision is to establish a high-performance work system whereby employee improvement is encouraged and integrated into daily operations.

TQM also centers on process thinking. In this context, Dahlggaard-Park et al. (2018) define process as a sequence of activities that comprises the transformation of supplier inputs into products for customer consumption. To ensure success, the concepts and steps involved should be outlined and a monitoring and evaluations strategy incorporated to identify and address potential challenges. The TQM theory also emphasizes an integrated system whereby the horizontal processes interconnect the various departments and specialties within the organization. These horizontal processes facilitate the establishment of the organizational structure and ultimately allow for the comprehension of the organizational vision and mission. They are also integral in developing guiding principles that oversee the communication and monitoring of business performance.

TQM essentially refocuses an organization's goals to emphasize customer satisfaction above everything else. With the necessary resources, commitment, and management support, an organization is bound to succeed by focusing on TQM. Customers in the Church setting are essentially its members or parishioners. For their satisfaction, it is important to maintain high-quality services consistently

for their spiritual nourishment. A major challenge, however, is that the quality of preaching and the message attached are not to the standards that members would appreciate. The lack of consistency in the quality of Church services due to ill-preparedness also makes it difficult for members to commit to attending weekly services.

Additionally, some preachers may not have the right qualifications or spiritual knowledge to cater to the congregation's needs. To this extent, TQM provides a framework within which the preacher understands the religious and spiritual needs of the congregation and aims to achieve them accordingly. Many people attend Church services to get closer to God, receive Biblical and spiritual guidance, nourish their souls, and receive important life lessons. Others visit as a customary activity or for political and social reasons. Understanding these reasons would help to determine how to improve quality and ensure weekly consistency. Continuous improvement would involve communicating with the congregation after every service to determine how they perceived the service and aspects that could be improved upon. Conducting surveys could also help to identify other internal or external aspects that might be affecting Church attendance.

3.2. Challenges that the 21st Century Church Faces

There are several challenges that the 21st Century Church faces. They include Biblical literacy, presence, disembodied tendencies, secularization, compartmentalization, boredom, temptation and the need to reinvent the wheel, consumer Christians, complexity, temptation to homogeneity, the authenticity with regards to the fallacy of brokenness, the idol of autonomy, aversion of commitment, the struggle for the Church to balance in the immoderate age, social media, and the need for racial and ethnic reconciliation. Others include sexuality and gender, religious freedom, anti-intellectualism, hyper-intellectualism, distrust particularly of the authority, and entanglement of allegiances.

Pillay (2017) considers Biblical literacy as a major problem in the developed nations in Europe and America. It impacts on all the challenges illuminated above thus making them more challenging. It emanates from the fact that individuals in and those not in churches may not consider the importance of the Bible. Illiteracy of the Bible scriptures leads to poor conception about teachings of the Church, as well as their interpretations.

Concerning presence, Christians are expected to be individuals of presence and also connected to God including one another not only by inhabiting but also unifying the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the 21st century society has made their lives busy and also distract them most often thus pulling Christians away from the presence. It calls for the Church to rearrange its priorities with regards to its vocation as presenters of the presence of God in the universe. Doing so should encompass liturgies and cultivating habits that help in the creation of contours and space that enables presence to be known and felt. As for the

disembodied tendencies, it is imperative to know that the trajectory associated with technology has departed from incarnational presence, as well as towards disembodied experience.

People are increasingly living their lives through depending on apps, streams, screens, and phones among others. Their relationships have become digital. Such phenomena have exacerbated Gnostic tendencies that exist including deemphasizes associated with crucial physicality of the Church in the material and not the theoretical sense. As a result, churches are required to incorporate techniques of encouraging practice of the Lord's Supper, physical gathering, and having meals together in their neighborhoods. Other strategies should entail shaking hands, bodily movement in worship, and hugging or embracing each other physically. It should encompass re-sensitizing individuals to fleshy and physical reality about the Church in the world.

On compartmentalization, it stems from the fact that people live their lives via boxes and windows besides chatting with many individuals simultaneously, posting a fragment of their lives, reading the Bible, and consuming visual media in another window. These factors make it quite easier for the lives of people to be fractured into experiences characterized by disconnected departments. These processes often have the potential of being detrimental to the spiritual formation process of individuals. Integrity is something considered wholeness and all parts of lives of God's creation are integrated and should reflect the Lordship of Christ. As a result, the Church is required to put more efforts to conform and cultivate the above.

With regards to boredom, [Comiskey \(2013\)](#) stresses that people are in an anti-culture where everything is hurried and fast-paced. People have short attention span and get bored easily which eventually has become a major problem for the Church. The values of tradition, routine, and stability characterized by the Church are increasingly becoming distasteful. Consequently, churches are being tempted to incorporate gimmicks and trendiness as a way of conforming and solving such challenges. However, this appears to be ill-advised. The Church in this century finds it relatively tricky to lead individuals to awe, worship, and wonder without having to water down things or even reinvent the wheel constantly.

Concerning the temptation for the wheel to be reinvented, it is the boredom challenge that has caused this problem. It has become an endemic problem to most churches across the world and there are several books that have offered a new prescription and paradigm for revived Church. There are those that have been tempted to go to denominations deemed conservative such as Catholics as a way of avoiding such nauseous glut of the Church as the technique of surviving such rants. [Lehr \(2017\)](#) illuminates that there are scholars that opine those churches should become more trusting with regards to continuity instead of considering every culture change as the invitation towards the reinvention of the wheel.

The next challenge entails the complexity issue and it can be associated with the temptation of the Church to reinvent the wheel to complicate both the Church life and Christianity. Pillay (2017) argues that this explains the existence of different definitive definitions concerning the gospel by different theologians and authors. It is an assertion that can be seen in different staff and programs that have turned the Church into complex corporations that are bureaucratic. Notably, there is cumbersomeness in complexity as it often impairs mission more so in the era characterized by the faithful churches being exiled in the mainstream culture. It calls for churches to be nimbler and leaner. The beauty of simplicity should be rediscovered with the focus being on historic sacraments and core practices of the Church. Making the Church more complex may make in more countercultural.

On the issue on consumer Christians, capitalism has resulted in the ambiguity of consumerism infiltrating the Church. It is quite common for people to shop from one Church to the other and also question sermons delivered. Individuals are going to Church gatherings that not only fit them but also those that match their list of preferences just as one would purchase an item from a shop. It is responsibility of the Church to challenge this instead of catering to such a growing mentality. A Church should be a place where people gather together for reasons beyond them. It should be an invitation of joining Christ with regards to what he is doing to the globe besides helping in affirming self-actualization of individuals.

As for the temptation for homogeneity, Lehr (2017) posits that the consumerism of Christianity in the contemporary society has led to churches being more homogenous compared to decades ago. Individual go to churches where they deem fit for them as they are likely to be surrounded with those that talk, look, and worship like them. However, this has never been ideal biblically. The power of the Bible through the scriptures of the gospel advocate for the unification of the diverse groups of individuals to help in breaking down the barriers of hostilities and natural divides such as class, race, ethnicity, music preference, gender, and culture among others.

One the fallacy of brokenness being authentic, Bäckström (2011) reiterates that it is one of the biggest challenges associated with the 21st century Church. The unbelief on change coupled with the weak theology of sanctification provides the nutrients to it. It is a problem that leads to claims of immutability and essentialism. Today, a significant number of Christians are somehow forced by sin than they are with holiness which is concern that the Church should address.

One the idol of autonomy, Comiskey (2013) explains that the contemporary culture is characterized by being commitment averse. Millennials fear mission out on the happening of the society as they preferring having open options instead of committing to things and foreclosing other possibilities. They are the generation that have made the RSVP based planning of a party an endeavor that is futile. It is a generation that opts to own homes at a rate that is relatively low

compared to the previous ones. They are also less likely to have an affiliation with a particular religion in comparison to the previous generation and they also get married later in life and at a lower rate than the generations before them. Such happenings have lessened and weakened commitment to the local Church and this make true long obedience and discipleship formation quite challenging. Churches may be relevant against such a backdrop through reinforcing unencumbered individualism but through challenging individuals to connect and also commit to Christ.

In the immoderate age, there has been the struggle for balance. The Church is likely to continue to struggle in resisting oversimplifying or resolving critical tensions and complex paradoxes related to truth and love, justification and sanctification, word and Spirit, and general and special revelation as the globe increasingly becomes more polarized besides being less capable of complexity and nuance. Churches have to lean to the paradoxes and complexities of such things besides making attempts to seek healthy balance as it can help in appealing to the Generation antsy.

On social media issue, it is vital to understand that it offers positive things. However, there are several things that concerning it that pose problems to the contemporary churches. Posturing is one of the major problems and it encompasses the per-formative obsession feeding hypocrisy and pride. [Lehr \(2017\)](#) adds that social media inclusive of texting have the potential of complicating pastoral situations, as well as making existing challenges worse. The allure of social media associated with celebrity and platform is increasingly becoming pervasive and this can destroy the Church more so when Church leaders are more interested in impressing the audience rather than tending with the congregants.

According to [Pillay \(2017\)](#), the need for racial reconciliation encompasses the understanding and the rationale that the Church should not be the haven for racism or any form of divide or anything that does not embrace diversity. Unfortunately, it has often let racial prejudice and wounds fester to go unchallenged or addressed. The 21st century Church should not be seen to be on the sidelines when it comes to issues associated with healing, work of justice and reconciliation as they have the role of leading the reconciliation efforts. Western nations are no longer the vibrant centers of world of Christianity. Similarly, the face of Christianity in the West has become more diverse. Churches that celebrate, leverage, embrace, and embody such realities in their societies are likely to thrive. But those that resist diversity and are geared to clinging to their ethnocentric privileges may falter.

On the challenges associated with gender and sexuality, it is a subject that entails many issues such as gender identity, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, pornography, and complementation and egalitarian gender roles among others. These issues have created fragmentation in churches, Christian organizations, and denominations. They also have the potential of driving the cultural alienation of the 21st century Church. [Lehr \(2017\)](#) asserts that challenges associated

with these issues are quite vast as they have major pastoral and theological implications. For instance, the conservative theological churches often seek to maintain a consistent biblical ethics on such issues.

With regards to religious freedom, the churches no longer have the freedom and leverage of carrying out their affairs as per the practices and traditional beliefs on issues related with gender and sexuality without the interference of the government. For instance, there are state laws in the US such as in Massachusetts that compels churches to allow individuals who are transgender to use facilities such as showers and bathrooms of their choices. It is a demonstration that the churches will have to disentangle from the government to their level best or figure out ways of dealing with legislative and legal challenges.

Anti-intellectualism has also been enumerated above as one of the challenges of the 21st century Church. Bäckström (2011) asserts that few churches encourage intellectual curiosity, healthy questioning and vibrant debate. Most churches provide unsatisfying and simplistic answers to questions of such magnitude and when they do so, they often foreclose an entire arena does not encourage the worshipping of God and cultivating holy wonder. Hyper-intellectualism is the other issue and it encompasses the rigorous rational defenses and theological training for faith. If the presentation of Christianity should be entirely cerebral then apparently there is something can be deemed missing. It calls for the contemporary Church to embrace mystery and also embody Christianity elements and the existence of God instead of just the conception of Him. The Church life and means of worship are likely to be more predictable, messy, and emotional than the preferences of the rationalists. However, it is likely to be more powerful and transformative.

Concerning the distrust of the authority, it is apparent that the young generation currently has a problem of distrust of authority. Consequently, it has made churches to be inherently problematic and challenging to them as they find it difficult to trust leaders besides struggling to submit fully to the authority of Jesus Christ including the authority of the scripture. However, the Church has the obligation of leaning into the transcendent authority of Christ even though it may be countercultural.

Lastly, on the challenge of entanglement of allegiances, Lehr (2017) explains that the Church has struggled since its inception. There are more questions than answers concerning the sense in which the allegiance to nation, empire, or some other secular community should interact with the allegiance to the Church and Christ. Today, the world has been witnessing the messy entanglement of Christians and politics to the extent that several quarters have to question such tendencies and their place on biblical values. Also, focus on identity politics have made this relatively challenging since Church members consider their Christian identity as secondary to other identities such as political affiliation, race, gender, and nationality among others. As a result, churches may in future find it difficult to acknowledge and also respect multifarious identities while challenging indi-

viduals to prioritize and consider them in the right way.

Christians would leverage gospel being easier to share to the communities that do not believe. However, this is not always the case and the situation has been made more difficult by the rising contemporary issues. The challenges that the Church is facing are threatening to destruct the Christian faith. [Bäckström \(2011\)](#) highlights that compromising with standards labeled by the world or getting inclined to the path of the world is a significant challenge for the Church. It appears that the society has influenced the Church more. Most people profess to be Christians but the spiritual situation of the society speaks of something different. The attempts of the Church to reach out to individuals have not resulted in much success in improving the spiritual condition in the community or society. A lot of strides can be made by the Church focusing on the spiritual condition of the society. The Church is bound to fail if it continues focusing only on the material aspects of the society.

What is lacking in the Church today is the biblical illiteracy and this has been compounded by the widespread deficiency particularly with regards to the basic elements of Christian character, morality and ethics. The moral dysfunctions among individuals that profess to be Christians outweigh the secular society. Substance abuse, greed, alcoholism, domestic violence, promiscuity, and sexual immorality are commonly being witnessed among the Church-going individuals.

There is an apparent silence in the pulpits and other Christian platforms concerning immoral behavior and sinful issues. It makes the Church to be seen to resonate with the secular world. [Lehr \(2017\)](#) illuminates that moral ethics and homosexuality issues are increasingly becoming a major divide in the Church and among Christians. The topic on marriage is also a much-debated issue recently. There are attempts to redefine marriage more so by the LGBT community and the Church is encountering pressure from many quarters to compromise on its position and teachings about the subject. For example, the human rights advocates have been making attempts to push the Church and convince them to change their theological stand and values concerning marriage. However, the Church has been asserting that it may not change its stand as it considers the change to be unnatural. There are cases where religious leaders have been expected to officiate and preside over such events and ceremonies. These leaders are against it and are citing that doing so is against the natural design of sexuality by God. But the human rights groups are adamant that it should be a matter of choice and right for individuals. Interestingly, there are theologians that have no issue with this unnatural behavior and have also been trying to employ the use of scientific research to offer justification for homosexuality. These inconsistencies and perception of different churches, denominations, and leaders concerning the topic can be detrimental to the image of the Church to the society. [McCracken \(2021\)](#) adds that this is not only the case where the issue of redefinition of marriage is surfacing. The permissibility of same sex marriage is likely to lead to issues such as polyamory and polygamy being acceptable in the society. These is-

sues leave more questions than answers about if the Church should stand against principles and principalities that are unchristian and not individuals.

Gender roles and equality is also the other challenge that can be associated to the issue discussed above. The representation of men and women is measurably equal. It should not be construed that gender equality implies men and women to be the same. However, it should be taken in the context of equal value and treatment. The Bible opining that woman should be submissive is often perceived to be gender biased. Similarly, its teachings are also often seen as based on a patriarchal culture. However, it is vital to illuminate that the Bible does not encourage gender inequality or even oppression. Instead, it promotes equality before God. Promoting the Biblical truth on gender issues has been a thorn in the flesh for the Church and Christians and this has been worsened by the pre-supposition of the feminists.

The other issue that the Church has to grapple with is the issue of poverty. Poverty, in this context, entails lack of basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, and lack of support in one's daily living. Notably, the definition of poverty is society specific. Poverty is always an obstacle to the Church as it seeks to reach out and convince individuals to Christianity. But, solving the poverty problem will always be a problem across the globe. Lastly, secularization is another issue the church should curb because it focuses on religious discerning, practices and institutions lose social significance.

3.3. Re-Designing the 21st Century Church

There has been a decline in Church participating more so in the western nations such as US. Several Churches have closed and this trend has been increasing at an unprecedented percentage among the young individuals who leverage spending time elsewhere. Therefore, re-designing the Church would be prudent in addressing some of the factors that are leading to the decreasing Church participation. According to [Comiskey \(2012\)](#), the focus of the model of the 20th century entailed building churches physically in terms of structure. However, the future of the Church should encompass first building the community. The health of the Church has always depended on focusing its love and energy outwards toward the society or community. Rather than the creation of large buildings, the focus should involve creating a vibrant Church community since the building are already there that help in catering for the needs of the whole community, and their designs are not only comfortable but also welcoming to make individuals hang out in them. The principles for building churches that are people driven should include being community first, ensuring that partnership matter, having incremental design, and creating the sense of creativity and adventure. On community being the priority, it is a principle that ensures that the needs of the community are addressed before considering those of the congregants and other things. It is an approach that can encourage people to participate in Church activities.

The rapid changes in Christianity have been accelerated by the century where

communications, commerce and travel have been connected worldwide in many unprecedented ways. Comprehending these changes in faith including the impact the global connectedness may have on the Church should be considered important. The relative number of Christians has not been dramatically eroded by these encompassing trends. [Bäckström \(2011\)](#) illuminates that in the last century, the number of Christian in the globe were about 35%. The number stands at about 32% today. However, the global distribution of Christian has changed with the shift moving from the north to the south hemisphere and from West to east. Secularization of Europe has contributed significantly to this development.

According to [McCracken \(2021\)](#), bingo nights and world wars are some of the reasons that have been cited for the decline off Christianity in Europe. The minds of many nations in Europe got scarred by the last two world wars where individuals would question were God was while they were happening. There are nations in this continent where the governments have taken the roles that the churches would engage in before. Similarly, the government providing services that the Church carried out have made the latter lose its role in the society. Interestingly, there is an explosion of Christianity in Africa. [Tidsworth \(2015\)](#) allude that associating Christianity with economic prosperity and democracy is one of the reasons for the explosion. Individuals are gravitation towards it as the means for upward mobility. The situation is also similar in Latin America.

The rise of pluralism is the other trend that should be taken into account. Ignoring the presence of other religion would be impossible especially when thinking concerning the global Church. The presence of other religion such as Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists among others leaves more questions about how Christianity can respond to the shifting landscapes about global religion. [Comiskey \(2012\)](#) illuminates some of the responses to include a changing center of gravity, theology, community, and issues of faith. On changing the center of gravity, [West \(2015\)](#) explains that the numerical shift of the geographical distribution of Christianity has the potential of significantly altering its character. For instance, for the Christians that belong to the global communion, the presence of Africans is likely to increase and become more evident. It is a demonstration that the churches will have to consider the rising force from the Southern Hemisphere. Concerning theology, the Church will be compelled to learn to respect the varied experiences that are shaping theological across the globe. However, it is likely to impact on the theological reflection of people. For example, there are tensions in China about official Church and house churches while in Africa, Christians are struggling to comprehend the relationship between indigenous religion and spirituality. There spirituality is often a blend of Christian and native expressions.

As for community, [West \(2015\)](#) asserts that the digital world has become a vital innovation as it has altered the thinking of the structure of a community. There are those that still have the sense of spirituality but in real sense have be-

come allergic to institutions that are of religious orientation. There is an emerging generation that prefers customized cyber communities instead of flesh and blood ones. [McCracken \(2021\)](#) adds that there is reason why the current generation is becoming warily about the forms of Christianity. There is the distrust of such institutions, several scandals of institutional churches, and churches failing to proclaim the gospel authentically and clearly to individuals are some of the factors highlighted. Young people also have a different perception concerning community and religion as they consider the latter as a matter of optional programming. They leverage creating their own networks instead of joining those that incorporate them. As a result, the Church should build communities through the use of digital technology and communications to address this glaring problem.

[McCracken \(2021\)](#) illuminates that the credibility of the Church is at risk. There are places where religion (Church) has been used as the pretext for bad things such as violence. It is an issue that continues to threaten an increase in percentage to those that are not affiliated to any Christian denomination. It calls for Christian to find ways of being loyal to their practices and beliefs besides being tolerant of others.

[Tidsworth \(2015\)](#) opines that the Church as a role challenging the changes that are occurring in the society. The values in the Bible are vital for Christians as they should also be taken into account and comprehended by the entire or wide society. Also, the views of the Christians can play an integral role in offering a healthy and challenging option and alternative to the secular norms that are increasingly becoming visible in different platforms such as social media, radio, and TV. Notably, the Bible communicates issues associated with morals. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Church to continue with this tradition. Individuals need guidance and this makes the Church to have the unique role of providing perspectives that are also unique on all aspects of life.

But there are those that argue that the Church should not engage on general issues that are occurring in the society. They leverage the Church focusing only on religious and spiritual matters and leaving other things to relevant bodies, agencies, and governments. [Comiskey \(2012\)](#) adds that churches should have the goal of converting individuals to Christianity instead of engaging in secular issues. Also, there are a number of things that the Church should do to promote unity in a multicultural and diverse community. Religious teaches are encouraged to engage in teachings about the importance of caring, tolerating, and accepting individuals from different cultures, backgrounds, and religions.

3.4. Signs of a Healthy Church and What All Churches Should Strive to Accomplish

According to [Jones and Hoopla Digital \(2013\)](#), for a Church to be considered to be on tract and healthy, it is required to glorify God. It is important for the Church to perceive itself including individuals in the society to consider it as an institution established for the purpose of glorifying God. Even though the Church

has the responsibility of using different ways in reaching out to people, their focus should be on God with regards to life and worship. Churches should aim at improving the reputation of God in the community not only among the believers but also the unbelievers. [Comiskey \(2012\)](#) explains that the stagnation of the Church has recently been associated with it losing its reputation in the society because they have rescinded in carrying out some of their roles in the society and losing public reputation has played a significant role. Discredit of ethics, lack of social service, lack of critical ability concerning social structure are some of the other reasons that have been highlighted for the stagnation of the Church. Therefore, regaining the social reputation would be a vital element for helping the Church to grow. [Tidsworth \(2015\)](#) concludes that there is a direct tie between the reputation of God and that of the Church.

Secondly, the Church should strive towards producing disciples. Producing them refers to the approach concerning the number of individuals it's not only brings but also keep. The next one should entail acceptance of new members into the Church. The growth of Christianity has always been pegged on the congregation loving to meet new individuals and loving visitors. The Church has the responsibility of serving all its members as it may help in attracting new members. [West \(2015\)](#) adds that exercise of spiritual gift is also a healthy sign of a Church. Christians can serve God through the use of spiritual gifts for growth.

4. The Teachings of the Church in the 21st Century

Since evangelism has become a way of promoting Christianity and Christian teachings, employing it effectively in the 21st Century Church can help in incorporating what the Church is missing. The first one encompasses the assertion that effective evangelism should always commence with a burden. Evangelism has not been effective in reaching out to different cultures because they have not managed to be in touch with individuals as they have been living their own Christian subculture. They seem not to care for individuals that do not adhere to their faith nor conform to their beliefs. The need to care is critical since nothing is likely to happen to make evangelism effective.

Secondly, effective evangelism requires the individuals to know and comprehend their audience. It is vital for them to know the people they are ministering to and it should encompass going right to where these individuals are and taking gospel to them. Having contact with people helps in making them feel they are valued and cared for and it can make them receptive about the evangelist exercise. It is a technique of building a bridge between believers and non-believers. When one learns and understands another person better, then the chances of the individual listening to the person can be quite high. Taking time to familiarize themselves with the audience and their beliefs can make Christians understand their culture which can be crucial in building a bridge between believers and unbelievers, as well.

The next issue involves Christians ensuring that their teachings are culturally

relevant. Christians immersing themselves in their own subcultures and languages that others do not comprehend would continue leading to the decline of Christianity in the globe. Doing so would encompass ensuring that the graphics of the Church are edge cutting, their music is fresh and original with the radio and TV productions are in tune with the cultures that they are speaking to. Their movies should also be well-crafted and carried out with artistic integrity without the message being shrouded. However, sensationalism should not be incorporated while employing these changes. The message should never be distorted. Tidsworth (2015) explains that the Church not conforming to the surrounding culture has resulted in some Christians being persecuted not for the sake of righteousness but for just being plainly weird. McCracken (2021) alerts that this assertion provides a reason for communicating the gospel well to the people and there is no need to make it complicated.

Village (2018) adds that evangelism and Christianity or Church practices and activities must be biblical or derive their tenets from the Bible but open with a cultural connection. The message built should be based on the Church, Christianity, and the work of God. The use of illustration is commended but its power should be in the word of God. The scriptures are provided through inspiration of God and it is not only profitable for doctrine but also for correction, reproof, and instruction concerning righteousness. According to Tidsworth (2015), effective evangelism and Christianity should entail focusing on Jesus, crucified, and risen. It helps in acting and serving as the reference to the Church in its true intention to individuals or targeted audience. Besides, it should also present gospel in its entirety and leave to results in God's hand.

4.1. Lessons from the Early Church

The early Church differs significantly from the contemporary Church. The early Church was characterized by strong traditions, the power of God, giving generously, unspeakable joy, and reaching out to the lost. Concerning strong traditions, the Church was considered to have been born in the power of the Spirit on the Pentecost Day which the early Church would strive to keep its shape through devoting itself to its activities and practices. West (2015) explains that the early Church devoted itself to the teachings of the apostles and fellowship. They devotedly committed themselves to God's word with fellowship being high on their agenda. Prayer was integral to the mix. On the power of God, it encompasses the fact that many individuals would be filled with awe concerning the many signs, as well as wonders that the apostles performed. The birth of the early Church was in the power of the Spirit which was a vital part of the ongoing experience. It is the power that allowed the Church to impact and influence individuals at a deep level.

With regards to giving generously, it is considered as the other crucial feature of the early Church. It encompassed all believers being together and having everything in common. Believers would sell property including possessions to give

to people who were in need. It is part of generosity that derived its impetus from the depth of commitment and fellowship that existed particularly among the early Christians. West (2015) illuminates that these assertions offer fascinating insight and depth about early Church. It was characterized by the strong sense of community as the believers were not only together but also had a lot of things in common. Notably, the depth of community during the period of early Church never extended to living communally. Giving generously is a kind of sacrifice that features prominently throughout Act, as well as epistles.

On unspeakable joy, Weigel (2014) reiterates that the early Church was joyful not only in fellowship but also in worship. They would meet in temple courts and break bread in these settings besides eating together with sincere hearts while praising God and enjoying favor of individuals. The other feature of the early Church that the 21st Century Church should incorporate is reaching out to the lost (Amankwa & Awuku-Gyampoh, 2022). Early Church has always been considered an evangelical Church. Reaching out to both the believers and non-believers explains the growth that the Church witnessed at the time.

4.2. Summary

While Christians are reflecting on the intention of God towards the world, they are usually tempted to be darkly pessimistic and sometimes naively optimistic. There are those that get inspired by the utopian vision that suggests that the kingdom of God can be built on earth in all its fullness. But most churches and their followers do not subscribe to such views as they derive their information from the scripture which provides them with the reality, as well as pervasiveness of societal and personal sin. The pessimism of other people emanates from the fact that they are faced with the reality of increasing misery and poverty, exploitation by existing powers, rampant oppression, spiraling violence, and the threat of nuclear warfare.

Similarly, there are also concerns that the earth will not have the potential of sustaining the ever-increasing population for long since its resources are being massively squandered. Consequently, they are trying to incorporate ways of fixing the globe in an exclusive manner concerning the return of Jesus to the extent of their involvement getting paralyzed. However, it is not prudent to disregard the extensive contribution that the successive Christians have made including those that hold the eschatology view through many decades to educational and medical work in many nations up to today. It is also imperative to add that even though there are those that believe that the role of the Church should primarily entail spreading the gospel, not engaging in social, economic, and political issues and other actions equates to their non-involvement in providing tacit support to the order that already exists. It is an assertion that reiterates that there is no room for escaping. The Church has to either challenge the evil structures or make the decision in supporting them. Lastly, there are several occasions documented historically as illuminated earlier concerning the Church where Chris-

tians have encountered oppression and persecution which resulted in these individuals disengaging from society thus providing impetus to the status quo. But Christians should continue challenging evil in society and transform it through their selfless love, lifestyle, inner peace, quiet joy, and patient suffering.

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