

An Investigation of the Pneumatological Praxes of Montanism with Lessons for the Contemporary African Church

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Abstract

Some Pentecostal and African Indigenous Churches lay claim to the Holy Spirit's inspiration and revelation for some practices that are inimical to biblical doctrine. Similarly, Montanism, an early Christian movement of the late second century, emphasized the Holy Spirit's work through the manifestation of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. However, it was considered heretical because of its outrageous pneumatological praxes. A study of the Montanism is historically valuable to learn lessons for sustaining the health of churches in Africa. This is the aim of this study. The study adopted the historical analysis method, generating information from personal observation and a qualitative survey of existing literature. Although Montanism emphasized the significance of holiness in a believer's life some doctrinal positions were

confusing to the early church. Valuable lessons for the contemporary African church are, proactively dealing with heresies, promoting spiritual discipline towards utilizing members' spiritual gifts, emphasizing women's ministry, pursuing doctrinal purity, attending to discipline and discipleship, and promoting sound theological education. The result of the findings is significant because it creates historical consciousness for churches in Africa not to repeat past mistakes. The article proceeds through the following steps: It first surveys abuses among contemporary prophets and pastors. Next, it provides an introduction to Pneumatology. After that comes a historical overview of the Montanism movement. Lastly, it draws lessons for the modern African Church.

Keywords

contemporary African church, Holy Spirit, Montanism, pneumatological praxes

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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers, who would dwell with believers forever (John 14:16). Thus, since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has played an essential role in the life of a believer, especially in terms of Christian living. From the early twentieth century, when there was a resurgence of the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal and African Indigenous Churches, the understanding of the activity of the Holy Spirit has taken on various forms. Whereas revival movements, with an emphasis on the workings of the Holy Spirit, have been beneficial to churches worldwide, in some quarters, the ministrations of the Holy Spirit have been abused. The openness of believers to the Holy Spirit has been abused by some who claim to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, some Pentecostal churches hold that baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second blessing and that the evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. Hence, if someone claims to be a Christian and cannot speak in tongues, they are yet to receive the Holy Spirit's baptism.

Similarly, in the late second century, there was a Christian movement called Montanism. Montanism was associated with the move of the Holy Spirit. The movement emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit through the manifestation of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. The proponents of the movement believed that true believers must demonstrate spiritual gifts. The movement was significant in the history of the Church but could not stand the test of time because it was banned, and its proponents were excommunicated from the Church. It was banned because it was considered heretical. This study investigates the pneumatological praxes of Montanism and draws lessons for the contemporary African Church.

The study adopted the historical analysis method, generating information from personal observation and a qualitative survey of existing literature. The historical research method is “is an attempt to understand a phenomenon by determining its processes of growth and dynamics of internal change.... It deals with determination, evaluation and explanation of past events essentially for the gaining of a better and clearer understanding of the present and making a more reliable prediction of the future” (Ogundare 2013, 47). Hence, both primary and secondary sources are used for data collection. It involves analysis because it is not a mere narration of events but engages and evaluates information for data collection.

The study first gives a general view of abuses among contemporary prophets and pastors by surveying prevalent abuses among them, which include emotional manipulation, financial exploitation, and unconventional prophecies. Second, the study provides a basic idea of what Pneumatology involves by exploring it from the perspective of the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Spirit is divine and plays a significant role in the lives of believers. Third, the article also discusses a historical overview of the Montanism movement. It traces the movement's emergence to Montanus. The women who later joined him (Priscilla and Maxmilla) played vital roles in the movement's growth. Lastly, the article draws lessons for the contemporary African Church. These lessons are, proactively dealing with heresies, promoting spiritual discipline towards utilizing members' spiritual gifts, emphasizing women's ministry, pursuing doctrinal purity, attending to discipline and discipleship, and promoting sound theological education.

2. Survey of Abuses Among Contemporary Prophets and Pastors

The Bible indicates that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are responsible for equipping Christians (Eph 4:11–16). They are to help spiritually develop believers so that they can perform works of service and become mature in Christ. It is also essential for them to guide believers spiritually. Garry (1994, 204) asserts that a pastor is a soul winner who knows that a soul is precious. Onwuka (2002, 4), who agrees with Garry, argues that the pastor is an angel of the church set apart to bring the message of hope and salvation to men. In the opinion of Anderson (1981, 20), a pastor or prophet is a spiritual physician who knows how to diagnose men's cases and rightly apply the medication of the Word of God to their spiritual needs. Unfortunately, some contemporary prophets and pastors are abusing their power. This survey highlights prevalent abuses among contemporary prophets and pastors in Africa by focusing on a few cases in Nigeria and South Africa.

One of the ways contemporary prophets or pastors abuse their offices is by creating fear in the minds of their parishioners. It can be called psychological manipulation. A study carried out by Kgatele and Thinane (2023, 10) affirms that “most pastors or self-appointed spiritual leaders claim authority over their members to first create fear and unrest that can overwhelm the community's sense of security, and second, to enable them to exercise control over their congregants, who in turn will rely on their individualized spiritual abilities.”

Unconventional prophecies are another noticeable abuse, especially among New Prophetic churches in Africa. Unconventional prophecy means the mode is characteristically different from that of the biblical mode of prophecy. Kgatele and Thinane (2023, 7) note, “In making their prophecies

different from biblical and other prophecies, they reveal people's details such as telephone numbers, identity numbers, [and] physical addresses.”

Financial exploitation is another area of abuse. It is demonstrated through coercive fundraising, sometimes tagged as seed sowing, covenant seed, and faith sowing. Corroborating this position, Nirintsoa (2021, 45–46) observes that Neo-Pentecostals “tell people that for them to be blessed, they have to bring money, which they call ‘seed’ to the church. The bigger the seed they bring, the bigger the blessings they will receive.” This is further illustrated by the case of Pastor Noah Abraham, who claimed that God had told him to charge his members ₦310,000 for tickets to heaven (Jannamike and Ojomoyela 2022). Pastor Noah Abraham started his work in Kaduna and then relocated to Araromi-Ugbesi in Omuo-Oke, Ekiti East Local Government Area in Ekiti State. He believes that God's kingdom will be established there (Jannamike and Ojomoyela 2022).

Financial exploitation is also demonstrated through the commercialization of the gospel as well as the misappropriation of church funds for personal use. In some extreme cases, spiritual products are sold, which is justified by claiming it is the Holy Spirit's leading. Recently in Nigeria, Prophet Jeremiah of Christ Mercyland Deliverance Ministry was in the news for selling spiritual products such as miracle soap and water (Njoku 2024).

Various practices are found that are inimical to biblical teachings. Such inimical practices are not only spiritually harmful, but also physically. For example, in Limpopo, South Africa, Prophet Lethebo Rabalago from Mount Zion General Assembly, was reported to have sprayed his congregants with an insect repellent as a medium for healing people from cancer, HIV, and any other illnesses. In order to stop this menace against human health, the Limpopo Department of Health launched a court bid against the controversial pastor (Makana 2017). It was revealed during the court case

against the pastor that some of the congregants had suffered detrimental side effects like coughing for more than seven months (BBC 2018). Judge George Phatudi ruled that the pastor should stop spraying insect repellent on members of his congregation (Makana 2017).

Another South African preacher, Pastor Lesego Daniel from Rabboni Centre Ministries, caused controversy by instructing his followers to eat grass to feel more connected to God at his Ministry in Garankuwa, north Pretoria. He also used a live snake to minister to his congregation during a church service (Abimbola 2018). At another service, he served the church members millipedes and beer as holy communion, saying, “God has given man everything on earth as food and any food man sanctified or prays on can equally be the body and blood of Jesus Christ and could be taken as Lord’s Supper” (Nwachukwu 2019). One can safely conclude that these acts are not only contrary to biblical teachings but are also an assault on humanity and have devastating effects on the people.

Moreover, “Daily news on various media platforms reveals how some pastors sexually molest and assault their members. The pathetic thing about the scenario is that they violate their members sexually under the pretense of deliverance or spiritual cleansing in most cases” (Oguntade 2022, 55). Agazue, cited in Oguntade (2022, 55–56), observes that current methods of exorcism in Africa, especially in Nigeria, “include the ‘anointing’ of the private parts of those women whom they alleged are possessed by witchcraft, mermaid or marine spirits.” This is no doubt outrageous.

Some members of the public believe that miracles showcased in some contemporary churches in Africa are staged. For example, an investigation into the story of Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International church (AMI) raising one Elliot from the dead found that the pastor faked it. The reports claim that people were paid to fake medical miracles (Koslosky 2019). Solomon Ademiluka (2023, 5) cites a report of a video

clip that creates the impression that one of the miracle-working pastors performs a miracle on a woman. However, he (5) also notes another video clip circulating of the same woman claiming the same problem while another unidentified pastor prays for her.

Emmanuel Iwuagwu (2018, 69) affirmed that some pastors used information acquired to prophesy during prophetic hours. He asserts that with such information the pastor will prophesy and the person being prayed for will confirm it as true, then they will be prayed for and they will instantly testify of their healing or the end of their problem. A recent BBC Africa Eye report, cited in Johnson (2024), claimed that the Nigerian televangelist, T. B. Joshua, pretended to perform miracles at his Synagogue Church of All Nations. Solomon Ademiluka (2023, 6) succinctly argues that “the quest for miracles has become a social menace in that many have fallen victim to prophets and pastors in their search for miraculous deliverance from one problem or the other.” This author also agrees with the opinion of Iwuagwu (2018, 68), who opines that “the scenario created by this abuse of miracles has created both excitement and skepticism”. In other words, while some people keep patronizing the fake-miracle working pastors others doubt the authenticity of their miracles. Therefore, the problems that fake miracles generated motivated the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria to ban the broadcast of miracles on Nigerian government television stations on 30 April 2004. Henceforth, they could not have miracles aired on television because they were not verifiable (Oguntade 2022, 101). In his analysis, Oguntade (2022, 101–102) argues that “unverifiable miracles were considered a practice that preys on the sensibilities of the Nigerian people.” Nevertheless, this article holds that genuine miracles still exist today.

3. A Short Introduction to Pneumatology

The Hebrew (רוּחַ) and Greek (πνεῦμα) words used for the Holy Spirit are both derived from the root to breathe (Berkhof 1988, 95). Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit. While conceptions of the Holy Spirit differ, Christians generally consider him to be one of the persons of the Godhead. In this section, the author explains the concept of pneumatology from both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT).

In the OT, the Holy Spirit is conceived as the wind and breath and is understood as the unseen force of God. The Holy Spirit operates within the physical domain and physical life of humans as well as natural objects (Exod 14: 21, Num 11:31, Hos 13: 15, 1 Kgs 19:11) (Schoemaker 1904, 14). Thus, for the early Hebrews, the idea of Spirit seems almost as general as the idea of wind. Both were energies or powers proceeding from God (18).

The OT has two unambiguous functions of the Holy Spirit (Schoemaker 1904, 15–16). These are the non-prophetic function and the prophetic function. The non-prophetic function was when the Spirit of the Lord fell suddenly upon some leader or hero, arousing him to action and imparting the physical strength and courage to perform some extraordinary deed of valor. It is well illustrated by the stories of Gideon and Samson in the Book of Judges (Judg 6:33–35, 14:5–6). The prophetic function was when the Spirit of the Lord came upon the prophets and stirred them up into a state of ecstasy. In that state, they were able to receive and communicate the divine message imparted to them. This function of the Spirit is well illustrated in 1 Samuel 10:5–13 and 19:20–23. The spirit was regarded as operative only while the prophet was in a state of ecstasy. For example, when Saul had finished prophesying, he returned to his ordinary vocation (1 Sam 10:13). However, the man in whom the spirit repeatedly manifested itself came to be designated as “the man of the spirit” (Hos 9:7).

From the NT perspective, Louis Berkhof (1988, 98) convincingly argues that the Holy Spirit is divine, which is clearly shown in Scripture, just as it shows the Son’s divinity. For example, he has divine names (Heb 3:7–9, Acts 5:3–4, 2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:21), divine perfections are ascribed to him such as omnipresence (John 14:16), omniscience (John 14:26, Rom 11:34), omnipotence (1 Cor 12:11, Rom 15:19) and eternity (Heb 9:14). Moreover, divine works are performed by him, such as regeneration (John 3:5–6, Tit 3:5) and the resurrection of the dead (Rom 8:11), and divine honor is also paid to him (Matt 28:19, Rom 9:1, 2 Cor 13:13) (Berkhof 1988, 98).

Vinay Samuel (1994, 12) explains that the Holy Spirit is described as a counselor (John 14:15, 26; 15:26) and the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 16:13). The Holy Spirit has different works among Christians and non-Christians. He (12) further elucidates that the Holy Spirit’s work with the world is to convince and judge the world for its guilt before Christ. The Spirit does this as the prosecuting Spirit of truth. Wilbur O’Donovan (1996, 135) corroborates this view when he notes, “The Holy Spirit persuades people that there will be a judgment when they have to give an account of their sin ... Based on this truth, he pleads with people to repent and turn to Christ (John 16:8–13).” For the disciples, the Spirit is the comforter, leading them into all truth (Samuel 1994, 12). The Holy Spirit dwells in a believer and gives him the desire and strength to change and be like Christ (Phil 2:13) (O’Donovan 1996, 137–138). O’Donovan (1996, 138–141) further lists some things the Holy Spirit does in Christians. These are regeneration (John 3:5–7), sealing (Eph 4:30, 2 Cor 1:22), strengthening and encouraging (John 14:15–18), helping Christian to pray (Rom 8:26–27), giving illumination of Scripture (John 16:12–15), motivating for witness and service (Acts 1:8).

Elucidating on the role of the Holy Spirit, Tucker Ferda (2012, 566–567) avers that His seal marks believers out as God’s possession and, by so doing, makes the reception of the Holy Spirit and not circumcision the key identity marker of believers. Other scriptural references prove that the Holy Spirit marks out believers. For example, in Galatians 4:6–7, Paul emphasizes that Christians receive the Holy Spirit because they are children of God. Paul taught further that the children of God are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14). Moreover, the Holy Spirit marks out God’s people destined for salvation, like in the case of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44–48).

The Holy Spirit also produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), guides (Gal. 5:16), performs signs and miracles, anoints (Acts 10:38), calls to ministry (Acts 13:1–5), gives spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12–14), helps Christians to overcome deceptions (1 John 2:20–27), pours the love of Christ into believers’ hearts (Rom 5:5), and makes unity and fellowship possible among Christians (Eph 4:3–13). It is also the work of the Holy Spirit to make the church grow qualitatively and quantitatively through “regeneration and sanctification and [He] dwells in it as the principle of the new life. He also teaches and guides the Church” (Berkhof 1988, 98). He increases the knowledge of the Saviour among the believers, keeps them from error, and prepares them for eternity (98). John Sachs (2005, 387–389) notes that the Spirit leads believers into new life in Christ. He leads them into the whole truth of Christ’s person and mission.

The NT also contains other activities of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in prophecy (1 Pet 1:11, Rev 19:10), guides and directs believers in cases of difficulty or unexpected crisis (Acts 10:10), and witnesses to the believer that he has eternal life (1 John 5:6–8) (Schoemaker 1904, 54–56). Helen Bergin (2002, 136–143) stresses the images used to portray the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. These include air and God’s

Spirit, the Holy Spirit and fire, and the Spirit and water. She argues that Hebrew and Christian sources stress the link between the life-sustaining aspect of air and God’s Spirit (136).

Bergin (2002, 136–137) notes further that although in the NT the word *πνεῦμα* applies to the Spirit and not always to wind or breath, it produces similar effects as *רוּחַ* (spirit, wind, breath) which is used in the OT. For instance, after Jesus Christ’s resurrection, he breathed on the disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22 NIV). In Matthew 3:11, fire is used as a link with the Holy Spirit to suggest purification and judgment. Bergin (2002, 140) avers that “the Pentecost event depicts Jesus’ community being empowered by His Spirit and by tongues of fire to continue what he began.”

There is also the link between water and the Holy Spirit, signifying new creation (John 3:5), satisfaction (John 7:38), and enabling believers to receive and exemplify the love of God (Rom 5:5). According to Bergin (2002, 143), the analogy between water and the Spirit of God suggests newness of life, cleansing, thirst-quenching, delight, and abundance.

4. Historical Overview of the Montanism Movement

Before discussing the historical overview of the Montanism movement, the author examines the overview of the Holy Spirit doctrine in the early church. For this study, the early church will be considered as the period between the first and fourth centuries. However, emphasis will be laid on the period between the first and second centuries because the Montanist movement emerged late in the second century. John Eifion Morgan-Wynne, cited in Clint Tibbs (2008, 314), submits, “During the first and second centuries, there was no clear statement of the theology of the Holy

Spirit.” He argues further that Christian authors at the time wrote not only of “the holy spirit” but also of “the spirit of prophecy,” “the divine spirit,” “the spirit from God,” as well as the anarthrous form “a (holy) spirit” and the plural forms “good spirits,” spirits of God, and “spirits of Christ,” who were believed to be active among Christians of the first and second centuries (314).

However, by the third century, there was a gradual development in the theology of the Holy Spirit. From this period, theologians began to grapple with the Holy Spirit’s divinity, nature, and status. Origen (AD 185–254) was believed to be the first Church Father who described the Holy Spirit in terms of a single reality but remains vague on the Spirit’s nature and status (Tibbs 2008, 314). However, Origen opined that there is nowhere in the Scriptures where the Holy Spirit was said to be a created being. The opinion of Origen in the third century gave the premise for a series of debates (Swete 1912, 143) on the divinity of the Holy Spirit in the fourth century (Haykin 1994, 15–17). Moreover, the teaching of the Arians of the second half of the fourth century, who taught that the Holy Spirit was a creature just as the angels or ministering spirits, gave rise to the adoption of the Creed by the Council of Constantinople in the year 381 (Richardson 1961, 118–119). The Creed states as follows:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the Prophets. (Richardson 1961, 119)

Although first-century Christians were conservative in calling the Holy Spirit God, it can be inferred from this creed that there was no longer ambiguity about the divinity of the Holy Spirit by the Council of Constantinople. It

informed the argument of Richardson (1961, 33) that heresies helped the church develop her theology mainly through the pressure brought to bear upon her. Correct formulations were necessary if men were to see the error of the heretical systems. Therefore, by the fourth century, the Holy Spirit was clearly viewed as divine, and he was distinguished from other spirits. It was more evident in the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 313–386), Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 293–373), and the Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea (AD 329–379), Gregory of Nyssa, (AD 335–395) and Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329–389) (Tibbs 2008, 315).

Historically, Montanism (Klawiter 1980, 252) is the first example of hyper-Christianity and hyper-spiritualism. Montanism was also known as the New Prophecy. It was a laity movement. The proponents claimed to have received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and were the media for the work of God among his people (Klawiter 1980, 251–252). In other words, they claimed to be interpreters and revealers of God’s mind and word to his people. For example, Maxmilla claimed to be an elector, revealer, and interpreter who was compelled willingly and unwillingly to learn the knowledge of God (Klawiter 1980, 252). The movement started in Phrygia, one of the provinces in Asia Minor. The movement was started during the reign of Marcus Aurelius by a man called Montanus.

Montanus began to prophesy around AD 156. He derived his inspiration and authority from John 14:16 and Mathew 23:34. Montanus claimed that he and his companions were the new prophets Jesus spoke about when he said, “I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers” (Mathew 23:34 NIV) (Grayson 2011, 87–88). However, it should be noted that Montanus was a convert from Paganism. He was a zealous priest of Cybele who took his fanatical zeal into Christianity.

He called himself the inspired organ of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit). The Montanists believed that the Paraclete Jesus spoke about in John 14:16

spoke through Montanus (Grayson 2011, 89). According to Pelikan, while in ecstasy, Montanus would say, “I am the Lord God Almighty, I the Lord God the Father have come” or introduce his prophecy by saying, “I the Father, the Son and the Paraclete” (Pelikan 1956, 100–101). It was on this basis he was charged for identifying himself as the Father and the Holy Spirit (Pelikan 1956, 100–101). It is common knowledge that OT prophets also spoke as the oracles of God. Harry Boer (1983, 63) elucidates that Phrygia was a region known for its Paganistic wild prophecy. It emphasized ecstasy. Ecstasy means to act outside oneself. In an ecstatic position, the Pagan priest could fast, suffer pain, dance, see visions, and prophesy (63).

Priscilla and Maximilla, who joined this movement and became assistants of Montanus, had left their husbands during the persecutions under Antoninus, which raged in Asia Minor and caused the death of Polycarp in AD 155. These women who claimed to be prophetesses worked with Montanus as prophets and reformers of the Christian life and proclaimed the approaching age of the Holy Spirit and the millennial reign of the Messiah in Pepuza, a small village of Phrygia upon which the New Jerusalem was to come down. Because of this they instructed Christians to fast, leave their earthly tasks, and live in Pepuza to await the end (Boer 1983, 63). In addition, preparing for the eschaton meant becoming ascetic, practicing celibacy, abstaining from eating meat, enjoying no pleasures, having no art, and wearing no ornaments (Manschreck 1985, 37).

They also taught that mortal sins after baptism were unpardonable (Manschreck 1985, 45). Thus, central to its message were the prediction of the imminent end of the world, the coming down of New Jerusalem, and the duty of Christians to confess the name of Jesus Christ publicly amid persecution. The message was predicated on the revelation that Priscilla claimed to have received in a dream. She claimed that Jesus Christ told her that Pepuza was sacred and would be where the heavenly Jerusalem

would descend (Klawiter 1980, 253). Members of this movement were notable for speaking in unknown languages (glossolalia) and prophesying. The movement quickly spread to Rome and North Africa. It might have reached Africa around the third century (Tabbernee 2005, 430).

According to Philip Schaff (1997, 110), it “threw the whole church into commotion and it gave rise to the first Synods which are mentioned after the apostolic age.” Affirming this assertion, Boer (1983, 63–64) notes that as the movement grew, it added other doctrines and practices. Marriage was a once-in-a-lifetime event (implying that there could be no remarriage after the death of a spouse), abandoning marriage for spiritual reasons was allowed, every Christian must have recognizable spiritual gifts, martyrdom must be encouraged and trying to escape from it was a sin. In addition, the three leading prophets could forgive sins, like others of high spirituality, and women could hold office in the church. Moreover, fasts were encouraged, and vegetarianism and ascetic living were enjoined (Grayson 2011, 89). Manschreck (1985, 37) also submits that “Montanus admitted women to the universal priesthood, saying endowment by the Holy Spirit was superior to ecclesiasticism.”

The followers of Montanus were known as Montanists. The movement was more potent in North Africa, especially among women who sympathized with it. Two distinguished women, Perpetua and Felicitas, who died at Carthage during the persecution of Septimius Severus in AD 203 were adherents of the movement (Klawiter 1980, 257–259). In later years the movement also influenced Tertullian, a notable Christian intellectual of the third century, who was formerly a member of Montanism before he left the sect and founded a new sect known as Tertullianists. This is clear from some doctrinal positions of Tertullian that are similar to that of Montanists (Manschreck 1985, 27). For example, Clyde Manschreck (1985, 27) asserts that Tertullian and Montanus expressed extreme eschatology and called

for strict fasting, martyrdom, and moral earnestness. They discouraged marriage and denounced second marriages as a sin.

Jaroslav Pelikan (1956, 100) also argues that the doctrine of the Trinity developed by Tertullian was predicated on the influence of Montanism. Although Tertullian disagreed that Montanus was a Paraclete, he treated him and the other prophets and prophetesses as bearers or instruments of the prophetic Spirit (105). Tertullian also saw the Holy Spirit as a teacher of discipline and morality. In other words, most of the sayings Tertullian attributed or traced to the Paraclete were ethical. He believed the Holy Spirit helped in fasting, greater strictness in marriage, and more excellent care in administering penance (Pelikan 1956, 105). Manschreck (1985, 45) concurs with this position. He emphasizes that Tertullian turned to the Spirit because of the moral laxity he noticed among the clergies. Therefore, the Montanists strict discipline matched Tertullian's moral austerity.

Philip Schaff (1997, 110) argues that Montanists as a sect operated into the sixth century. He asserted further that the sect had many adherents in Phrygia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia and Constantinople at the time of Epiphanius. Until Justinian (AD 530), Constantine's successors repeatedly enacted laws against them. Also, although the bishops and synods of Asia Minor had different views on the movement, the majority declared the movement demonic and excommunicated Montanists from the church fellowship because it engendered schism. According to Manschreck (1985, 37), Montanism was rejected by the church, "not because it promoted the miraculous gifts of ecstasy but because it engendered divisiveness." However, Boer (1983, 65) has a contrary view, noting, "Montanism had an effect on the Catholic Church: the church subsequently discouraged prophecy and unusual spiritual powers within it. Discipline became more and more concentrated in the hands of the bishops."

Supporting the view of Boer, William Tabbernee (2005, 428–429) highlights the following as charges against the movement from the church authorities. First, the women (Priscilla and Maximilla) were prophesying while in an ecstatic trance. "According to an anonymous bishop, the mode of prophesying was contrary to that handed down by the church" (Tabbernee 2005, 429). James Grayson (2011, 89) supports this position when he avers that their "prophetic events were noisy, and the prophecies were said to have been given in incomprehensible speech, probably a form of glossolalia." Second, they were charged with false prophecies because their predictions about the world's imminent end were not fulfilled. Additionally, because of their belief that the Parousia would take place at Pepuza (Grayson 2011, 89).

Third, Montanus, the movement's founder, was charged with dissolving marriages on the claims that Maximilla and Priscilla left their husbands to join the movement (Tabbernee 2005, 429). In other words, he was charged for contravening Christianity's ethical stance on marriage and divorce. James Grayson (2011, 88) also identified that Montanus was charged with heresy for calling Pepuza along the neighboring village of Tymion Jerusalem. Moreover, the Montanist leaders were accused of arrogating power to give absolution of sins to themselves. Of course, this claim brought them into direct conflict with the Catholic leadership of the day (Grayson 2011, 89). Lawlor, cited in Grayson (2011 89), argues that the three prophets (Montanus, Priscilla, Maximilla) were believed to stand in a line of succession and were the final prophets. It could also be the reason for their conflict with the church authorities.

5. Lessons for the Contemporary Church in Africa

This section draws lessons from the study for the contemporary church in Africa. The author opines that if applied they will help sustain the health of prophetic churches in Africa.

5.1 Proactively dealing with heresies

Earlier in this article, references were made to cases of asking members to eat grass under the guise of being led by the Holy Spirit and sleeping with women on the pretext of anointing service. Christian bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (EASA), and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), should intensify efforts in educating their members and sanction erring members as necessary. A proactive approach will ensure the younger generation will inherit a healthy church. Christian denominations in Africa can take a clue from the early apostles, who took decisive steps in curbing the spread of heresies.

Examples abound in the Bible to illustrate this point. It can be recalled that at a time in the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, some men were teaching that circumcision was a prerequisite to salvation. Paul and Barnabas reported this to the church in Jerusalem who deliberated and decided that Gentile Christians should not be burdened with circumcision. At this they sent a letter to that effect to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:1–35). The Apostles also dealt with Gnosticism. Noll (1997, 86) writes, “Gnosticism and Docetism are related heresies that regard the physical world as inferior to the purely spiritual.” Paul wrote to Timothy to educate and warn him against falling into the hands of Gnostics (1 Tim 6:20–21). At the time, Gnostics claimed that one could be saved by knowledge. They

also denied the humanity of Jesus Christ and considered the human body to be evil. They relied on secret wisdom and tradition (Col 2:4–8). John the Apostle also addressed this heresy in the book of 1 John (Barker 1985, 2406). The apostles gave attention to education and dealt with the heresies of their time. They also called meetings to resolve heretical issues when necessary.

5.2 Promoting spiritual disciplines for the utilization of spiritual gifts

The foundation for a healthy spiritual life is spiritual formation. Spiritual formation connotes an intentional effort to become Christlike. Spiritual disciplines are necessary for spiritual formation. Dallas Willard, cited in Don Thorsen (2020, 149), asserts that there are two types of spiritual disciplines. These are spiritual disciplines of abstinence and engagement. Church leaders must train church members on spiritual disciplines to harness and utilize members’ spiritual gifts. The spiritual discipline of abstinence that members should be taught includes the discipline of solitude, meditation, contemplation, fasting, and sacrifice. Spiritual disciplines of engagement include study, worship, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission (Thorsen 2020, 149). These disciplines will help to discover spiritual gifts and utilize them appropriately. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the edification of the body of Christ and the advancement of the gospel. The church should not ban the exercise of spiritual gifts just because some abuses exist, like the leadership of the early church did during the Montanist movement. Instead, church leadership should encourage the proper use of spiritual gifts as stipulated in the NT. Also, they should discourage or check the abuse or misuse of spiritual gifts. The emergence of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century is proof that the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped

or caged. The youth, especially, should be allowed to exercise their spiritual gifts in an acceptable biblical manner. It will reduce the exodus of youth from evangelical or mainline churches.

5.3 Attending to women's ministry

Ancient sources and modern historians agree that conversion to Christianity has been far more prevalent among women, compared to men (Stark 1995, 233). Some classical writers further claimed that women enjoyed far higher status within the Christian subculture than women in the Graeco-Roman world in general. Still, they were easy prey for any "foreign superstition" (Stark 1995, 231). In any case, women's place in any society is crucial to its development. Obia (2018, 49) opines that "if women fail to give their best or their efforts are inadequate, such society might suffer all-round under-development." Since the late twentieth century, African churches have given prominent roles to women, some of whom are church founders, evangelists, and prophetesses. Obia (2018, 57) asserts, "In the African Indigenous Churches, women's contributions to missions and Christianity generally became possible because of the special attention given to women to fulfil their missions and callings."

Notwithstanding, observably, women patronizing religious homes, churches, religious camps, and open-air services still fall into the wrong hands more often than men. Quayesi-Amakye (2018, 5) supports this position by noting that "women become easy targets since they tend to patronize religious/spiritual programmes more than men. They appear conscious of uncountable burdens and gallivant for relief at the slightest opportunity." Therefore, the Church must have a vital ministry for women to give more attention to their spiritual growth.

5.4 Emphasising doctrinal purity and uprightness

Doctrine is crucial to the health of a local church. Without sound doctrine, the growth of the Church will suffer a decline or completely shut down. Paul foresaw a situation like this when he warned his sons in the Lord, Timothy and Titus, to cherish Christian doctrine and warned that a time may come when people will not appreciate or value sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3). He specifically warned Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely, and that he should persevere in them because by so doing he would save himself and his hearers (1 Tim 4:16). In the same vein, he instructed Titus to teach elders in the church to hold firmly to the message so that they can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose the message (Titus 1:9).

The study has examined how the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was developed in the early church. Theologians and Church Historians could recall the factors that led to the canonization of the NT. The heretical teachings and the need to preserve the apostolic doctrine were among the crucial reasons for canonizing the NT scriptures. All these have helped in the preservation of Christian principles and theology. In contemporary times, some preachers preach what suits their hearers, and some twist the Bible to establish their ungodly practices. Unfortunately, most of these messages go viral on social media. Therefore, Christian denominations that uphold the sole authority of the Bible should ensure the doctrinal purity of Christian beliefs and practices. It will help sanitize pollution and heresies in the body of Christ.

5.5 Emphasising church discipline and discipleship

In the case of Montanism referred to in this study, the Church excommunicated Montanus and his followers from the Church. Of course, the author opines that excommunication should be the last resort of

disciplinary actions. Notwithstanding, churches in Africa should take the issue of discipline seriously. Church discipline is waning because of the desire to retain members and the proliferation of churches. Most churches do not want to employ disciplinary measures because of the fear of losing members to another church. Despite these challenges, churches should not be wary of enforcing discipline or shy away from it. If discipline is not ensured, the Church will lose its integrity in society, and then it may be challenging to be a witness to society.

In this regard, discipleship is crucial in the spiritual formation and growth of the clergy and members. The author believes Montanus and the women had genuine spiritual zeal but lacked adequate knowledge to demonstrate spiritual gifts. In all indications, they believed and taught that Christians should be morally pure, and although they did it outrageously, they instructed believers to prepare for the eschaton. The gap in the error of Montanists lies in the need for discipleship. Hence, the contemporary Church must take formal and informal discipleship training seriously. The new converts should undergo spiritual training so that Jesus Christ will be formed in them.

5.6 Recognizing the need for sound theological education

Theology is the study of God. There are divergent views about the necessity of theological education for a successful ministry. Some Pentecostal and African Indigenous Churches preachers think that all that a preacher needs for a successful ministry is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They believe that the abilities to speak in tongues, prophesy, perform miracles, healings, and deliverances are the significant reasons for success in ministries. Others believe that if a gospel minister attends a theological school, it should not teach core theological courses like systematic theology, biblical Hebrew and Greek, philosophy, and psychology. According to some Pentecostal pastors

these courses do not give room for spiritual growth and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Instead, they should attend bible colleges that emphasize practical ministries such as courses on spiritual warfare, deliverance, and how to engage in prayer and fasting. This informed Mathews Ojo's (2006, 236) argument that some pioneers of the charismatic movement in Nigeria, for example, were anti-clerical. They viewed the trained clergy as one who had been blindfolded by Satan with "book knowledge" and who could not "grasp the essence of the Holy Spirit." Leke Ogunewu (2008, 65), therefore, submits:

With this type of ignorance and misconception about education, many of the early pioneers of the charismatic movement in Nigeria initially never perceived the necessity for theological education. Rather the emphasis was on the enablement of the Holy Spirit. It was generally believed that the minister should rely on the Holy Spirit for whatever services he intends to render to the household of faith.

Peter Awojobi (2020, 4), who shares this view, observes that a lack of theological training has led many of the founders of religious movements to errors when teaching, preaching, praying, and counseling. As such, the lives of their followers were endangered. Although there is a shift from their earlier position, there are still pastors who do not believe in theological education and prefer shallow theological education. These do not encourage critical thinking and engagement which are necessary in this contemporary time for efficiency. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit should be undermined in Christian ministries. The author, a theological educator, is aware that though theological schools emphasize sound theological education, many do not downplay the importance of spiritual formation. For example, the focus of the Nigerian Baptist Theological

Seminary is on sound academics (Jer 3:15), vibrant spirituality (John 4:24), and competence in ministry (2 Tim 4:5). It is, therefore, a practice for every lecturer to start each class with a devotional message and mentor the students (Oguntade 2022, 57).

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the pneumatological praxes of Montanism from a historical perspective. It has drawn lessons from the study for the contemporary Church, especially African churches. The study revealed that although Montanism started in a small village in Asia Minor, it spread to Rome and North Africa. It had a strong influence in North Africa among women and also influenced Tertullian. African Christians should be sensitive to the move of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, leaders should beware of heretical sects and heresies. The paper also revealed that the Montanists had some positive sides, like emphasis on moral uprightness and preparedness for the end of the world, which calls for sacrifice and commitment. Therefore, the contemporary Church should not be hasty in throwing away the baby with the bath water. It should harness and effectively utilize the spiritual gifts of its members and ensure all new converts are spiritually nurtured and disciplined. Similarly, heresies should not be condoned. Hence, church discipline should be maintained and theological education encouraged.

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