

European Journal of
Philosophy, Culture and Religious Studies
(EJPCR)



**A Hermeneutical Evaluation of Luther's Sola Fide
and Its Relevance to the Doctrine of Salvation in the
Apostolic Church Nigeria, Southwest Zone**

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A Hermeneutical Evaluation of Luther's *Sola Fide* and Its Relevance to the Doctrine of Salvation in the Apostolic Church Nigeria, Southwest Zone

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Article history

Submitted 02.05.2024 Revised Version Received 05.06.2024 Accepted 09.07.2024

Abstract

Purpose: The study evaluates Luther's theory of *sola fide* and its relevance to the doctrine of salvation in the Apostolic Church Nigeria, Southwest Zone. The doctrine of *sola fide* typically entails the notion that salvation is through faith only. Unfortunately, in contemporary times, the concept of salvation has suffered much misunderstanding. It has been a subject of much controversy characterised with so much variations and confusion of thoughts in its art of teaching.

Materials and Methods: Employing the tool of hermeneutics and critical assessment, the study comparatively examined the theo-linguistic implications of Luther's *sola fide* and TACN's doctrine of salvation.

Findings: The study discovers that TACN's doctrine of salvation shares fundamental

similarities but TACN's doctrine of salvation extends the doctrine of salvation further than Luther's *sola fide* by emphasizing the possibility of a Christian losing his salvation. However, it is discovered and argued that TACN's commitment to the doctrine of *sola fide* has not been balanced in practice. While the church professes that salvation is attained through faith only, her officials and members are observed to lay significant emphasis on salvation through works.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study therefore recommends that the church should be consistent in its commitment to *sola fide* both in doctrine and practice. This can be achieved through consistency in the art of teaching what is believed by the church.

Keyword: *Sola Fide, Hermeneutical Evaluation, Doctrine, Salvation, Apostolic Church*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* is principally his theology of salvation. Salvation is one of the most important elements of the Christian faith. It is unarguably the first step to having a meaningful relationship with the Divine. In both Old and New Testaments, the concept of Soteriology has been adopted whether implicitly or explicitly by the people of God. There are evidences to show that several attempts on Soteriology are seen in display. Hence, the subject matter of salvation inspires and regulates the acts and deeds of believers in their journey of faith. According to Pelican (2006), "the central theme of the Bible is God's mission to human beings so as to bring them to receive and experience His saving Grace". This assertion indicates the centrality of salvation to the Christian faith. It also points to the fact that, all that the documentation of the Bible aims to achieve is to connect man to God through salvation.

In a bid to elucidate the implication of his earlier claim, Pelican (2006) further explains that, the Bible is composed around the message of salvation both for the past, present and the future. Gibbs (2010) asserts that if the concept of Soteriology is being emphasized in the church, nominal Christians will reduce. The church is observed to be producing nominal Christians probably because the pastors no longer emphasize on the doctrine of salvation. More so, it is noticed many pastors do not fully understand the concept of salvation and this may have generated a lot of inept controversies among the members. The recent emphasis of church leaders on money and acquisition of church facilities questions the sincerity of the church's quest for genuinely saved individuals.

However, while it is worthy of note that the Old Testament conception of Soteriology is not out rightly contrary to the Christian conception of Soteriology, it is pertinent to draw attention to the fact that, the Christian conception of Soteriology emphasizes salvation that births a spiritual relationship between God and man. The early church in their campaign for the salvation of the people provides insight into the demands or conditions for attaining salvation. This formed the centrality of their message to the people which includes the belief in the life of Jesus, death, resurrection, appearances and ascension (Acts. 2:36; 11:36-43). This process according to the early church positions a man into a relationship with God and a new life pattern.

Whether this process is a one-time experience as perceived or one that can be renewed after being lost is a recent discussion among scholars. It has brewed several schools of thought whereby the evangelicals argue that salvation is attained by a man just once and cannot be lost. In the words of Millard (1992), conversion is a singular and immediate event for most evangelicals. On the other hand, the conservatives argue that salvation can be lost and renewed before the ascension of the saints.

Martin Luther represents a major shift in the history of the church and that of reformation, and consequently, his opinion of what salvation means composed what is later believed by the Protestant Sect of the church. (Syamsul & Khoirunisa, 2019) Previously, "the Catholic Church taught that, salvation comes to individuals by faith and participation in the sacraments. In opposition to this view, Luther and all Protestants after him came to believe that salvation was by faith alone (Millard, 1992). Thus, resultant from this protest is the birth of two simple phrases used by the Protestants to convey a summary of their belief: '*sola fide*' which interprets '*salvation by faith alone*' and "*sola scriptura*" which implies that the Bible is the highest authority in spiritual matters.

The central principle for this study, *Sola fide* aims at laying specific emphasis only on the finished atoning work of Jesus for the salvation of man's soul. Thus, salvation is only acquired through the belief in Christ's crucifixion. This was against the predominant belief of the term laid out by the Catholic Church that the way to salvation is by participating in the sacrament. In other words, the Catholic Church prescribes that there are certain activities that connote piety or virtues through which man attains salvation, but Luther and the

reformer's movement propound that, participating in the sacrament may be a means of worshipping God, but it is certainly not the way through which salvation can be attained.

Luther observes that, a sinful man cannot change the sinful direction of his will (Grislis 1961). Consequently, in an attempt that human salvation should depend upon the voluntary choice made by sinful man, no human being may be saved. Though, the sinner is capable of making decisions in his daily life, it is possible that the sinner might not be able to remove the basic sinfulness of his will by his own efforts. Therefore, such sinner may remain in complete bondage to sin unless he is assisted by grace. Luther further emphasizes the totality of human sinfulness by his interpretation of the capacities of the fallen man's reason. Human reason as a part of human nature, insists that Luther is completely blind in regard to "divine things".

The main objective of this study is to compare Luther's notion of *Sola fide* with a view to show its relevance to The Apostolic Church, Nigeria, Western Zone's doctrine of salvation. Random sampling technique was employed in the study to randomly select samples such as Pastors, Church Officers and members in The Apostolic Church Nigeria, Southwest Zone who were affirmed as having laudable experience and knowledge about the church's doctrine of salvation. The whole information was gathered through well-structured, open-ended questionnaire, and structured interviews. The data collected from questionnaire and structured interviews were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed respectively. The study employed the hermeneutical approach to investigate Luther's theology of *sola fide* as it relates to TACN, South West Region.

Meaning of *Sola Fide* and the Doctrine of Salvation

Sola fide is a Latin phrase that translates to "faith alone." It is a theological concept within Protestant Christianity, particularly associated with the Protestant Reformation and propounded by Martin Luther. It is used by Luther to explain the source of salvation for the Christian. The concept of *sola fide* emphasizes that salvation is obtained solely through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than through any works or actions performed by an individual. This concept contrasts with the Catholic doctrine of justification, which includes both faith and good works as prerequisites for salvation. *Sola fide* emphasizes that a person is justified, or made right with God, solely through faith in Jesus Christ, without the necessity of adding any human works or merit to achieve salvation. Inherently, the subject matter of salvation is the primary content of Luther's *sola fide*.

There are various conceptions of salvation as propounded by scholars and religionists in the history of time. The Hebrews for instance conceived salvation through various terms such as freedom or deliverance (*nasal, ga'al*), redemption (*padah*), ransom (*kopher*), reconciliation (*kaphar*) amongst others. In the Old Testament, salvation was purely an attribute of God which is extended to His elect because of His magnanimity. Salvation here does not just refer to deliverance from sin; it entails being secured or rescued from dangers as well as being blessed with the good things of life. For this reason, the psalmists often thanked God or sought God for His salvation. (Exo. 14:13, Psalm 106:4, Psal 114: 10, Isaiah 12:2, Micah 7:7) In this light, salvation in the Old Testament is a concept that encompasses many things such as freedom, deliverance, blessings, etc. Example of salvation experiences in the Hebraic context includes deliverance of God's people from enemies, drought, diseases and plagues, enslavement, etc., by God Himself. In synopsis, salvation in the Hebrew concept of salvation is perceived as a relationship between people and God and with other humans. Example of salvation experiences in the Hebraic context includes deliverance of God's people from enemies, drought, diseases and plagues, enslavement, etc., by God Himself. In synopsis, salvation in the Hebrew concept of salvation is perceived as the peaceful existence of the elect tribe, Israel.

However, the Christian concept of salvation as rooted in the New Testament points at a more complex relationship because it refers to a spiritual relationship with God. Rom. 10:10 defines the process through

which salvation can be achieved which is to believe in Jesus with the heart and confess His righteousness with the mouth. In this context, salvation is perceived as “preservation from the present and incoming danger”. (Pelican, 2006) This is further reiterated in Heb. 2:3 where the need for salvation for the readers is presented to be imminent. Also, in the New Testament, Jesus is pitched to be the author of salvation; He is the Lamb of sacrifice offered for the salvation of mankind. (Heb. 2:10, 5:9, 6:9, 9:28, 2Tim. 2:10)

In like manner, the New Testament posits salvation as the bridge to redeeming the human race from eternal damnation. It is a means to rescue man from total separation from God; a way to making man God’s eternal friend. Accordingly, sin has alienated man from God and the process of salvation is the only hope of reconciling man back to God. Thus, the Christian concept of salvation indicates that without salvation, man is condemned to eternal damnation. In addition to this fundamental belief is the belief in the arrangement made by God to reconcile man to Himself which is Jesus Christ.

Contemporary Christianity which TACN Western Zone instantiate builds on the theoretical formulations of salvation in the New Testament and typical references to beliefs that point at Jesus as the source of salvation. But then, in contemporary Christianity and TACN specifically, the concept of salvation is strictly employed to refer to the commencement of divine relationship between man and God. In the words of Oderinde (2023), “salvation encompasses redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, expiation, sanctification and glorification.” It is believed that all forms of life’s blessings are entailed in salvation. That is, redemption, forgiveness, sanctification, prosperity, good health, financial liberation, etc are all inclusive in the TACN’s concept of salvation.

Also, Fatokun (2023) defines salvation as “freedom from sin, guilt and power.” In all of these definitions, it is notable that salvation is simply conceived as a means to achieving liberty or freedom or deliverance either physically or otherwise. Lawson (2010) summarizes salvation as “a complete life which is composed of peace, deliverance, harmony, reconciliation, acceptance and favor”. The latter submission points to the fact that for the contemporary Christian and members of TACN, to be saved means to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This relationship is expected to attract the desirable blessings of life for the Christian.

Lutherian *sola fide* provides a theoretical foundation for TACN’s doctrine of salvation. The Apostolic Church of Nigeria is a church built on the teachings of Jesus Christ and of the early Apostles. One of the pillars of the early church is the call to salvation. The Apostles taught audiences at every opportunity to become saved and for them; the only way to salvation is by believing (faith) in Jesus Christ. This is the primary focus of Luther’s *sola fide* and this pattern is also the template used by TACN. TACN therefore shares the same orientation with the early Apostles and Luther on the primacy of salvation and the assured route to salvation being Jesus Christ.

Early Christian *Sola Fide*

Maurice (2008) asserts that Christianity had rapidly and persistently spread throughout the Roman Empire by the beginning of the fourth century, exhibiting a remarkable consistency in its doctrinal tenets. Although the early Church did not exhibit complete uniformity in terms of doctrine, belief, or practice, the majority of Christians adhered to the principles of Christian Orthodoxy.

Olson (1991) state that the early Church faced various heresies, which challenged doctrinal consistency and influenced the development of salvation doctrines. However, these Heresies were not as significant as the Christological controversies that emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries. One of the primary points of contention during the fourth century pertained to the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Specifically, the inquiry of the Christological controversies centered on whether the Church's founder, Jesus Christ possessed a human nature. Did He possess divinity? Could He possibly possess both attributes of humanity and divinity simultaneously? The significance of the response to this inquiry was not only rooted in its historical relevance, but also in its implications for Soteriology. Some of the major Christological controversies include: Arianism, which denied the full divinity of Christ; Nestorianism a doctrine which emphasized the distinction between Christ's human and divine natures; Monophysitism a theory which argued that Christ had only one nature, which was divine.

Meanwhile, these controversies led to several ecumenical councils, such as the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), which sought to establish orthodox Christian doctrine regarding the nature of Christ (McGrath, 2011). Also, Martin Luther's doctrine of sola fide (justification by faith alone) was influenced by these earlier Christological debates, particularly in how he understood the person and work of Christ. Luther's emphasis on faith alone as the means of salvation was rooted in his understanding of Christ's dual nature and the efficacy of his sacrifice.

The connection between Christological controversies and sola fide is further highlighted below:

- i. The nature of Christ: Luther's understanding of Christ as fully divine and fully human (in line with the Chalcedonian definition) was crucial to his view of salvation. Christ's divine nature made his sacrifice infinitely valuable, while his human nature allowed him to stand in for humanity (Kolb, 2009).
- ii. Imputation of righteousness: Luther's doctrine of sola fide relied on the idea that Christ's righteousness could be imputed to believers. This concept was grounded in the Christological understanding of Christ as the perfect God-man (Trueman, 2015).
- iii. Rejection of works-righteousness: Luther's emphasis on faith alone was partly a reaction against what he saw as a corruption of Christology in medieval Catholic theology, which he believed diminished the sufficiency of Christ's work (Bayer, 2008).
- iv. The role of the mediator: The Christological debates about Christ's nature informed Luther's view of Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity, reinforcing his doctrine of sola fide (Lohse, 1999).

So, the Christological controversies of the early church provided the theological groundwork for Luther's later formulation of sola fide. By establishing a clear understanding of Christ's nature and work, these early debates shaped the soteriological landscape that Luther would later navigate in developing his influential doctrine.

This inconsistency in the church about fundamental church doctrines has given room for the spread and establishment of heresies. In fact, traditions such as Gnosticism, a doctrinal system which banked salvation on the possession of certain secret knowledge passed on to some people from Jesus Christ without the knowledge of the apostles and many others like Calvinism's eternal security, a doctrine that once salvation is acquired, it can never be lost thrived due to this lack of congruent stand on the part of the church. (Fatokun, 2023) However, Luther's Soteriology is perceived to be truly biblical and rooted in the Bible. Its principles are not inconsistent with each other.

Luther's *Sola Fide*: Theological View of Salvation by Faith

Martin Luther's doctrine of salvation is fundamentally hinged on the writings of St. Paul and St. Augustine's teachings as an Augustinian monk that he was. The doctrine that a person attains salvation only by faith is considered to be the capstone of Luther's theology. (Seifrid, 2001) In fact, the reference to the doctrine of salvation by faith is found in almost all of his writings. In his works, Luther argues that the thrust of Paul's

discussion on salvation was to challenge any presumption or confidence of salvation through the law, not an outright condemnation of the law. Luther further argues that, to want to be justified by the works of the law is to nullify the grace of God.

Luther went on to explain what he means by nullifying the grace of God thus: Nullifying the grace of God is therefore, a very great and common sin that, all the self-righteous men commit; for as long as they seek to be justified through the merit of congruity or through the law, they nullify the grace of God and Christ (Marshall, 2001, p. 25).

In another volume of his work, Luther continues the discussion stating that, the desire to be justified through the law presents a picture which suggests that, “Christ has not yet come (Seifrid, 2001), or as though, while present, He was not able to justify mankind by Himself.

According to Luther, to ignore the sufficiency of Christ with regards to salvation means, “being separated from Christ and for Him to become utterly useless to us” (Seifrid, 2001). Wricdt (2003), quoted Luther as saying that, salvation by faith is the chief article of the whole Christian doctrine, which comprehends the understanding of all godliness. Luther came to understand salvation by faith as being entirely the work of God. Against the teaching of his day that the righteous acts of believers are done in cooperation with God, Luther asserted that, Christians receive that righteousness entirely from outside themselves: that, righteousness not only comes from Christ, it actually is the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us (rather than infused into us) through faith. Faith is that which brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ, Thus, faith, for Luther, is a gift from God, and “... a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favour that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it” (Seifrid, 2001) This faith grasps Christ’s righteousness and appropriates it for itself in the believer’s heart.

According to Brill (2008), Luther explained Salvation by Faith by referring to the following scriptural verses amongst others:

...the first and chief article is that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord died for our sins and was raised again for our salvation by faith (Romans 3:24-25).

He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)

God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23-25).

These verses are indication that for Luther, salvation is attained through faith in Jesus Christ and not essentially by observances of religious rites and ritual. It is for this purpose that McGrath (2001) maintains that, it is widely known that Luther regarded salvation by faith as the article of the standing or falling church. For him, without it, the church of God cannot exist for even one hour. In his commentary on Galatians, he states that “whoever falls from the doctrine of salvation by faith is ignorant of God and is an idolater...” (Elliot, 2000).

The Doctrine of Soteriology in the Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN)

What TACN believes and teaches as touching the doctrine of salvation are mentioned in articles 2,4 and 10 of the Church’s Tenet. These articles of the Tenet indicate how repentance from sin is necessary for any man to be saved and also believing (faith) in the finished work of Christ is necessary for salvation (Justification, sanctification, redemption, etc.) This shows that TACN agrees with the scripture that says salvation is by Grace through faith and not of works. But the tenth article of the Tenet states that it is possible for a person

to fall from grace. This principle indicates that a man who is saved can lose his salvation. TACN believes that even if the Bible says we are saved by grace through faith, necessity is laid on the believer to sustain his salvation by his works; else, the salvation of the individual can be lost (Fatokun, 2016).

Fatokun (2023) assesses the tenets of TACN which are indicators to the church's doctrine of salvation. Tenet 2 of TACN states that "the utter depravity of human nature and necessity for repentance and regeneration and eternal doom for the finally impenitent." According to him, The Apostolic Church Nigeria is a Pentecostal denomination which has as one of its pillars, the principle of holiness. The second tenet of the church therefore holds that man in himself cannot save himself because his nature of utter depravity. There is therefore a strong need for the intervention of God through the Holy Spirit to redeem man, cause regeneration within him and restore him in a righteous state back to God. On the other hand, the church stresses that a man who fails to accept this offer of redemption stand to be judged by God already.

Secondly, the fourth article of the TACN Tenet broods further on the subject matter of salvation through faith. The TACN's doctrine of "justification and sanctification of believers through the finished work of Christ" showcases TACN as a classical Pentecostal denomination. Durham (1973) refers to sanctification as a progressive working on the faith of the believer which commences at the point of accepting salvation. In like manner, TACN believes and teaches that Christ performed the entire task necessary for man's redemption. The only task left for man is "a humble appropriation of this divine gift of grace by repentance and faith in Christ's vicarious death and resurrection." (Fatokun, 2023) Therefore, the Christian is sanctified by faith as well. On the other hand, the notion of justification refers to the judicial act of God wherein He relieves a man of his burden and guilt of sin. as such, justification is the process of being adopted by God as a child. Here it is important to note that justification also comes by faith. Nonetheless, while justification is not by self-works of righteousness but by faith, justified believers have to produce fruits of good works. In fact, the TAC Constitutions states that "we are not justified by work, but we prove that we are justified by doing the work of righteousness."

The third doctrine which this study considers important to TACN's Soteriology is the tenth article which states that there is "the possibility of falling from grace." This doctrine stands in sharp contrast to the doctrine of eternal security chiefly championed by Calvinism, semi-pelagianism and semi-gnosticism, a doctrine which pervades the neo-Pentecostal traditions in contemporary times. TAC believes and teaches that the salvation by grace that a believer receives should be backed by works of righteousness. This opens the Christian up for regeneration which is brought to fulfillment through the Holy Spirit. TAC holds the view that every believer has a role in maintaining the salvation that he received freely from God. This is because in as much as salvation is a gift, if it is not preserved, it can be lost eternally. As Phil. 2:12 states, '...work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'

According to the explanations of Fatokun *et al.*, (2017), as regards the teaching and principle of falling from grace which the church believes in, it was explained that, the doctrinal principle and teaching of "possibility of falling from grace" is an Apostolic teaching warning Christians to be mindful that as children of God, they can consciously or unconsciously walk away from their salvation. This implies if believers engage in any activities that could expose them to dangers and any other act aimed at tempting God and giving Satan opportunity to shipwreck their spiritual life to the detriment of their Christian faith and salvation.

This doctrinal principle and teaching of "possibility of falling from grace" is also birthed as an apology to the doctrine of Calvinism, a very deceptive teaching, concept and presumption that is referred to as "eternal security" or "once saved, always saved" and spiritual guarantee that once we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord, then we are secured for eternity regardless of our lifestyle. (I Timothy 4:1, I

Corinthians 10:12, Romans 8:29-30). The Christian Principle of the Doctrine of Falling from Grace can be best defined as apostasy. Consequently, apostasy has been x-rayed as the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief or principle by a believer (Fatokun, 2016).

Thus, a believer who becomes apostate had fallen from the faith and thus cut off from among the elects who are chosen to be partakers of God's Kingdom, the rapture, the millennial reign of Christ on earth and the promised New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:4-6, 10-15, 21:2-6). The Objective of this apostolic doctrine of apostasy is an express warning to apologist of the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" or "Calvinism" and many other Christian denominations who profess and teach the heresy. The idea of "once saved, always saved" is a presumption of an empty hope that deceives believers in false doctrine and false senses of eternal security.

Fatokun (2016) contributed further by explaining that, it will be hazardous for Christians who aim at making heaven to build their spiritual journey on the premise of eternal security without being conscious of the fact that Hebrews 6:4-6 reveals the possibility of falling from grace. At this juncture, caution has to be taken by Christians or believers on a teaching that is trending in this end-time, which is "the theory of Eternal security". What does this theory teach? Also known as, "once saved, always saved". It believes that the moment any one becomes a Christian, such is saved from hell and the salvation cannot get lost again. Therefore, let us endeavor to maintain that which we have received till the end- I John 2:24-25.

Above all, Fatokun (2016) writes that, "One must guide and maintain his personal salvation as Paul said, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (II Corinthians 13:5). The doctrine of eternal security should be discarded in all its forms and presentation. Salvation is free but maintenance is very costly. So, do not lose your salvation.

Comparative Analysis of Luther's *Sola Fide* and TACN's Doctrine of Salvation

Oderinde (2023) notes that discussions on the concept of Soteriology are usually multifaceted and complex with definitive implications for the church and individual Christians. In her words, "Soteriology demonstrates the significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ." As such, Soteriology is a topic that can never lose its relevance to the New Testament church because the church itself is built on the person and works of Jesus.

Comparing the teachings and belief of TACN and Martin Luther's, this study identifies that there are huge similarities and quite few differences with how salvation is perceived on both grounds. The Similarities falls in the context of how salvation is conceived. Both Lutheran Soteriology and TACN's Soteriology believe that salvation is available to man based on the finished work of Christ alone. This explains the grace of God in Christ Jesus and on the premise of man's faith alone, man is saved; just faith void of his effort but just his faith.

The first point of similarity between Luther's *sola fide* and TACN's doctrine of salvation is in the doctrinal alignment of both theories. The Apostolic Church, like many Protestant denominations, subscribes to the belief in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Luther's emphasis on *sola fide* aligns with this core tenet of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria. In the same vein, both theories lay important emphasis on the role of Grace in the salvation experience of a Christian. *Sola fide* underscores the primacy of God's grace in the salvation of believers. This resonates with the Apostolic Church's teachings on salvation as an expression of God's unmerited favor towards humanity.

Secondly, both doctrines of salvation counteract legalism. On the part of Luther, his doctrine was a response to what he saw as legalistic tendencies within the Catholic Church, where salvation was often tied to the performance of religious rites and good works. Similarly, The Apostolic Church, Nigeria started out as a movement against the orthodox form of Christianity; a religious form of Christianity. As such, the church in a bid to refuse falling into a works-based understanding of salvation that was prevalent in the early Christian invasion in Africa and Nigeria in specific, redefined their stance on the subject matter of salvation.

Also, both doctrines provide justification for the assurance of a believer's salvation. By emphasizing faith alone as the means of salvation, *sola fide* as propounded by Luther and TACN's Soteriology provides believers with a strong sense of assurance in their relationship with God. This assurance of salvation based on faith in Christ's finished work on the cross is a source of comfort and confidence for members of the Christian faith.

Another important similarity that both doctrines of salvation birth is the entailing empowerment for Christian living. While *sola fide* emphasizes that salvation is not earned through works, it also affirms the importance of a transformed life marked by good works as a fruit of genuine faith. The Apostolic Church draws from this aspect of *sola fide* to encourage its members to live out their faith in Christ through acts of love and service to others.

The differences between Luther's *sola fide* and TACN's doctrine of salvation however pertain to the nature of salvation. As Oderinde (2023) puts it, "there is a general consensus among Christian theologians that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation but the dynamics of salvation itself have been the subject of debate." On the part of Luther, there is no specification of the nature or dynamics of salvation either as a long-standing virtue or a potentially temporal feature in a person's life but TACN makes her stand clearly known. Simply put, Luther's views on the dynamics of salvation are not always explicitly clear-cut, and interpretations of his writings can vary. To stop where Luther stops is to simply state that Luther posits that salvation is attained only through faith in God. TACN on the other hand makes it clear that salvation can be lost if a believer refuses to remain within the jurisdiction of the Grace that saved him. So, the main point of divergence between Luther and TACN on the subject matter of salvation is that while Luther is silent on the dynamics of salvation, TACN takes an anti-Calvinist stand on the dynamism of salvation.

This study observes and argues that although TACN's theory of salvation give adequate credence to faith as presumed by Luther in its teaching, yet it does not lay enough burden of proof on the subject matter of faith when it comes to the teaching and practice of salvation among her members. Meanwhile, it is important to note that while Luther barely explains his take on the value of salvation either as an eternal gift or not, TACN states that salvation is an eternal gift and it can be lost if a Christian fails to produce works of righteousness; that is, man can lose the eternal gift of salvation if not carefully and jealously kept by him.

***Sola Fide* in the Light of Eternal Security**

Historically, the church seems to have irreconcilable differences on the subject matter of the perseverance of the saints in the faith. This discourse is popularly staged between Calvinism and Arminians. The doctrine of eternal security, as proposed by John Calvin suggests that once a person has truly been born again, such will also persevere in true faith and faithfulness, never losing their salvation. On the other hand, the teaching of James Arminius disagrees with this opinion stating that a truly born again person can renounce the faith or fail to be faithful, and thus lose their salvation.

The eternal security doctrine asserts that once a person has genuinely accepted Christ as their savior, their salvation is eternally secured and cannot be lost. Proponents of the doctrine have referred to John 10:28-29 as the Biblical basis for the doctrine.

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

Theologically, this doctrine is closely associated with Calvinism, forming part of the "TULIP" acronym (Perseverance of the Saints). However, it's also held by some non-Calvinist groups. One of the major advancement of the eternal security doctrine is that it provides assurance of Salvation for the Saints with specific reference to Romans 8:38-39:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

From the foregoing, both the doctrine of eternal security and Arminianism acknowledges Luther's *sola fide*. In both theories, salvation is attained through faith alone. However, while Calvinism purports that individuals cannot lose their salvation, Arminianism holds the opinion that a believer can renounce his faith or fail to be faithful, thereby losing his salvation. In this light, it is important to identify that TACN stands in line with Martin Luther and James Arminius. The position of these two brings a balance to TACN's doctrine of salvation.

TACN, South West Zone's Perceived Emphasis on Salvation by Works

This study observes and argues that in practice, although TACN agrees that salvation is attained through faith in Jesus Christ alone, yet, TACN Southwest zone lays prominent emphasis on works of the believers such as the physical appearance of members and social interaction among believers as the indicators of salvation, such that this is even evident in the messages of some of her Ministers. This emphasis undercuts the commitment to the principle of *sola fide* as a doctrinal foundation for TACN's Soteriology. Luther's *sola fide* lays the necessary foundation for Soteriology in TACN but at the point of deploying this fundamental principle into practice, the church is observed to fall back to justifying salvation through works. This thereby raises a form of inconsistencies in the doctrine and practice of Salvation in TACN, South West zone.

Activities such as appointment of church leaders, confirmation of full members and articulation of church members into the church's workforce are expectantly faith-based spiritual advancement activities. But then, it is observed that certain individuals assume these spiritual advancements without exhibiting faith which is the fundamental of their salvation. The implication of these is that there are individuals who have assumed church leadership positions or have received church recognition without exhibiting true faith in God.

Meanwhile, critics may question whether there is a means through which the faith of a person can be measured in order to ascertain that such a person has faith or not. In response to this, this study suggests that genuine faith produces fruit. These fruits are in any case physical attributes or attitude which showcase an individual's change of heart (salvation) but then, it is not these attributes in themselves that are important to the discourse of salvation but rather, the faith in Jesus alone that births them. So, even though a person who has been saved is expected to manifest the works of righteousness, the essence is to bring to the fore, the faith he has in Jesus alone which makes it possible for him or her to manifest these attributes.

Therefore, the emphasis that the church in contemporary times lays on works does not align with Luther's *sola fide* which in the first place provides the needed doctrinal foundation for the Pentecostal church of today. This means that the church needs to revise her approach in the teaching and practice of her soteriology. If salvation is attained through faith alone, then the works of righteousness is also produced through faith alone. This is why the fourth article of the tenets of TACN suggests that even the justification and sanctification of the believer is attained through faith in the finished works of Christ.

In as much as TACN teaches that the Christian is expected to work out his salvation, it is requisite to note that in compliance with the doctrinal foundation of her soteriology, TACN must teach and practice faith in God only even in her demand from members to produce the works of salvation. In fact, not to fall from Grace is achieved through faith and not through works.

Implication of the Study

This study examines the relevance of Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone) to The Apostolic Church in Nigeria. It shows that TACN's doctrine of salvation has its doctrinal foundation in Luther's reformation *sola fide*. This thesis provides a foundation for the teaching and practice of salvation and the Christian life in contemporary Pentecostalism which does not exclude The Apostolic Church Nigeria. *Sola fide* emphasizes that salvation is obtained solely through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any works or merit of our own. This concept was central to Martin Luther's theology during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, as he sought to challenge the prevailing notion of salvation through religious rituals and good works advocated by the Catholic Church at the time.

One of the important implications of the study is a discovery of the theological background of TACN's doctrine of salvation. The Apostolic Church Nigeria posits a theory of salvation that hinges between Luther's *sola fide* and Arminius' possibility of falling from grace. However, the study suggests that TACN's doctrine of salvation should in practice lay premium emphasis on *sola fide* which brings to the fore the finished work of Christ rather than on the possibility of falling from grace. That is, the emphasis of the doctrine of salvation should be on the perfect work of salvation which has been wrought by Christ Jesus and the faith of the believer in such work; rather than on possibility of a fall from grace.

In summary, this study highlights that Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* remains relevant to The Apostolic Church in Nigeria as it reinforces core Christian beliefs about salvation, grace, and the Christian life, while also offering insights into combating legalism and fostering assurance and empowerment among believers.

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