

# **UNDERSTANDING MODERN IDOLISATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA.**

By

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## **Abstract**

Idolatry is the love, desire, reverence, trust and worship for things or man instead of God. It is the practice where man, animate and inanimate things are preferred over against God. God in His wisdom and majesty forbade idolatry in the first and second of the ten Biblical Laws He gave through Moses. Many people take idolatry to be the worship or reverence of images- sculpted, molded, carved, graven. Idolatry is anything that takes the place of God in man. What one takes to be what one relies on, gives attention to, worships or reveres in preference to God. Over the years, idolatry has taken-on new garbs. It has taken new dimensions from graven images to things or characters that man have preferred, revered and worshipped instead of God. Man needs to always rely on God for everything (protection, providence, guidance, source of life and living, happiness etc.). But many people in Nigeria today and particularly Christians rely more on other things or activities which take the place of God in their lives. It is in the light of this that this paper seeks to give an understanding of idolatry, history of idolatry among the chosen Nation of God, Israel. It also considers the Church of Christ's view and teaching on idolatry as it pertains to Roman Catholicism, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. The paper treats some modern forms of idolatry. And finally, suggests how the Church of Christ can deal with this cankerworm.

## **Outline**

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## **Introduction**

Idolatry is a familiar term that many people are conversant with. It has been spoken of over the years. Its connotation then and today is the same. But it has taken new dimensions today. Idolatry is new now in the modern times. And some people are not aware of these new proportions that idolatry has taken. Witlessness, they say is a killer disease. Its effects can be avoided with knowledge. It is in the light of this that this write up seeks to bring to light so that people who may unknowingly be bathing in the murky pool of idolatry can be saved of its dire consequences.

## **Understanding Idolatry.**

The word idolatry is derived from the word Idol. An idol is from the Greek word 'eidolon' which means an idol or image. And idolatry is the practice of veneration of idols.

The Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines idolatry as 'the worship of idols or the worship of images that are not God.' And it defines idol as 'a material effigy that is worshipped.' A person who worships idols can be called either 'an idol worshipper,' 'an idolizer,' 'an idolater or Idolatress (in the case of a female). In simple terms, it is the worship or veneration of idols or images.

In Adeyemo ed. (2006:110) it is stated about idol that: "The Hebrew word translated as 'idol' or 'graven image' means an image carved in wood or sculpted in stone. It represents something observed in nature that people begin to worship as a deity. It is also an object that the worshippers believe they can manipulate as suits them"

To Mabilog (2016), Idols are anything that takes God's place in giving us fulfillment, satisfaction, security or significance. Many of the things that people have idolized -- both past and present -- are not necessarily bad things, but good things that take bad positions on our priority tree.

From the above definitions, I can say, Idolatry is anything that man reveres and worships, hanging his being on it and trusting it to the level that it

takes the place of God in his life. Idolatry does not refer to false pagan worship only. It's a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry entails making that which is not divine, divine to take the place of God. Idolatry is whenever man honours and reveres a creature in place of the Creator. This might be gods or demons, power, pleasure, knowledge, family, race, ancestors, games, the state, money, position, etc.

### **God Abhors/ Detests Idolatry**

God's clear warnings against idolatry are found in numerous Biblical passages. Through His prophets and leaders, God called upon the people of ancient Israel to obey Him so their lives would be filled with purpose, joy, blessings and contentment. At the same time, He strongly cautioned them to spurn the veneration of false gods (Leviticus 19:4) 'Do not turn to idols, or make for yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God'. Ezekiel 20:18 'And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols'.

But the people's inquisitiveness with idols got the better of them. The attraction they found in such worship swiftly turned them away from their Creator. They would not regard His directives or cautions but gave their time, treasure and devotion to useless idols as clearly stated in 2 Kings 17:12-15 'And they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, you shall not do this.

(13) Yet the LORD warned Israel, and Judah by every prophet, and every seer, saying, turn from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. (14) But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. (15) They despised His statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them, that they should not do like them.’

By their idolatrous practices the people of Israel became so extremely immoral that it led them into demonism and the ritual sacrificial killings of their own children. The Psalmist stated this in Psalm 106:36-38. (36) They served their idols: which became a snare to them. (37) They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; (38) they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood.’

But Why did people, who had the Interminable God in their midst, the God that has chosen them as His Special people, depart from Him into meaningless idolatry? Jeremiah answered this by giving us reason for this strange behaviour of the Israelites when God Himself wondered. Jer. 2:5 says, thus says the

LORD, ‘What wrong did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? Why did they abandon a way of life that would warrant their happiness, serenity and productivity? In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Moses gave the people an assurance of blessings that would follow them flowing from the Lord their God over against the curses stated in the preceding chapter 27. He said, (1) ‘And if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth: [2] And all these blessings shall come upon you, and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. (3) Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. (4) Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. (5) Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. (6) Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. (7) The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your eyes: they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. (8) The LORD shall command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and He shall bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. (9) The LORD will establish you as a people holy to Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in His ways. (10) And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD;

and they shall be afraid of you. (11) And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. (12) The LORD will open to you his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (13) And the LORD will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward; if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, [14] And if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.’ Service to other gods which are idols, man-made items will not attract the above blessings but attract curses which are stated in the verses following.

### **Israel’s Idolatry in Spite of God’s Warning.**

The first instance of Israel as a nation lapsing into idolatry is the unfortunate incident at Mount Sinai shortly after God entered into a covenant with them. In Exodus 19-20, we see God establishing His divine covenant with Israel as a nation after Moses led them out of Egypt where they had served the Egyptians as slaves for 400 years. ‘The time that the people of Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out

from the land of Egypt' (Ex.13:40,41). Israel stayed in Egypt for thirty years as free people, then were made slaves for four hundred years. This happened in fulfilment of God's words to Abraham: 'Then the lord said to Abram, Know of a surety that your descendants shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there and will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve and afterward, they will come out with great possessions' (Ex. 15: 13, 14). So shortly after the covenant ceremony and giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17, Moses climbed the mountain upon Yahweh's call to meet with God and to be given more directives of operation for Israel as now a Chosen, Covenanted people. Israel waited for about forty days and asked Aaron to make for them gods. Aaron made the idol of the golden calf and Israel worshipped the idol to God's apprehension. Exodus 32:1,4-6. (1) When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. (4) And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf, and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up, out of the land of Egypt. (5) When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD. (6) And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to



eat and drink, and rose up to play'. Thus a calf made of gold was idolised and it took the place of God and His servant Moses as what brought them out Egypt.

And the Israelites entered Palestine, after having wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. (Exodus 16:35) 'And the people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land; they ate the manna, till they came to the border of the land of Canaan'. When they got into Canaan, life changed from wandering to sedentary. The land's inhabitants, the Canaanites, were already deeply rooted in idolatry. Klein (2018:68) said that, 'Canaanite worship had descended into profound degradation through fertility cults, which exalted such fictional deities as Mot, the god of death and Shapash, the Sun goddess. Likewise, they worshiped Molech also named Milcom, the Canaanite version of the Egyptian god Set, the deity of fire and evil. Molech and his fertility goddess consort Ashtoreth are described in Scripture as an 'abomination' partly due to licentious sex used in their worship'. Molech was worshipped with human sacrifices attached to it. The International Bible Encyclopaedia described it thus:

"The image of Molech was a human figure with a bull's head and outstretched arms, ready to receive the children destined for sacrifice. The image of metal was heated red-hot by a fire kindled within, and the children laid on its arms rolled off into the fiery pit below. In order to drown the cries of the victims, flutes were played and drums were beaten;

and mothers stood by without tears or sobs, to give the impression of the voluntary character of their offering” (The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Volume III, page 2075).

Israel upon entry and settlement into Canaan, compromised their position and followed the abominations of the people of Canaan. They went after their idols and worshipped them. The history of Israel’s apostasy rings through the book of the Judges. Jdg.3:7 ‘And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and serving the Baals and the Ashe’roth’. Jdg.4:1 ‘And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died’ Jdg.10:6 ‘And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ash’taroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve him’. Later on in history, Israelite kings like Solomon, Jeroboam, Ahab worshipped idols. 1 Kings 11:5 ‘For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites’. But why was Ashtoreth so worshipped? The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge, Volume I, answers the question “... the primary motive of the worship of Ishtar (Ashtoreth) was the impulse to deify sensuousness and sensuality. She not only legitimated the sexual indulgences ...

but she was naturally taken as the authoress of the sexual passion ...” Jeroboam the first king of the divided upper kingdom of ten tribes made idols and made Israel to worship the idols. 1Kgs.12:28 ‘So the king (Jeroboam) took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, ‘you have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt’. 1Kgs. 21:25,26. (25) ‘There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. (26) He did abominably in going after idols, as the Ammonites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel’. So the kings of Israel led in idol worship.

What actually made the Israelites, the chosen nation of God to easily fall prey to idols is difficult to say. “Many Israelites succumbed to the allurements of the fertility-laden rituals and practices of the Canaanite religion, partly because it was new and different from the Yahwistic [Godly] religion, and possibly because of a tendency of a rigorous faith and ethic to weaken under the influence of sexual attractions” The International World History Project, essay: “Canaanite Culture and Religion,”

### ***But does Judaism Permit Idolatry?***

By no means does Judaism permit idolatry. Barry Kogan(1992:169-170), David Novak(1996:72) agreed that, Judaism prohibits any form of idolatry even if they are used to worship the one God of Judaism as occurred during the sin of

the golden calf. According to the second word of the Decalogue, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. The worship of foreign gods in any form or through icons is not allowed.

David Novak(1996:72) said that, Jewish scholars like Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda, have particularised on the matters of idolatry in the Jews worship of Yahweh. . One of their popular writing is the commentary of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon also known as Maimonides which dwelt so much on idolatry. He went on to assert that, according to this Maimonidean interpretation, idolatry in itself is not a fundamental sin, but the grave sin is the denial of God's omnipresence that ensues with the belief that God can be physical. In the Jewish belief, the only image of God is man, one who lives and thinks; God has no visible shape, and it is bizarre to make or worship images; instead man must worship the invisible God alone (73). This clearly shows that Judaism does not permit idol worship as worship to Yahweh.

Heschel (2005:73-75) stressed rightly that, ‘the commandments in the Hebrew Bible against idolatry prohibited the practices and gods of ancient Akkad, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. The Hebrew Bible states that God has no shape or form, is utterly incomparable, is everywhere and cannot be represented in a physical form of an idol’. There is nothing God can be compared to. This assertion rings through the teachings of Hebrew teachers and Leaders. Moses told his people that their God is one. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord

our God is one Lord” (Deut.6:4). And in Isaiah’s prophecies, God Himself said that, He is one and can’t be worshipped with idols. “I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images” (Isa.42:8)

Naomi Janowitz (2007:47) said that, Biblical scholars have traditionally focused on the textual evidence to construct the history of idolatry in Judaism, a scholarship that post-modern scholars have increasingly begun critiquing. This Biblical polemics, states Naomi Janowitz, has distorted the reality of Israelite religious practices and the historic use of images in Judaism. The direct material evidence is more reliable, such as that from the archaeological sites, and this suggests that the Jewish religious practices have been far more complex than what Biblical polemics suggest. Judaism included images and cultic statues in the First Temple period, the Second Temple period, Late Antiquity (2nd to 8th century CE), and thereafter. However, Kleih (2018:42) followed Janowitz line of argument concluded that, ‘Nonetheless, these sorts of evidence may be simply descriptive of Ancient Israelite practices in some—possibly deviant—circles, but cannot tell us anything about the mainstream religion of the Bible which proscribes idolatry’.

Janowitz further explained that, ‘The history of Jewish religious practice has included cult images and figurines made of ivory, mire, and seals. As more material evidence emerged, one proposal has been that Judaism oscillated between idolatry and iconoclasm. However, the dating of the objects and texts

suggest that the two theologies and liturgical practices existed simultaneously. The claimed rejection of idolatry because of monotheism found in Jewish literature and there from in Biblical Christian literature, states Janowitz, has been unreal abstraction and flawed construction of the actual history'. Neis (2013:), Bland (2001:290) agreed with Janowitz that, 'the material evidence of images, statues and figurines taken together with the textual description of cherub and "wine standing for blood", for example, suggests that symbolism, making religious images, icon and index has been integral part of Judaism'. Every religion has some objects that represent the divine and stand for something in the mind of the faithful, and Judaism too has had its holy objects and symbols such as the Menorah, Janowitz concluded.

In many Bible passages, God clearly forbids idolatry. For example, right at the giving of the covenant law, God forbade Israel from making and bearing idols for worship (Exod.20:4; Deut.5: "I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images" (Isa.42:8) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus, says the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn away from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations" (Eze.14:6). A curse is placed on people who make idols. "Cursed be the man who makes a graven or molten image (idol), an abomination to the Lord, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say Amen." (Deut.27:15). Idol worshippers are among people

who will not enter or inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor.6:9; Rev.22:15). And so, the apostle Paul enjoined the Corinthians and Christians generally saying “Therefore, my beloved, shun the worship of idols” (1Cor.10:14).

## **The Christian View of Idolatry**

Christians belong to different divides according to denominations. Generally, there are two main divides. And so I will categorise the Christian views of idolatry into two general categories: the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox views; and the views of many Protestant churches.

### **Catholic View**

The Roman Catholic Church accepts images and the veneration of Mary, Jesus Christ, and the Black Madonna and late Saints as common practices in the Catholic Church.

Goldblum et al (1992: 39-40) held that, ‘the Roman Catholic and particularly the Orthodox Churches have traditionally defended the use of icons. The debate on what images signify and whether reverence with the help of icons in Church is equivalent to idolatry has lasted for many centuries, particularly from the 7th century until the Reformation in the 16th century.’ Craighen (1914:24), Vance (1989:5-8) agreed with Goldblum that, ‘the debates have supported the inclusion of icons of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles, the iconography expressed in stained glass, regional saints and other symbols of

Christian faith. It has also supported the practices such as the Catholic mass, burning of candles before pictures, Christmas decorations and celebrations, and festive or memorial processions with statues of religious significance to Christianity.'

Gero (1973:2-7) said that St. John of Damascus, in his "On the Divine Image", defended the use of icons and images, in direct response to the Byzantine iconoclasm that began widespread destruction of religious images in the 8th century, with support from emperor Leo III and continued by his successor Emperor Constantine V during a period of religious war with the invading Umayyads. Gero quoted John of Damascus, "I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood", adding that images are expressions "for remembrance either of wonder, or an honor, or dishonor, or good, or evil" and that a book is also a written image in another form. Groschel (2010:58) concluded that, St. John defended the religious use of images based on the Christian doctrine of Jesus as an incarnation.' But we cannot accept this kind of conclusion because Jesus incarnation cannot be idolised. This is God's special revelation for man's salvation.

According to Byars (2002:44), Jeffrey (2002:18-24)'St. John the Evangelist cited John 1:14, stating that "the Word became flesh" indicates that the invisible God became visible, that God's glory manifested in God's one and



only Son as Jesus Christ, and therefore God chose to make the invisible into a visible form, the spiritual incarnated into the material form.’

The Catholics see what they do as not worship of idols. Eze (2011:11-14), Jansons (2003:386) talking about the way the Catholics look at what they do said, The Catholic defence mentions textual evidence of external acts of honor towards icons, arguing that there is a difference between adoration and veneration and that the veneration shown to icons differs entirely from the adoration of God. Citing the Old Testament, these arguments present examples of forms of "veneration" such as in Genesis 33:3, with the argument that "adoration is one thing, and that which is offered in order to venerate something of great excellence is another". These arguments assert, "the honor given to the image is transferred to its prototype", and that venerating an image of Christ does not terminate at the image itself – the material of the image is not the object of worship – rather it goes beyond the image, to the prototype.’

And the Catechism of the Catholic Church explained this position that, ‘the Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, "the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype," and "whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it." The honor paid to sacred images is a "respectful veneration," not the adoration due to God alone. And that, Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive

aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is.’ (CC:2113,2132)

Thus based on the understanding and teaching of the Catholics, production of images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Christian saints, along with prayers directed to them is prevalent among the Catholic faithful. No wonder they prefer to pray to Mary and the fallen saints calling on them to intercede for them than praying directly to God through Jesus Christ.

### **Orthodox Church View**

According to Clark and Ashley(2001:211-212), the Eastern Orthodox Church has distinguished between latria and dulia. A latria they say is the worship due to God, and latria to anyone or anything other than God is doctrinally forbidden by the Orthodox Church; however dulia has been defined as veneration of religious images, statues or icons which is not only allowed but obligatory.’ But does this understanding stand at pal with God’s second commandment? The Orthodox also practice Marian Devotion like the Catholics which is the veneration of Mary.

Broich, et al (1984:126), Giakalis(2005) said the Orthodox apologetic literature, extensively discussed the proper and improper use of images. Exegetical Orthodox literature points to icons and the manufacture by Moses (under God's commandment) of the Bronze Snake in

Numbers 21:9, which had the grace and power of God to heal those bitten by real snakes. Similarly, the Ark of the Covenant was cited as evidence of the ritual object above which Yahweh was present.' The Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787AD, accepted the use of Icons and since then the Eastern Orthodox Church has ever been celebrating the use of icons and images. Eastern Rite Catholics also accepts icons in their Divine Liturgy, Giakalis concluded.

### **Protestant View**

According to Milton (2002:187-194), the idolatry debate has been one of the defining differences between papal Catholicism and anti-papal Protestantism. He went on to say that, the anti-papal writers have prominently questioned the worship practices and images supported by Catholics, with many Protestant scholars listing it as the "one religious error larger than all others". The sub-list of erring practices has included among other things the veneration of Virgin Mary, the Catholic mass, the invocation of saints, and the reverence expected for and expressed to pope himself. The charges of supposed idolatry against the Roman Catholics were levelled by a diverse group of Protestants, from Anglicans to Calvinists in Geneva.' The issue of Veneration of Mary, the Saints and the pope featured in the 1517 AD reformation led by Martin Luther.

Batnitzky (2009:147) said, Protestants do not abandon all icons and symbols of Christianity. They typically avoid the use of images, except the

cross, in any context suggestive of veneration. The cross remained their central icon.’

Batnitzky also went on to say that Protestant often accuse Catholics of idolatry, iconolatry, and even paganism. It is good to note that, in the Protestant Reformation such language was common to all Protestants. In some cases, such as the Puritan groups denounced all forms of religious objects, regardless of whether it was a statue or sculpture, or image, including the Christian cross.

He went further that, the body of Christ on the cross is an ancient symbol used within the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches, in contrast with some Protestant groups, which use only a simple cross. In Judaism, the reverence to the icon of Christ in the form of cross has been seen as idolatry.’ In the Reformed, the simple cross sign is accepted and used but not idolised.

### **Modern Forms of Idolatry**

Mabilog (2016) in his article said, Idolatry looks completely different today from what it once was. Whereas there was a time when idols were inanimate figures and statues, today they can come in various forms. Idolatry is an issue of the heart and can thus only be broken by a transformation of the heart.

Hannah Wegman in her article stated that:

“If we are honest with ourselves, "idolatry" is a topic which many modern Christians see as antiquated and outdated. When we hear the word "idol" today, many of us automatically picture a golden statue of a bull or calf. We tend to skim over passages that include references to idolatry, because we see it as something that only Old Testament believers struggled with. But that is largely not the case. In Paul's writings to the New Testament churches, he addresses the issue of idolatry:

"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!" (Romans 1:22-25, ESV)

The reason that many of us aren't acknowledging the idols in our lives is due primarily to the fact that we have an incorrect definition and image of what idolatry truly is. Nancy Pearcey said:

‘Scripture treats the topic of idolatry far more subtly. An idol is anything we want more than God, anything we rely on more than God, anything we look to for greater fulfillment than God. Idolatry is thus the hidden sin driving all other sins’.

It is very obvious that many Nigerians today have things that are controlling them. Some Christians and clergy alike are deeply involved with things that take or occupy their lives and so they live not for God but for those things. They live to please those things. Their lives are guided by those things. God Almighty no longer matters much if not completely. We have to take a look at some of the idols in the Nigerian society and the Church. Idolatry has taken a new dimension and is manifesting its ugly head in forms other than carved, sculptured, molded, drawn or draped images. Some of these include:

## **Work.**

Work was given to man at creation. Gen.2:15 “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” And in an earlier statement, “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...’ (Gen.1:28). to subdue and have dominion entails activity. One cannot sit idly, and dominate or subdue. Work has to be done. But God does not intend that work should occupy man to relegate Him to the background and to nothing. Mabilog observed that, “Many people look to work for a sense of significance and security. While there is nothing wrong with work, it can be dangerous when it drives our decision-making to the point of completely ignoring God's ways and desires, or we put it before things that are equally or more deserving of our time.” But some people have idolised their work. Their time is for their work and so they have little or no time for God. This is work idol.

## **The Internet**

Internet is a good thing that has brought about easy and faster communication and access to information and messages. But some people including Christians have deified the internet. Their resources and time go to the internet. They trust and rely on the internet for their living more than on God. People spend long hours on the net with no time to pray and attend Church activities. Some have

through the internet resorted to watching pornographic films to the dishonor of God.

### **Money or Wealth.**

The bible tells us “the love of money is the root of all evils.” (1Tim.6:10). And again the Lord Jesus Christ himself said “You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Mat.6:24). But some people have fallen prey of money. The desire for wealth accumulation has overtaken some preachers in our Churches. Hours are spent in money matters while Gospel preaching is relegated to when everyone is exhausted and worn out. Mabilog rightly said that “Money is not exactly a modern-day temptation only, but the lesson remains the same. There is much value in money, but it is not the most valuable thing.” In many of the Churches in Nigeria, prosperity messages are the core of preaching. The teachings of the Bible are liberalised, the wealthy are free in whatever they do in the churches. The rich people are venerated, honoured and adored even by the clergy, simply because they desire to get rich. Healing masses are all avenues to make money. Sell of aprons, oils, water, salt, handkerchiefs, head ties, stickers and so on, all in the attempt to make money. In some churches, families pay huge sums of money to have the clergy attend burials of family members.

## **Celebrity Idol**

Celebs have become idols in our society. Celebs are venerated. Their shows take many people away from Worship of God. Recently, Emmy Wuks travelled from Benue state by Bicycle to meet with Davido. Something he cannot do in the name of attending a Church Program. A guy wrote on Facebook that the happiest thing that would happen to him now is see MohBad alive. Jeffery Craig 3 years ago had this to say regarding celebrity idolization.

“In today's world celebrity worship seems to be a big thing; people will follow and hold on to every word their favorite celeb says. I've even heard people refer to certain celebrities as "gods" Well I guess they are as people worship the ground that they walk on. I've heard people refer to Eddy Van Halen, Eric Clapton or the late Randy Rhoads as "Guitar gods." What people need to realize is that all of their celebrity gods in the end will drop dead, look at Elvis, John Lennon, Michael Jackson, they're dead and gone and yet people still worship them. I've even read about a John Lennon fan who committed suicide after John was assassinated - Why? Lennon didn't even know she existed; this was celebrity worship to the extreme! Get over it folks, celebrities are nothing more than mortal human beings who have nothing to offer and in the end they will all be dead and six feet under. Jesus is the one that we need to worship as He is the Son of the Living God and only He can offer us eternal life. Jesus has



more to offer than some living or dead celebrity, and only He is worthy of our worship.”

## **Phones**

Phones have become idolised in Nigeria and her Churches. Christians prefer to play games, watch movies in the midst of preaching of the Word of God in the Churches. Some Christians now attend worship services with only phones in the name of ‘I have the Bible and hymns saved on my phone. Going to the Church with Bibles is now old fashion. Some clergy even play on their phones while in service. I once rebuked a colleague who answered a call while the sermon was being preached. And another one who told the congregation that the its right for the clergy to operate on their phones and answer calls while in service. Mabilog said that, “Phones or tablets or whatever shiny piece of kit you carry around with you and can't stop checking every five minutes. If you're giving your electronic device more time and attention than your loved ones, something's wrong.” Why should phones take the place of the Almighty and the Bible in the life of a Christian. This is idolatry and utter madness.

## **Success**

God himself wants us to succeed in this life. No wonder he blessed man at Creation “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...’(Gen.1:28). But

our success is not to be at the disservice to God our Maker. Mabilog said that “God wants us to be successful, but He does not desire success to take His place in our hearts. When we pursue success outside of God's will, we will find no satisfaction, but when we choose to surrender to God and His ways, Joshua 1:8 promises that we “...will be prosperous and successful.” It's particularly easy to make success an idol when we follow other people's definitions, rather than God's.” But the desire for success has overtaken even many Christians.

### **Lying.**

Lying has taken tour of the hearts of many Christians today including the clergy. Many lie because they want to get something. Thus putting God aside and not believing in His Divine Providence again but relying on their lying abilities. People lie for varying reasons: to get positions, to cover their wrongs, to get approval, to get money and so on. Hannah Wegman quoted Nancy Pearcey as saying “ why do we lie? Because we fear the disapproval of people more than we want the approval of God. Or because we value our reputation more than we value our relationship with God. Or we are trying to manipulate someone into giving us something we think we need more than we need God. The more visible sin (lying) is driven by an invisible turn of our hearts toward something other than God as the ultimate source of security and happiness.”

## **Image**

Image here is the way we want people to look at us or see us. People spend a lot of time and resources trying to project their images and have the world see them. Even Christians do care more about their image and name than they care about projecting God's image. Mabilog said,

In the age of Facebook and Instagram, we can be obsessed with projecting the image of the perfect life, perfect relationship, perfect kids, perfect holidays, perfect friendship group...Just choose your filter and in one click, your life can look like everybody else's dream come true. But the Christian faith is about the joy found in God, more than in ourselves or the things of this world. Let's make sure we're projecting this image to others more than anything else. In amongst all those pictures of yourself and all the great things in your life, are there any pictures of your church or anything that would speak to the world of your faith in God?

## **Sex.**

Sex is a gift from God at creation for man to enjoy and through which procreation can be achieved. Although sex was designed and created by God, man has maligned and distorted its value and purpose. We can be easily driven by the flesh instead of the word of God, especially in an age when nudity is celebrated over modesty, sexual exploits are boasted over, and our visual culture is awash with provocative images. In this day and age, sex has become an idol that drives us to make small and big decisions that will lead us away from Christ if we're not careful. Sex has taken over the lives of even the clergy

to the extent they harass their Church members and even minors. What a shame? Some Christians including clergy have become sex addicts. They go after anything in the skirts. This is sex idolisation.

## **Sports and Games**

Sports and games are things that help in projecting the image of people and even states and nations. They are useful in the area of health and provide joy and happiness as well. It is not a sin to take part in sports and games, neither is it wrong to watch. Today some people take sports and games to occupy the better part of their lives. Football, boxing, wrestling, Ludo, chess, draft, cards are some of the sports and games that Nigerians have idolised. Many people have made themselves worshippers of John Cena, Johnson, Tyson Fury, Anthony Joshua, Lionel Messi, Sancho, Ronaldo and others. Many People and Christians prefer missing any other thing than missing these people in the rings or in the field. Clubs like Manchester United, Manchester City, Dortmund, Chelsea, Arsenal, Liverpool, Juventus, Barcelona, Real Madrid, and Bayern Munich have fans that give their time, money, attention and everything to show their support. They prefer going to watch their teams play than going for Church activities. Some clergy even prefer to miss their preaching assignment or make alternate arrangement to have time to watch their favoured team play. Thus, games and sports have taken the place of God in their lives, tantamount to idol worship.

## **Family and Children**

Children and Family are important to everyone. It is God that gives us families and children. But where people give their time, resources, money and rely on these relegating God to the background, it becomes idolisation.

The list is endless. Materialism, the self, the state, Politics, Hatred, and others are all forms idolatry is manifesting in. Time and space cannot allow me to consider all in detail.

## **The Role of the Church in dealing with this menace**

The Church in Nigeria has a big role to play in the fight against modern Idolatry which is eating deep into the Nigerian Church and Society.

1. The Bible teaches us to always put God first in our hearts. Idolatry is putting or having some other thing that takes the place of God in one's life. If we put God Absolutely first in our lives, created things will not be idolised in our lives again. Jesus Himself commanded us "But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mat.6: 33).
2. Those who have idolised things in their lives should put them off. Colossians 3:5 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is

idolatry." It means "Cutting off from Completely." It is making a turn around, killing such things from one's members.

3. The Church needs to deliver those who are in this mess. Fervent prayers, counselling, deliverance sessions have to be carried out. Revival has to be done.
4. Those who endure in such practices should be rebuked and if unrepentant, should be disassociated.
5. Idolaters, idolatresses need to repent, confess and ask for forgiveness from God so that they will be made anew for God's glory.
6. A return to the right Preaching and Teaching of the Word of God is a must be done. The Church of Jesus Christ must return to the Bible and the right teaching as the Apostles of Christ did. Right teaching with God and His Christ at the center of the teaching will work wonders in ridging-off the Church of idolatry.
7. The Church must rise up and unite to fight this dare devil, the cankerworm that is eating deep into the Church's fabrics. We should shun our divides (denominationalism) but unite to fight idolatry spiritually out of the church.

## **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, these idols—anything we put before God—will not give us fulfilment but will leave us empty because they were never projected to take the

place God should occupy. So, what is the way out of this problem? Because certainly we must earn a living, care for ourselves and families and carry out other daily duties. All these does not escape God's knowledge. Let us rely on God's providence. We should leave no space for idol curiosity nor pinch our expectations and dreams on people, things, projects and humanly-designed notions. Rather, let us always give top priority to God and His Word and hang our hopes on the great Kingdom coming at the Glorious return of Christ.

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