

## A Theological Response to Spiritual Decline Among Christian Youth in Nigerian Society

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### **Abstract**

*Spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigerian society has become a crucial phenomenon posing a significant threat to both the church and its clergy. Biblical examples of spiritual decline among youth include Samson, Eli's children, Samuel's children, and Demas. Factors contributing to spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria include lack of proper parental upbringing and care, inadequate biblical teachings, bad company and peer influence, youth exclusion in church planning and programs, technological and social media influence, societal and economic pressures, and spiritual attacks. The consequences of spiritual decline include apathy, coldness, lukewarmness, and massive exodus of Christian youth from the church and church activities, affecting both the church and its leaders. Theological responses to mitigate this decline include emphasis on godly parental upbringing, discipleship and follow-up, youth inclusion in church planning and programs, lively messages and fervent prayer, integration of faith and fun, and building a lively youth department. The researcher concludes that addressing the spiritual decline of the Christian youth in Nigeria is both inevitable and urgent, considering their crucial role in the church. Whatever affects them affects the entire church.*

**Key words:** *spiritual decline, Christian, youth, mitigate.*

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### **Introduction**

Spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria has become a crucial menace that plagues Nigerian churches. It is so problematic and prevalent that it has touched almost every facet of denominations and other Christian organizations in Nigeria. Significantly, Bible reveals the cases of Samson, Eli's children, Samuel's children and Demas as examples of youth that manifested spiritual decline.

Ultimately, several factors that influence spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria include: lack of proper parental upbringing and care, Inadequate Biblical Teachings, bad company and peer influence, youth's exclusion in church planning and programmes, technological and social media influence, societal and economic pressures, and spiritual attacks. Consequently, there is so much apathy, coldness, lukewarmness and massive exodus of several Christian youth from the church and church activities, which pose significant threat on both the church and its clergy.

The theological response employed by the researcher to mitigate the spiritual decline of the Christian youth in Nigeria encompasses the following components: emphases on godly parental upbringing, discipleship and follow-up, youth inclusion in church planning and programmes,

lively messages and fervent prayer, Integration of faith and fun, and building a lively youth department. The sub topics to be discussed includes: Overview of Spiritual Decline among Christian Youth in Nigeria, Biblical Perspective of Spiritual Decline, Causes and Effects of Spiritual Decline among Christian Youth, and Theological Response to Spiritual Decline among Christian Youth in Nigeria.

### **Overview of Spiritual Decline Among Christian Youth in Nigeria**

Youth has been defined in several ways by many people, depending on their worldviews. The United Nations defines youth as people within ages 15 to 24 years, while the Nigerian Baptist convention defines youth to be people from ages 17 to 40 years. However, Adesina Abegunde regards the youth as young people from ages 17 to 30 years”<sup>1</sup> The researcher places the youth as young people within ages 15 to 30 years.

Ultimately, Christian youth are the young people between the ages of 15 to 30 years who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and personal Saviour. Adesina Abegunde perceives the Christian youth as the ones that are brought up by their parents and guidance in the fear of God, who also absolves the virtue of faith, love, courage, and uphold the programme of disseminating the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> Christian youth are known for their confidence and enthusiasm to embrace and uphold the course of Christ.

Conversely, spiritual decline refers to a state of low spiritual performance in one’s relationship with God. This can manifest as apathy or lack of interest in spiritual disciplines such as Bible studies, prayers, and church services. It may also degenerate into prioritizing material possessions over spiritual growth, condoning sins, rejecting spiritual responsibilities, avoiding constructive criticism, distancing godly influences.

Remarkably, spiritual decline may be characterized by a close affinity with those outside the faith, adopting worldly values and being extremely engrossed with secular affairs. Evidently, some people look good outside, but bad inwardly. Dough Fields declares, “God isn’t looking for people who act righteous on the outside but aren’t on the inside. God is more concerned about your being than your doings.”<sup>3</sup> The rationale for measuring spiritual vibrancy is based on the inward transformation and ongoing lifestyle.

Spiritual decline among the Christian youth in Nigeria has become a perverse ecclesiological phenomenon and a pressing concern that poses significant threat to Christendom. This issue does not only affect young church members; it also affects pastors’ children. Sadly, this menace has left the clergy and other church leaders perplexed. Spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised, because it is so prevalent that every denomination and church leaders lament greatly about its consequences, not only on the unity and development of the church, but has also on its divine goals and objectives. Various efforts made by several denominations to curb the menace of spiritual decline among the Christian youth seem not to have yielded effective results, which necessitated the need to for this paper.

Ultimately, addressing spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria requires identifying its immediate causes and effects. Understanding these factors can provide effective

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<sup>1</sup> Adesina Abegunde Recounting Youth Ministry Model. (Ogbomoso: Kingdom Impact Publishing Media Ltd. 2025),17.

<sup>2</sup> V. E. Asoquo, “Christian Youth and Morality Question in Methodist News 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Edition, 2003), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Dough Fields, *Your First Two years in youth Ministry*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 66.

solutions to the decline, leading to spiritual renewal, growth, and revitalization of the church's spiritual mandate. This, in turn, can foster church unity, development, and the fulfilment of its divine goals.

### **Biblical Perspective of Spiritual Decline and its Relevance to the Nigerian Context**

Both Testaments vehemently warn against spiritual decline. It is seen as neglecting God, arrogance, self-reliance and idolatry (Duet 8:11-14:19). Samson was an example of one of the youths who had spiritual decline in the Old Testament. His close affinity with Delilah caused him a lot (Judges 16:1-31). Furthermore, Joash experienced a spiritual downfall which led him to idolatry just after the death of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron. 24). Barton Bruce affirms that it is easy to be too busy in managing one's wealth that God is pushed out of one's life.<sup>4</sup> Being self-reliant, engrossed in riches, influenced by power, position, intelligence, wisdom, skill, and negligent of God, denote spiritual decline.

Demas deserted the ministry because of worldly influences. Similarly, in Hebrews 6:4-6, the New Testament warns against spiritual decline and also highlights the gravity of apostasy and the necessity for resilience. God is much interested in spiritual growth. S. A. K. Olaleye submits, "Spiritual growth deals with one's relationship with the Lord."<sup>5</sup> The basic aim of biblical rebukes is not to insult people, but to foster spiritual growth.

### **Causes and Effects of Spiritual Decline Among Christian Youth in Nigeria**

**Lack of Parental Upbringing and Care:** Every Christian parent is indebted to their children in training them, following the biblical guidelines in the statement: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Roy G. Irving and Roy B. Zuck declare, "Indeed, each parent is responsible for the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual upbringing of his child. The home has an immeasurable influence-for the good or bad -on the child."<sup>6</sup> Conversely, youth can experience spiritual decline as they grow when such parental roles are not effectively implemented.

Sadly, a husband grieves over his ugly experience. He rebuked his wife for refusing to reprimand her son who stole her money, but the woman responded, "It is better for my money to be stolen by my son than another person, for I know that when he grows, he will replace it." Christian youth from such homes are likely to experience spiritual decline. Philemon Solomon laments on Eli's failure to replicate discipline on his sons, which affected his ministry. He complains how some parents have left their children to become objects of shame and disgrace to parents and the church.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, some pastors rarely rebuke their young ones. Conversely, they suffer spiritual decline.

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<sup>4</sup> Barton Bruce *Life application Study Bible* (Michigan: Tyndale House publishing, 1996), 350.

<sup>5</sup> S. A. K. Olaleye, *Strategies for Church Growth*. (Lagos: Spirit and Life Equipment Ministry, 2012), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Roy G. Irving and Roy B. Zuck eds, *Youth and the Church: A Survey of Church's Ministry to Youth*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Philemon Solomon, "Moral and Spiritual Decline Among Christian youths: A Careful Approach of Eli's Family" (Dynamic theological Seminary, Kwale Delta State. (20<sup>th</sup> May, 2023), <https://www.google.com/search?q=spiritual-decline-among-christian-youth-in-nigeria+pdf7oq=s&gs-icrp=> (accessed March 18, 2025).

Regrettably, the constant quarrels of some parents at home make the atmosphere unbearable for their children. Sometimes, their friends or peers become their advisers. Jim Burns asserts “The shift in a major influence is really quite startling. ..., mother and father were replaced by friends and peers ....”<sup>8</sup> When parental roles are vacant, wrong people may occupy them, leading to the spiritual decline of the youth involved.

**Inadequate Biblical Teachings:** Some youth who are born and raised in the church can hardly differentiate being an unbeliever from being a believer in Christ, because their church does not provide adequate biblical teachings about new birth, its requirements and maintenance. They may likely move away as they grow. Chap Clark asserts, “First, the ministry of the Bible—preaching, teaching, and reading—is the primary means by which God saves and sanctifies youth.”<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, youth with biblical foundation are not always vulnerable to influences that can destroy their faith. Akinwale Oloyede says “the Bible is the sure source of guidance.”<sup>10</sup> Any youth that is guided by the Bible survives adverse situations.

**Bad Company and Peer Influence:** Bad company and peer influences are equally factors that give rise to spiritual decline of Christian youth in Nigeria. Bible rightly advises “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.” (1 Cor 15:33) Some Christian youths are victims to spiritual decline as a result of bad company and influence of peer groups. Conversely, Mark Yaconeill explains “Parents want their children to be safe from bad kids and bad deeds. Church members want youth who are courteous and respectful....”<sup>11</sup> Sadly, the influence of bad company and peers make such expectations of parents and the church impossible.

### **Exclusion of youth in Church’s Planning and Programmes**

The exodus of large number of youths from the church constantly pose a serious threat to the church. In relation to this, Mark Yaconeill unveils, “I was invited to a meeting at a local church to talk about youth ministry. Parents and other church members were distressed that young people had stopped attending, despite the church’s investment of time and money ....”<sup>12</sup> Apparently, part of this exodus of the youth from the church could be traced from the exclusion of youth from the planning and programmes of the church.

Some churches do not consider the youth while drawing out the plan and the programmes of their church. Mark Yaconeill affirms that “...the programming in the 20<sup>th</sup> century church was majorly focused on adults...”<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the contemporary youth have things that attract them. They are

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<sup>8</sup> Jim Burns, *The Youth builder*. (Eugene: Harvest house Publishers, 1988) 34

<sup>9</sup> Chap Clark, ed *Youth Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: five views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing house, 2015), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Akinwale Oloyede, *Introduction to Christian Theology in African context* (Osogbo: House celebrity Publishers, 2023), 73.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Yaconeill, *Contemplative youth Ministry Practicing the Presence of Jesus*. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 63.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Yaconeill, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

bound to abscond from the church and its activities when there is nothing that motivates them. According to Amolara Abosede Areo, “young people respond most to contexts that stimulate and engage them in all areas of human experience including the emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual and social dimensions.”<sup>14</sup> Lack of motivation resulting from the youth’s exclusion in church programmes has been one of the significant factors that mitigate their spiritual growth.

**Technological and Social Media Influences:** Technology and social media have brought significant transformations, improvement and relevance to humanity. Conversely, they could be detrimental if not appropriately applied. Some youth live in social isolation, clinging only to their phones and other gadgets without any meaningful interactions with family members, including parents. Jim Burns asserts, “Youth workers must seriously consider the fact that in our mobile society some young people are retreating from making significant friendships. The result is a sense of loneliness.”<sup>15</sup> Often, a life of loneliness resulting from excessive attachment to technological gadgets can engender a serious distance from God.

**Societal and Economic Pressures:** The societal upheaval and the fluctuating economic system of this nation are also crucial factors that frustrate Christian youth in this nation. Fashions, excessive increase in prices of goods and the lifestyles of the people in the society pose significant pressures on them.

In respect to societal and economic pressures, burns asserts, “The young people that you and I work with today are different from those of any previous generation ... The same teenager is filled with more stress, anxiety, and pressure than teens of any previous generation.”<sup>16</sup> Indubitably, the reactions and the inability of some youth in resisting certain societal and economic pressures are capable of affecting their spiritual life.

**Spiritual Attacks:** Factually, some Christian youths have become vulnerable to spiritual attacks, leading to spiritual decline, regardless of their good Christian background. Despite the godly upbringing of Samuel’s children, they did not follow his footsteps (1 Sam :1-3). This could be regarded as an attack of Satan to Samuels’ children, so as to frustrate him.

Satan has always been at work, but his influence is particularly pronounced now. His tactics can be direct or indirect, yet overwhelming. Media such as graphic Netflix shows, violent and addictive video games, and involvement in activities that dabble in the supernatural can desensitize young people, leading them down paths they never intended to tread. This can open doors to Satan's influence in their lives<sup>17</sup> The importance of media cannot be overstated; however, it has become a focal point for Satanic influence on youth, particularly when misused or when they become overly engrossed in it.

### **Theological Response to Spiritual Decline among Christian Youth in Nigeria Emphasis on Godly Parental Upbringing**

Spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria has become a crucial menace to the church and the Christian parents as well. John O. Enyinnaya says “the church should wake up the challenge

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<sup>14</sup> Amolara Abosede Areo, Strategic Christian Parenting. (Ogbomoso: Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd., 2021), 76.

<sup>15</sup> Jim Burns the *Youth Builder*, (Eugene: Harvest house Publishers, 1988) 34.

<sup>16</sup> Burns, 31.

<sup>17</sup> Brain Baker,” Satan’s Attacks on youth” <https://youthministry.wol.org/multiple/satans-attack-on-our-youth-brain-baker/> (accessed May 21, 2025)



by being the church it ought to be....”<sup>18</sup> The church should constantly admonish parents in the church to take up their roles seriously. Paul saw the faith in Timothy as a reflection of what was in both his mother and his grandmother. (2 Tim. 1:5). “They communicated their strong Christian faith in Timothy.”<sup>19</sup> Parental godly training reflects on their children, and helps them to withstand spiritual fall.

**Discipleship and Follow-up:** The church should intensify their efforts on discipleship and follow-up, which conform to Christ’s command (Mat 28:20) and Paul’s follow up (Acts 15:36). These two joined responsibilities can effectively mitigate the problem of spiritual decline of Christian youth. Some youths are neither adequately disciplined nor followed up. It is a problem.

### **Youth Inclusion in church Planning and Programme**

The church should consider the youth by including programmes of their interest. Youth do not like to be despised. Apostle Paul said to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young...” (1 Tim 4:12) Most youth do not feel comfortable in a church where their opinions do not count. Chap Clark submits, “...we must commit to making sure every young person knows that they matter ....”<sup>20</sup> The youth work zealously when they feel accepted and accommodated.

Mark H. Senter says “This leads to the conclusion that the pastor and the congregation have a responsibility to include youths in the priority and functions of the congregation.”<sup>21</sup> This inclusion is capable of retaining the youth and their faith.

**Lively Messages and Effectual Fervent Prayer:** Spiritual decline among the youth is inevitable in a church whose worship is monotonous. Conversely, a church with lively messages and effective prayer retains them. Dayilim Danfulani & Ayo Atowoju pine, “Spiritual renewal will not only fill the hearts of people, but it will also change people.”<sup>22</sup> The youth are earnestly transformed where there are Lively messages and effectual fervent prayers. Walt Mueller points out that “One of the great mysteries of prayer is that it leads to comprehension of and conformity to God’s will.”<sup>23</sup> Prayer is a great vessel that aligns the youth with God’s will. Emiola Nihinlola opines that “Christian prayer life needs to be constant with the kingdom lifestyle.”<sup>24</sup> Prayer confines Christian youth within the borderline of God’s kingdom. “No prayer equals no power.”<sup>25</sup> A praying church produces resilient Christians. Lively messages and fervent prayers retain youth easily.

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<sup>18</sup> John Oluchi Enyinnaya, *Theological Incongruence in Africa and the Search for Theology Fit for the People of God* (Ogbomosho: Kingdom Impact Publishing Media Ltd., 2023),60.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce, 2425.

<sup>20</sup>Clark, 85.

<sup>21</sup> Mark H. Senter 111 wisely Black and Chap Clark and Malan Nel, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 24.

<sup>22</sup> Dayilim Danfulani & Ayo Atowoju, *Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: A Theological Reflection* (Lagos: B Print Publishing, 2012), 28.

<sup>23</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of the Youth Culture*, (USA: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 180.

<sup>24</sup> Emiola Nihinlola, *Theology for Living: Essays in African Context*. (Ogbomosho: Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Ltd., 2021), 262.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred P. Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching*. (Murfreesboro: Sword of the Publisher, 2000),44.

**Integrating Faith and fun:** The church should endeavour to incorporate activities like singing or music with biblical teachings, in order to retain the youth. This can be done by constantly inviting some gospel artists who are both singers and preachers. This appropriates with the words of the psalmist (Psalm 100:1-5) David W. Robins admits, “But students need the right tools to help them focus their minds on God’s truth.”<sup>26</sup> Essential tools easily help to retain the youth in the faith. “Physical exercise has some values” (1 Tim 4:8). Youths crave for varieties.

**Building a Lively Youth Department:** A lively youth’s department help greatly in mitigating the problems of spiritual decline. “One of the major goals of any youth ministry is to provide an opportunity to form a healthy, Christ-cantered community of peers influencing each other in a positive way.”<sup>27</sup> Youth with godly influence help to keep their fellows in the faith.

### Conclusion

This paper has studied spiritual decline among Christian youth in Nigeria as a matter of pressing concern that has affected every dimension of the Christendom. Factors that contribute to spiritual decline among the Christian youth include wrong parental upbringing, lack of parental care and examples, lack of proper Christian foundation, bad company and peer influence, youth’s exclusion in church programmes, technological and social media influence, societal and economic pressures, and spiritual attacks.

The theological response adopted by the researcher to combat the spiritual decline of the Christian youth in Nigeria includes: emphases on godly parental upbringing and care, discipleship and follow-up, youth inclusion in church planning and programmes, lively messages and fervent prayer, integrating faith and fun, and building a lively youth department. The researcher submits that addressing the spiritual decline of the Christian youth in Nigeria is both inevitable and urgent, considering that they are the life wire of the church. Whatever that affects them affects the entire church.

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<sup>26</sup> David W. Robins, *Building a Youth Ministry that Builds Disciples*. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2011), 213.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

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