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Review

Tengey, Samuel, *Critical Issues in Contemporary Church*. Church Resource, Accra, 2017, ISBN: 9789988264864

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Dr Samuel Tengey is the founder of Church Resource and GSR Consulting, which mainly equips the church through resources such as this book, consultations, and training. Having grown up as a minister's son, and based on his personal ministry experiences from a young age, Tengey identifies critical issues in the contemporary church globally, particularly in Africa. It is often assumed that because the church is a spiritual body, everything done there must have a spiritual approach. Tengey disagrees with this premise. While upholding spiritual values and approaches, the church is also an organisation that needs organisational and managerial skills to succeed.

Some of the critical issues the contemporary church is confronted with are church growth, unresolved conflicts, lack of organisational skills, backsliding, nominalism, recruitment of members from other churches, bad leadership, lack of customer care values (perhaps pastoral care would be a more suitable term), and the challenge of other religions, particularly Islam. Tengey is concerned about how sophisticated the nature of sin is becoming. Exacerbated by the media and the increased use of the internet, pornography and other unbiblical movements like homosexuality and feminism are coming to the doorsteps of almost everyone. As a feminist/womanist theologian myself, I wonder if the author does not lean toward patriarchal tendencies.

After foregrounding the pertinent issues confronting the contemporary church, Tengey proposes that the church needs strategic intelligence, which is the ability to strategically make the most of opportunities and to mitigate

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threats and unforeseen circumstances, to succeed. The church needs to enhance its managerial and organisational leadership skills by learning from the corporate world and other institutions to effectively operate. One cannot ignore the competitive nature of church and ministry. Hence, there is the demand for churches to find their niche and uniquely brand themselves if they are to survive.

Tengey proposes the following principles as vital to the success of the church: well-defined vision and mission statements; a statement of core values; strategy; and strategic planning based on a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analysis of internal factors identifying and revising relevant activities, policies, skills, values, and other variables accordingly. Furthermore, the church needs an appropriate structure in place. It must set ambitious targets and ensure that there is an excellent human resource system. Intensive training and development; a competent financial department; marketing/outreach and research; and intelligence units are all essential to the growth and success of the church. Tengey juxtaposes these organisational principles with biblical verses and principles, making them relevant and appropriate for a spiritual context.

Like industries, churches must identify their unique qualities and understand how they differ from others to remain relevant and to keep up with the competition. Tengey borrows concepts from the corporate world by adopting Porter's 5Force Analysis, which assists industries in understanding the forces and dynamics affecting their output. Tengey applies four of Porter's five forces to the church: (1) the threat of new entrants, (2) the power of buyers (members and how they can easily switch churches in contemporary times due to the availability of many options), (3) the availability of substitutes, which better explains the previous point (the power of media and the internet even makes the options easily accessible), and (4) competitive rivalry, which may not be expected to exist in the spiritual setting but undoubtedly does exist.

In the current era of *customerism*, whereby the customer reigns, members leave when they are not satisfied. In terms of competitive rivalry, churches can respond in one of two ways: they can do nothing and expect God to deal spiritually with the situation, or they can escalate the level of competitiveness with counteracting activities. Tengey's framework provides the platform for

gaining industry-specific intelligence by in-depth analyses of the church's status and activities while asking very critical questions regarding specific programs and core values.

While Tengey urges churches to identify and maintain their well-branded and unique niches, it is imperative to pay particular attention to the theological and spiritual dimensions. A church's focus must be on their specific calling and not mimic others. Tengey calls for examination, evaluation, and revaluation of programs and activities. This will also call for research and surveys, which may sometimes render leadership vulnerable; nonetheless, this is very crucial for the growth of the church. . Tengey does well to identify the problems with the church, but he is too cautious in critiquing the kind of leadership training rendered at the seminaries, which might lie at the core of the critical issues. If pastors are trained to see the church as a spiritual entity, that is how they will approach church administration. While Tengey admonishes presbyters, church boards, and those in leadership to understand their role as supportive—they are not to control the pastor—what about pastors who disregard the wisdom and contribution of the laity, thinking that they alone must have the final say?

Tengey explores some critical issues for the church, mostly to do with organisation and “business”, but he neglects other critical issues, such as domestic abuse, the marginalisation of women, and exclusion of persons with disability. Even though the threat of the media is acknowledged, there are other dimensions within the social media space where members' privacy is compromised through live and uncensored transmission. This does not suggest that social media is bad, it can be fully utilised with discretion. God is somehow turned into a transactional God who needs a seed to multiply. Although the book is well written and structured, I find the use of Wikipedia as a reference source problematic.

Critical Issues in Contemporary Church is a must-read for pastors, especially those in Africa, and theological institutions should consider it for use as a textbook. The church indeed needs to look beyond spirituality and embrace organisational and managerial skills as proposed by Tengey to succeed.