

The Role of the Nigerian Church Pastor in National Transformation: An Expose

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Abstract

Election tension and economic corruption in Nigeria are almost becoming a socio-economic and political epidemic influenza in the sense that Nigeria's politico-economy is rapidly being affected due to moral decadence in the society. The withdrawal of Christians from politics is rather posing more problem than solution. Therefore, using the exposition approach, this paper sought to challenge and sensitize the church pastor (priest) in Nigeria to play the role of national transformation especially in relation to Christian ethics and electioneering process. The paper argued based on the premise that the pastor's role in the promotion of moral values, ethical reorientation, epitomization of righteousness in the Society and civic education will act as an antidote to moral decadence, political demagogue and economic sabotage in Nigeria. This work was concluded on the presupposition that the role of the Nigerian Church pastor in national transformation is very key to the development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Role, Nigerian Church, National Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of National transformation has been in vogue for a very long time in Nigeria and it is been revisited in both the academia and political spheres. At present the slogan project of President Good luck Jonathan is: "transformation agenda." Although, this subject matter has been discussed over time, yet Nigeria has not been transformed enough, social-culturally, religiously, economically and politically. If so, there are a lot of works to be done to transform Nigeria in all the dimensions so mentioned above. In this case, the pastor is being called upon to his or her bit.

Therefore, the propelling factor for this paper is the situation of moral decadence, political demagogue and economic sabotage observed the contemporary Nigeria. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to challenge and sensitize the church pastor (priest) in Nigeria to play the role of national transformation especially in relation to Christian ethics and electioneering process. Doing this will take some processes and as such, the expository paradigm shall be explored as a methodology.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The English concept of pastor is being referred to as a Christian minister or priest in charge of a congregation and as somebody who is not a minister or priest but who gives spiritual advice to a group of people (Encarta, 2009). The concept of the pastor is very clear in the bible as well. The word pastor is from the Greek word poimen and it means a guide, protector or shepherd (O'Donovan, 1995:161). The meaning is clearer in Jesus' re-commissioning of Peter saying, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). Paul grouped pastors and teachers together in Ephesians 4:11 probably because the duo are so often found in association with each other. Since it is the responsibility

of the shepherd to feed the flock, both pastoral and teaching ministries complement each other. The pastor's role is to lead, feed and care for his flock. The pastor must be compassionate and patient. He must carry the church in his heart and feed them with the truth of God. In the context of this work, the word pastor means a church priest or congregational minister.

Moreover, transformation according to the Encarta (2009) means a complete change, usually into something with an improved appearance or usefulness. It also means the act or process of transforming somebody or something.

3. THE NIGERIAN MILIEU: AREAS IN NEED OF TRANSFORMATION

3.1. Educational System

The educational system in Nigeria is deteriorating by the day to the extent that Nigerian parents are now sending their children to neighboring African countries like Ghana, Zambia, etc. There are infrastructural decay in many Nigerian secondary and post secondary schools. The academia which is supposed to be the place of academic and moral nurture has become the home of corruption and cultism (Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi, 2010). Employment of teachers and lecturers are now done by politician not based on academic excellence and moral probity of the candidate. While qualified candidates are edged out, some less qualified persons find their ways into the system. The resultant effect is the type of graduates that are being produced into the society today. While some lecturers sexually harass students, some others extort money from student in the name of hand outs and other guises. Many tertiary schools owned by the government especially state government have become so expensive for the child of the average Nigerian parents. All these calls for total transformation as we challenge the government of the day to properly fund education.

3.2. Infrastructure

Almost all our roads are in a deplorable situation across the nation. Although, the government of president Goodluck Jonathan is working hard to transform the road net works in Nigeria, there are still more to be done. Many state governors are far behind in road infrastructure. The Nigerian masses are in need of clean pipe born water, good hospitals, good road net works, functional industries and uninterrupted power supply. It is either these items are absent, malfunctioning or functioning below installed capacities.

3.3. Socio-Economic Sphere

Economic corruption is also prevalent in Nigeria. In an attempt to use the experience of prophet Isaiah in the Bible (chapter 6:5-8) to proffer a solution to the nagging issue of corruption in Nigeria, Ossai-Ugbah (2014), opined that:

One of the greatest needs of present day Nigeria is a realization of one's deep sense of lost humanity and awfulness of corrupting influences. The greater human understanding of the character of human guilt, the greater will be the sense of utter unworthiness. Isaiah's cry of woe is a cry of awakening to morality and moral participation in the context of society. There is a demand for ethical and ritual purity as against ethical and moral impurity because all these embrace the totality of religious experience. Corruption is first an individualized before it becomes societal.

The above quotation depicts the moral decadence in the Nigerian society and the need to turn to God for cleansing. It is reported by the former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Ribadu Nuhu, that Nigerian past leaders stole N64 trillion

equivalent to US\$500 billion at the current exchange rates, from public coffers within a period of forty (40) years, and when this figure is benchmarked against the 2008 budget of N2.456 trillion, this translates into a budget of 26 years (Ukoni, 2010). Apart from Mr. James Onanefe Obori (former governor of Delta State), Mr. Lucky Igbenedion (former governor of Edo State) and a few others, no other political office holder in their capacities have been successfully brought to book for corruption. In recent times, looting of public funds in Nigeria is in the increase. Former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun was said to have once paid the lip service of kicking against corruption but was accused of unlawfully enriching himself to the tune of over N13 billion and was sacked from office and was convicted (Igbuzor, 2008). Most recently, Mr. John Yusufu Yakubu, the former head of the Police Pension Board was discovered to have embezzled N23.3 billion of the police pension fund and it was treated with laxity by the court (Ughegbe, and Onyekwere, 2013). This judgment appears to be encouraging people to loot the nation. Can Nigeria succeed in the fight against corruption if she continues like this?

A lot of people in Nigeria are involved in corruption in one way or the other. For example, some parents aid and encourage their children in examination malpractice. Another glaring example of corruption in the society is the petrol station operators who cheat on costumers by adjusting their fuel pumps. Almost all the people who promote corruption in Nigeria in the past and present are either graduates from a tertiary institution or at least have obtained secondary school education. Many of them are adherents of one religion or the other in Nigeria. The list goes on and on. All these raise the question: what is the way forward? We cannot deny the fact that corruption in Nigeria is affecting the growth of the nation's economy. This aspect of Nigeria's life need total transformation.

3.4. Socio-Political Sphere

The political sphere of the Nigerian nation needs transformation in so many areas. Some political leaders in Nigeria are yet to move with the tide of transformation. This is why some politicians blackmail and tell lies to outdo their opponents thereby bringing bitterness to bare in the society. They overheat the polity for their personal gain. The judiciary and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) need transformation in order to give right judgments and conduct free, fare and credible election respectively in Nigeria. The Failure of Governance and Leadership in Nigeria is also responsible for the present situation in Nigeria. So many Nigerian opposition politicians who do not see anything other than power in Aso Rock are quick to point accusing fingers at President Goodluck Jonathan in order to discredit him for their own advantage. When we are talking about leadership failure, we are not referring to just Good luck Jonathan but a totality of previous and present leadership including those politicians who are claiming to be saints and messiah of Nigeria. They prefer to frustrate the system in order to prove a point for their own advantage. Before and after Independence, Nigeria is a country blessed with natural and human resources so vast and rare. Kanyip (2014) pointed out that Africa most populous nation, a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, like Saudi Arabia, Angola, Kuwait etc., who have urgently deployed these natural resources to make their nations into the masterpieces they are today. But can that be said of Nigeria? Nigeria is on its knees despite the presence of all these aforementioned development opportunities.

There is a break down and decay of social infrastructure, health services are largely unavailable, education is costly and without recognizable standards, power generation and energy supply is epileptic. Pensioners and civil servants are denied and owed their legitimate payments and dues. For lack of security there is breakdown of law and order in the polity, people are robbed, maimed, kidnapped and killed at will by fanatical terrorist known as "boko boys."

The country is so rich but the majority of the people are poor, living on a meal per day. Despite an increasing budget, undeniable citizen rights like free education, health care, social services and trust funds are waved away for lack of funds. How did Nigeria come to this sorry state? What is directly responsible for this gross national failure? ‘What went wrong with Nigeria?’ This is because of lack of good governance and leadership in the nation (Dike, 2013; Kanyip, 2014). Leadership and governance is the bane of our society, we have been so unfortunate to have at the helm of our national institutions clueless, thoughtless and insensitive individuals who consider leadership and office as a means of self-glorification, enrichment and positioning. They lack ideological leanings; they are not progressives and hence do not understand the full import of the word “national service” like Moses and Jesus had (Kanyip, 2014). The nation was disorganized by the corrupt years of military regime, a period in the nation’s existence when decency and civility was relegated to the background. Unconventional means of governance was introduced during that period that saw to the undermining of the nation’s unity and cohesion. National offices were seen as means of patronage and compensation, not developmental service. The peoples will were recklessly subverted, while democratic norms and dictates for the free and equal world were squashed with draconian decrees. There were coups, counter coups and set ups; One form of despot after the other came in and left amidst wailings and tales of woes from the citizenry; the people cringed for a democratic system of governance with the hope and belief that their views and wishes for a better nation will be upheld. The military era hopefully came to an end in May 1999 with much sigh of relief from the people (Dike, 2013). The present democratic leadership was devalued; people of questionable character and preference were selected to governance. They were elevated and forced on the people through nasty means of intimidation, forgery and electoral rigging. Consequently they offered governance at national, state and local levels that were devoid of accountability, transparency and due process. Immorality and adultery was elevated; while important state decisions were left pending. With such characters in leadership, there came the introduction of fetish and satanic practices into governance where oracles, shrines and deities were consulted for the sake of ensuring position or office. The leaders have the capacity to influence public policies to make a difference in the lives of the citizens, but have failed to do so because their primary goal of assuming leadership position is self-enrichment. They have the power to educate, inspire, and provide the youth with the resources to advocate for the causes they believe in, but like bad parents, they have failed in their responsibilities to lead by good examples (Dike, 2013; Kanyip, 2014). All of these raises serious issues for the church and her leaders in Nigeria.

3.5. Religious Sphere

The religious sphere of the nation including Islam and Christianity needs some forms of transformation. Although, we have been told that Boko Haram is not part of Nigerian Islam, the accolade given to them by the media and the coloration of Islam showed that: the voice is that of Jacob but the hand is that of Esau. Many churches have been sacked in the North-East just because some religious bigots want to play out the script of their pay masters and religious plan. On the other hand, a church that fails to rise beyond the extant culture of its environment will be loved by power-mongers, miracle and fun-seekers. Simply because it does not disturb the status quo. Such a church at best will function like a refrigerator that preserves perishables instead of an incubator where culture-changing leaders are developed and released to uplift humanity to higher spheres of meaning. “Obviously, many Nigerian churches fit into the refrigerator model as they strive to outdo each other in the art of whitewashing the decadent rich. Religious leaders are now the finest image-makers of pilferers of public treasuries. Thanksgiving services are often organized to enhance the political capital of integrity-deficient rulers.

Televised prayer meetings are held to put seals of divine endorsement on the ambitions of political rascals. "If the devil could run for an elective office here, Nigerian churches' operators would unhesitatingly anoint him as the people's messiah, and give brown envelope to their allies in the media to do the same. "It is said that the battle for Nigeria's independence was fought and won on the pages of newspapers. Given the predominance of the 'brown envelope syndrome', we cannot optimistically say that Nigeria's war against corruption will be fought and won on the pages of newspaper. It is difficult to say it will be fought and won on the pulpit, simply because many religious leaders are enmeshed in corruption (<http://www.nairacampus.com.ng/2014/10/>).

4. NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN CHURCH PASTOR

i. Promotion of Morality or Moral Values

In both the church and larger community the pastor has the responsibility to teach and promote Christian moral values. The pastor is an agent of moral transformation irrespective of his church denomination. Nigeria needs moral transformation in her social cultural, economic and political spheres of existence. Especially at this time when Nigerian is being crippled with election malpractice, economic and moral corruption and terrorism. In this line thought, Ottuh (2013) sported the promotion of morality as one of the roles of religion in the development of Nigeria. He states further that religion creates morality in the society through its moral laws and it is meant to guide the adherents of such religion. This is not far fetched in pastoral ministry because the pastor or priest is the driver of the process of moral transformation in the church experience. This transformation can be done through the preaching and teaching of the undiluted word of God. This word can be encoded into rules and regulations to guide Christians Nigeria. In this regard, Wilde (1916) opines thus:

The concept of law is one of the two concepts which may be taken as fundamental in an ethical system. According as we start from the idea of good to be attained or of a law to be obeyed. We... have a teleological or Jural theory of ethics. The former of this was the characteristics type of Greek theories; the teleological conception of morality is looked upon as fundamentally a matter of self-regarded rules, realization, and its laws are regarded as rules for attainment of a good which every man naturally seeks.

Since the adherents of Christianity are the same people living in the same society, whatever moral lessons or practices that are being taught by the pastor in that society will definitely influence the society in one way or the other. Christianity can be seen as an agent of moral piety. Christianity for example has always condemned injustice, stealing (robbery), murder, adultery, fornication, cheating, incest, corruption, sabotage and other social vices that are capable of destroying development in Nigeria. The standards of moral conducts among Christians are well defined either in the Holy Bible or by oral tradition. There has been a moral breakdown and Nigeria as a society is plagued by bribery and corruption, armed robbery, assassinations, embezzlement of public funds, kidnapping, sexual immoralities, examination malpractices, inter-religious crisis, political manipulations, etc. In President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, he tried to terminate corruption and some other social vices but not even a community was totally emancipated of corruption or social vices. The police has tried to get rid of robbers from the community but to no avail. As we can see immorality is the disease of the soul and mind which can only be cured by the fear of God. Religion in Nigeria especially Christianity has always been involved in the preaching of the fear of God. Once the heart and mind are sanitized by moral doctrines, crime will be less in Nigeria. Many of the citizens who have received the gospel for example, have repented from their immoral or deviant lives. Our political leaders and the masses should submit themselves to biblical moral teachings and practices, and then embezzlement of public funds and the practice of other social vices

will be reduced to a barest minimum in Nigeria. This implies that if the fear of God is in the heart of the people of Nigeria as prescribed in the Bible, election malpractice, economic and it related crimes will be reduced to a very large extent in the Nigerian society. When Nigeria as a nation is free of terrorism, corruption, kidnapping, etc, investors will be willing to come in and invest. Therefore, the Nigerian church pastor is being challenged to continue to preach and practice moral values because moral values are the food and drink which keep society alive, healthy and happy. Nzeako (2006) also displays an understanding that ethics and ethical values can be applicable for national development in Nigeria in the sense that ethics can be used to fight corruption, individualism and materialism through a wide range of virtues such as righteousness, faithfulness, truthfulness, honesty, integrity, modesty, humanity, tolerance, patience, industriousness, self discipline, self-control, justice, patriotism and other virtues.

ii. Ethical Reorientation

Nzeako (2006) asserts that leadership ethics in Nigeria among other things, should include the following: leadership position should be assumed with the aim to serve the people and develop the nation, and not to amass wealth for selfish ends; every leader should put the welfare of the people and the development of the nation first and above every other consideration; every leader should be willing and able to rise to his responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is half-mark of true leadership; the leader must be a person who has the fear of God, who has living conscience and who acts according to good conscience; and the leader should not be power-drunk; rather, he should be able to know when he and his administration have outlived his welcome and usefulness and he should be willing to allow others to take the leadership through legitimate or legal way. Nzeako's position is not far from the position of religious teachings in Nigeria but we cannot deny the fact that the proliferation of churches and other new religious sects with commercial intentions have watered it down. Therefore, the real religious bodies like Christianity which have more adherents in Nigeria should take it as a duty to continuously teach their adherents who are in leadership position on the need for ethical conducts that will develop Nigeria. This type of teaching should include the children and the youths in anticipation for future leadership responsibility. The mentality of amassing wealth in office should be discouraged in the teaching of the pastor and other church leaders in Nigeria. By so doing, their members will be made to know that it pays to live a life of integrity and righteousness in the fear of God.

iii. Epitomization of Righteousness in the Society

The Nigerian church and her leaders should not speak about corruption with the two sides of the mount. Rather they should be a worthy example of righteousness and the fear of God in the society. All the political leaders and civil servants in Nigeria belong to one religion or the other, yet corruption keeps increasing in the society. This is so because some large numbers of religious adherents have refused to stand for righteousness and integrity. All religions in Nigeria, especially Christianity is against corruption and as such, if all Christian adherents desist from corruption, it will be reduced to its barest minimum.

iv. educating the church and masses of their civic responsibilities

The pastor should not only preach the bible, but it must be translated to transform the totality of man. Today politics is being seen by Christians as a dirty game. This is an erroneous understanding. Politics is not dirty but the people who are playing it in a dirty way. This is why Christians are expected to be involved in politics so as to sanitize politics in Nigeria. Paul in Romans 13:1-7 admonishes Christians to carry out their civic responsibility. Such civic responsibilities include tax payment, respect for constituted authority and the recognition of governance as God's

initiative for human society. Christians in Nigeria should be educated by the pastor to register for voter's card and participate in voting. The pastor may not be partisan but he should be well abreast of political intrigues so as to know how to educate his members on how and who to vote into office. Pastor should be watchful for any candidates or political parties that have traces of terrorism, religious bigotry, tribal opiomism and sectionalism and discourage his members from voting for such individual or party. Although, there is no recognized censors on religious adherents, Christian are very many in Nigeria and as such, they have the power to vote the right people into political positions.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that that the Nigerian church pastor has a lot of roles to play in the savaging of this nation. If Nigeria is to take her due place of glory in the comity of nations, Nigerian churches leaders, members and media practitioners must leave the league of ethically compromised fortune hunters and awaken to their social responsibilities of savaging politicians, edifying the public mind, fighting corruption and promoting equity, fairness and justice. When this is done, there will be peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

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Citation: John Arierhi Ottuh, Andrew O. Okoro, Nathaniel E. Ayetin (2015) The Role of the Nigerian Church Pastor in National Transformation: An Expose. IJHSSE 2(3), PP: 10-17.