

LEADERSHIP, MISSION AND CHURCH GROWTH IN AFRICA

A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF



HIS EMINENCE
DR. SAMUEL CHUKWUEMEKA KANU UCHE

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Dr Samuel Chukwuemeka Kanu Uche

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Chapter Twenty-Seven

Church Leaders and their Quest for Social Transformation in Nigeria

OLÚSÉGUN PETER ÒKÉ

Abstract Religion constitutes an inextricable part of African society. All human activities are plaited and coloured with religious expressions and rituals as no religion is practised in isolation and church leaders are those charged with the divine responsibility to be the mouthpiece of God. They have over the years played a significant role in the transformation of the society and they remain crucial components in every sector of human society. Their interventions have been acknowledged from the spiritual, psychological and marital dimensions. However, an area where little attention has been paid which has necessitated this engagement is in the social transformational role of Church leaders in Nigeria. Transformation means moving away from poverty, social injustice, unemployment, and poor education to a haven of better society. Therefore, this paper underscores the importance of Church leaders in their quest for the transformation of the society. The methodology used is the content analysis of relevant literature. Findings revealed that church leaders have helped the society in the areas of education, economy, sport, poverty alleviation, social well-being, prevention of violence, conflict resolution, disaster relief and support. Recommendation was made on the need to improve on the self-sacrificing efforts of church leaders for a better society.

Key words: Church leaders, their Quest, Social Transformation, Nigeria

Introduction

Over the years, religion has played a pivotal role in the social-economic and political development of the country¹. There is no gainsaying denying the fact that religions cannot be practised in isolation². Religion exists because society exists and society exists because it is propped by religion³. Religion permeates

¹ Afolabi, O.O. (2015). The Role of Religion in Nigeria Politics and its Sustainability for Political Development. *New Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol. 3(2).pp.42-49.

² Abdulla, M.R. (2018). Culture, Religion, and Freedom of Religion or Belief. *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*. Vol.16.pp102-115.

³ Obioha, U.P. (2009). Ethics, Religion and Humanity: Rethinking Religion in 21st Century Africa. *Global Journal of Humanity*. Vol.8.No182.pp28-34.

every aspect of our lives⁴ and this is the more reason why Africans are said to be notoriously religious as they are involved in religion from cradle to grave⁵. Religion is not a private but a social matter. As a social phenomenon, according to Durkheim, it is linked to the social well-being of the people and this suggests that religion can impact positively on the society through the prevention of conflict/violence, enhanced moral and ethical fibre and improve social transformation⁶. As religion cannot be discussed in isolation of human existence, so is its relevance to the society.

Church leaders most especially in Nigeria, assist as partners in progress through the provision of infrastructural facilities and other interventions to reach development goal⁷. Leadership in every aspect of life are of two categories. We have the transactional leadership and the transformational leadership. In the transactional leadership, followers simply obey the order (implicit or explicit) of their leaders and, in so doing, meet certain standard of behaviour because of a contractual arrangement. But, the transformational leadership which is akin to our discussion on church leaders is a situation where a leader inspires the followers to reach standards of performance which they would not have reached were it not for the impact of the leader⁸. Thus, their behaviour has been transformed by the actions and, perhaps, charisma of the leaders to turn things around.⁹ For a better understanding, the Greek word for "transform" is *metamorphoo*. It is a combination of two Greek words: "meta" (meaning "change") and "morphoo" (meaning "form"). The word "metamorphoo" means to change into another form. The English word "metamorphosis" is derived from the Greek word "metamorphoo" which means to transform. Therefore, transformation is defined as a complete change in form, appearance, of someone or something. For the purpose of this study, it is a process of effecting complete change in somebody or something, church or society with the aim of making it better.¹⁰

⁴ Kagema, D.N. (2015) The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Promotion of Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa in the Twenty-First Century: A Kenyan Experience. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*. Vol.15, pp1-9.

⁵ Sanni, J.S. Religion: A New Struggle for African Identity> Retrieved from <http://www.scieto.org.zain> 2016. Accessed 10/09/2022.

⁶ Monivas, J.R. (2007). Science and Religion in the Sociology of Emile Durkheim. *European Journal of Science and Theology*. Vol.3. No.1, pp17-30.

⁷ Benyah, F. (2020). Pentecostal/ Charismatic Churches and the Provision of Social Services in Ghana. *Sage Journal. An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*. Vol.38, Issue 1.

⁸ Xiaoxia, P. (2006). Transformational leadership Vs Transactional Leadership. The influence of Gender and Culture on Leadership styles of SME'S in China and Sweden Kristianstand University

⁹ Alan, H. and John, P. (2000). *Intelligent Leadership: Creating a Passion for Change*. South Africa. Random House (Pty) Limited. P.27.

¹⁰ Ajala, S. Youths as Agent of Transformation in Church and Society. Ed. Temitope B. James. *The Church Transforming Society*. p. 26-36.

The fact that the present state of the country's economy is in doldrums is a pointer to the fact that there is deficit of good leaders in Nigeria¹¹. The nation is at crossroads as a result of perennial experience of corruption, bad leadership, nepotism, wastages, robbing Peter to pay Paul syndrome which have become endemic in our national fabric. Church leaders have been making obvious impact in contributing meaningfully to the social economic progress of the nation. Since successive government regimes have failed to fulfil their campaign promises to the electorates, church leaders have made it a point of duty that the duty of the religious organisations is not only to preach the gospel and that salvation should not just be for the soul but also for the body¹².

Church Leaders and Social Transformation in Perspectives

Religion as a phenomenon has impacted the society in a number of ways. It is a fact that cannot be controverted that due to the paucity of funds and the economic meltdown that is experienced by government as a result of bad governance and corruption which has brought untold hardship to the people, it is crystal clear that government, private organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) all alone cannot provide for the necessities of life needed by members of the public to better their lives. Church leaders see the need for them to rise to the occasion of assisting the government through making a positive impact in any little way possible.¹³ Churches and their leaders should not limit themselves to the four corners of the church and on the pulpit alone. But, the best way to win souls is to make effort that is geared towards meeting societal needs spiritually and physically. Such intervention by Church leaders in transforming the society will be discussed in *seriantum*.

As said earlier, it has been observed that the Nigerian politicians and political appointees have not lived up to the critical role of delivering on people's expectation of guaranteed economic advancement of the Nigerian state. The Nigerian state has abandoned their responsibility of providing the basic necessities of life for the populace. Economic development which is aimed at the overall well-being of the citizens of a country, as they are the ultimate beneficiaries of the development of their country cannot be achieved if church leaders are concerned with the spiritual advancement of members while leaving out other important aspect¹⁴. Economic development is a

¹¹ Ogbeidi, M.M. (2012) Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria: A Socio-economic Analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.unh.edu> in 2009. Accessed 14/09/2022.

¹² Otvera, L. (2014). The impact of Politics on Church in the Rift Valley. Project Documents, Andrews University.

¹³ Umeanolue, I.L. (2014). Religious influences on Politics in Nigeria. Implications for National Development. *Origirisi: A new Journal of African Studies*, Vol.15.

¹⁴ Naik, Y. (2020) Using Economic Development to improve health and health inequalities: The Health Foundation.

sustainable boost in the standards of living of the people of any country. It implies an increase in the per capita income of every citizen. The Nigerian economy in the recent times has endured a trajectory of economic instability occasioned by an extensive stretch of unsustainable development plan and policy summersault which is compounded by lack of political will on the part of those in government to change the narrative and bring succor to the people. This disequilibrium breeds underdevelopment in countries in Africa, of which Nigeria is one.¹⁵

Christianity as a religion spread in Africa with the expansion of colonialism, mostly in the 18th-19th century with the cardinal point of spreading the gospel, education and health. It is important to note that these missionaries built schools no matter what the argument is that it served their interest in training interpreters which they needed desperately¹⁶. The fact is that those schools served the educational needs of Nigerians to some extent¹⁷. Christianity was the first to actively pursue the task of bringing formal western education to African and indeed Nigeria. The first of the educated in the schools established by the church became freedom fighters and liberated Nigeria from the shackles of colonialism¹⁸. Christianity, as the historical and yet universal religion of all nations, is only fully itself when it is in actual fact the universal church, that is, when it has a tangible and historical reality among all nations and civilizations¹⁹. In other words, church leaders are now more than ever before in the vanguard of encouraging people to work and pray in order to have economic freedom. It is important therefore to emphasise that in as much as the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much (James 5: 16) in prayer must be accompanied with work, otherwise, it is dead. In order to escape poverty effectively and sustain gainful employment in a nation that is struggling to find its footing among the developed economies, youths need community support of which many church leaders have taken upon themselves as a responsibility²⁰.

Church leaders in Nigeria today play a significant role to support and grow a community of believers that is not only spiritually healthy, but also economically viable. Examples of such church leaders in Nigeria are: Pastor

¹⁵ Eregha, P.B. (2019). *The Economics of Growth fragility in Nigeria*. African Governance and Development Institute. Accessed 21/09/2022.

¹⁶ Manala, M.J. (2013) *The Impact of Christianity on Sub-Sahara*. African. Retrieved from <http://www.Scielo.org.za> in 2013. Accessed 15/09/2022.

¹⁷ Iwuoha, C.M.A. (2018). *The Role of the Church in fostering Sustainable Education in Nigeria*. *IGWEBUKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No.2. pp.53-65.

¹⁸ Boyi, J.B. (2009) *The Ministers of God as Agents of Social Reform*. In Ed. Temitope B. James. *The Church Transforming Society*. p.37-48.

¹⁹ Pickard Jr. W.M. *A Universal Theology of Religion*. Sage Journals. Retrieved from <https://journal.sagepub.com>. on 12/4/1991. Accessed 18/09/2022.

²⁰ Miller, R. B. (2006) *Pastoral Leadership Problem in small, Established Churches*. [Htps://www.ac.uk](https://www.ac.uk). Assessed on 10/09/2022.

E.A. Adeboye of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) through its National Youth Empowerment Initiatives which include, SHIFT, R.I.S.E. Magazines and REACH. According to the General Overseer of the Church, Pastor E. A. Adeboye, the essence of the initiatives is to win souls for Christ and to empower the youths. Under the R.I.S.E initiative, courses offered during the two-weeks training include Web Design, Photography, Video Editing, Baking, Fish Farming, Interior Decoration, Computer and Mobile Phones repairs.²¹ Pastor Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM) is not left out in the efforts at revamping the already battered economy, as he empowered about 108 graduates from Dorcas Empowerment School, which has trained and graduated members of the church in Fashion Designing, Shoe Making and ICT²². The Living Faith Church (Winners' Chapel) just like other denominations also trained and empowered people through the Youth Development Centre of the church. It is an effort of the church to reduce crime, violence, unemployment, uncertainties and juvenile assault which is widespread among the youths in the recent times²³.

These church leaders make use of local board and staff members to provide non-formal skills training to young men and women, such as vocational technical skills, agricultural production, small enterprise development, health and nutrition, and access to credit. Through their programmes, youths become self-reliant and added to the workforce in the country. Church leaders provide mentorship for young adults attempting to enter the entrepreneurial field, provides the needed support, encouragement, and motivation²⁴. Many of the beneficiaries of such training have become employers of labour, thereby reducing unemployment rate in Nigeria.

With the introduction of western education many years ago to where we know today as Nigeria, Church leaders inculcated moral education into the lives of their adherents and many become not just clergy but teachers in schools²⁵. The positive effect of this led to the production of citizens who became nation builders. In recent times, Christian churches have contributed to the educational development through the establishment of primary,

²¹ Fehintola, O.T. (2016). An Appraisal of the Role of the Church in National Development: A Case Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development*, Vol.25.No 1.pp.2-7.

²² Ovbiebo, D. (2021). Church and Youth Empowerment: A Case Study of Pentecostal Missional organization in Edo State of Nigeria. <https://vir.unisa.ac.Assessed.09/09/2022>.

²³ Oghenekohwo, J.E. (2019) Empowerment Programmes of Faith- Based Organisations (FBO's) and Socio- Economic Well-being of Members in Yenagoa Community, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*. Vol.7 (4) 192-198.

²⁴ Oghenekohwo, J.E. (2019) Empowerment Programmes of Faith- Based Organisations (FBO's) and Socio- Economic Well-being of Members in Yenagoa Community, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*. Vol.7 (4) 192-198.

²⁵ Anwuluorah, O. P. (2015). 63 Perspectives of Christian moral Education in Governance in Nigeria. *African Journal Online*.

secondary and tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria. The failure of government to fund education through the provision of facilities that will take care of many students who sit for qualifying examinations into higher institutions of learning made churches in Nigeria through the initiative of their leaders to establish schools. It is also important to unequivocally state that over time, successive governments and administrations have found out that they cannot do the job of providing education alone hence the policy of returning mission schools to the original owners as well as liberalizing the licence for the establishment of private universities.²⁶ Since then, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous increase in the number of faith-based private institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Examples of such schools in Nigeria established by Church leaders/ Christian religious groups are: Redeemer University, Covenant University, Landmark University, Bowen University, Ajayi Crowder University, Precious Cornerstone University, Dominion University, Mountain Top University, Babcock University, Madonna University,, Benson Idahosa University, Caritas University, Gregory University Uтуру, Crawford University, Joseph Ayodele Babalola University, Salem University, Tansian University, Rhema University, Wesley University of Science and Technology, University of Mkar, Anchor University, Evangel University and so on²⁷. Hardly can you find a church in Nigeria now without a higher institution of learning. My argument here is premised on the fact that though those can be seen as mere business outfits, they have drastically helped in the reduction of admission seekers that find it difficult to gain admission into the Federal and State Universities available in the country.

Education is a tool used for the integration of individual into the society so that he can achieve self-realisation, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress²⁸. This is why the role of the church in this regard cannot be overlooked. The intervention of the church leaders in this direction has been widely applauded. Despite the fact that church leaders have received a lot of condemnations on the amount charged as school fees, of which many of their members could not afford, the establishment of those schools has helped in the reduction of the number of applicants seeking admission in Nigerian Universities.

Another important area where the intervention of church leaders is felt is through their poverty alleviation programme. Poverty has been identified as a worldwide problem to humanity. It is a phenomenon that has caused

²⁶ Iwuoha, C.M.A. (2018). The Role of the Church in fostering Sustainable Education in Nigeria. *IGWEBUKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No.2, pp.53-65.

²⁷ List of Private Universities Owned by Churches in Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.thenewman.org.ng> on 12/09/2022. Accessed 25/09/2022.

²⁸ Afe, J.O. (1995). *Teacher Education in Nigeria: Trends, Issues and Challenges*. Benin City: Nigerian Education Research Association.

several afflictions and untold sufferings of varying degrees not only to Nigerian citizenry but the world at large.²⁹ Poverty has been defined differently. It is a lack of physical necessities, assets and incomes. It includes, but is more than the income-poor³⁰. The World Bank's definition says, "A person is considered poor if his or her income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs³¹". Essentially, poverty is better described than defined. The poor are those who are unable to obtain an adequate income, find a stable job, own property, or maintain healthy living condition. They also lack adequate level of education and cannot satisfy their basic health needs.³² At present, around 460 Million people in Africa are living in extreme poverty, with poverty threshold at 1.90 US dollar a day.³³

The nonchalant attitude of government from independence to alleviate poverty as promises made were not fulfilled has mandated other strata of the society to take it upon themselves to tackle poverty.³⁴ While other nations of the world are making frantic efforts to progress and get richer in order to provide for their citizens a better standard of living, Nigeria is deteriorating at alarming rate as a result of hunger, unemployment, poverty and lack. Therefore, the role of the church in the fight against poverty becomes germane. Though, church leaders are not left out of poverty discourse as, according to them, poverty affects every aspect of man. Even the Bible made copious references to the issues of poverty as a reality and that it is a global phenomenon. Genesis 45: 15 describes poverty as a form and manifestation of the fall of man and consequences. On many occasions, church leaders directed members to leave their shops to attend programmes which are not economically beneficial to them but for the church to make money³⁵. Poverty alleviation embraces the efforts at all levels of governance be it government, or non-government organizations, individuals, and corporate bodies, to

²⁹Jegede, O.P. (2020). An Assessment of the Role of the Church in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, Vol.3 No.2. Pg. 130 - 143

³⁰ Spicker, S. Definitions of Poverty: Twelve Clusters of Meaning. Retrieved from <http://rszarf.ips.uw.edu.pl>

³¹ (www.compassion.org/blogs/2020/20/95/). Accessed on 5/09/2022.

³² M.I. Obadan, (1997). Analytical Framework for Poverty Reduction: Issue of Economic Growth Versus other Strategies. In *Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. Selected Papers for the 1997 Annual Conference. The Nigerian Economic Society. Ibadan. Pat Mag Press Ltd.p.2.*

³³460 Million People in Africa are living in Extreme Poverty.

(<https://www.stastica.com>). Accessed 10/09/2022

³⁴ Jegede, O.P. (2020). An Assessment of the Role of the Church in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, Vol.3 No.2. Pg. 130 - 143

³⁵ Oke, O.P. (2019). The Contributions of the Christian Church to Poverty Creation in Nigeria. In (eds. Samson Fatokun et.al.) *African Christianity in Local and Global Contexts. A Festschrift in honour of Rev. Prof Isaac Deji Ayegboyin.p. 475-483.*

consign poverty, at least in its alarming dimensions to history³⁶. The paramount objective of the Church is to preach the gospel. But, the gospel may not be well-received by a hungry man. The question to ask is what is the position of the church to the poor and needy? Does the Church not have any role or an obligation to play towards reducing the suffering of the poor not only in the church but, also in their immediate environment and society at large? The obligations to Christians imposed on them by Christ is apposite to our discussion on the response of the church to the poor. The question Jesus Christ asked the disciples “why do you call me Lord, Lord, and yet you do not do what I tell you?” (Lk. 6:46). This passage of the Bible expressly explains the Church’s social responsibility today which among other includes visiting the prisoners, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, or the captives. Church leaders in the recent times have set up various committees to respond to the yearning of their members. People that suffer poverty are psychologically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically affected as it also affects their family, community and social relations³⁷.

Various efforts of successive government to alleviate poverty through the establishment of programmes such as: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); Better Life Programme (BLP); Directorate of Employment (NDE); People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN); Community Bank (CB); Family Support Programme (FSP); Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP); National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP); and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) to mention but a few to better the living condition of the populace have not yielded any positive result due to poor implementation³⁸. Church leaders have come to the rescue by alleviating poverty through the appointment of members of staff who have become breadwinners to their families in higher institution of learning establish by them. In those schools mentioned above, various categories of employees are engaged to join their workforce thereby drastically reducing the number of unemployed people in the society.

One of the fundamental roles of Church leaders lately is to act as agents of social transformation as it was the case among the disciples. From the time immemorial, the Church has been responding to the scourge of poverty in the world and Nigeria is no exception like taking care of the poor, the weak, the homeless, the naked and the hungry. Even, in the contemporary time, Church

³⁶ Bleisner, E. Calvin. (2008). *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (Westchester: Cross-way).

³⁷ Kakwata, F. (2020). *The Church and Poverty Alleviation: The Challenges for Congo Evangelistic Mission*. www.missionalia.journals.ac.za

³⁸ Jegede, O.P. (2020). *An Assessment of the Role of the Church in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria*. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies* (IJMSSPCS), Vol.3 No.2. Pg. 130 – 143

leaders still engage the community around them in social services like provision of clean water, construction of roads, medical services, provision of food items for members and so on³⁹. The upsurge in the number of poor people in the country and the economic meltdown make their impact very difficult to be felt as it ought to be.

In the contemporary society, an area in which there is much attention is the relationship between Church leaders and their involvement in sport. This will take us to making a comparison between the two phenomena.⁴⁰ By way of definition, religion is the belief that supernatural forces influence human lives. Religion is defined to mean "a social construct encompassing beliefs, to make some sense of the great questions of life and death."⁴¹ From the definitions above, religion is seen by the authors as the belief in the existence and worship of a supreme power that is beyond and above and controls our acts.⁴² On the other hand, sport is conceptualized as "a competitive human physical activity that is governed by institutionalized rules. The all-encompassing definition of sport states that sport is any activity, experience, or business enterprise focused on fitness, recreation, athletics or leisure."⁴³

One basic thing that is common to both religion and sport is the fact that they involve human development. The interconnectivity in the two is that they both have the ability of bringing people together. This is primarily because the popularity of sports cuts across race, social class, gender and age barriers. It is as a result of this that, apart from the spiritual calling and engagement of church leaders in promoting peace and inter-personal relationship, they see the importance and the usefulness of sport in bringing about an all-inclusive development to Nigerian as a whole, irrespective of education, occupation and tribe. From the foregoing, religion and sport can be seen as two major institutions that influence the social landscape in the lives of many.

The interrelationship between religion and sport can be seen in the form of various organisations that have been centered on linking sport and religion. Church leaders making use of sport to engender development have also become quite common in Nigeria today. Even long before now, one of the notable religious figures who keyed early enough into the promotion of sports is Oral Roberts, the founder of Oral Roberts University when he ventured into

³⁹Is cooperate worship essential? Some Biblical Consideration for the church's response. [https:// arpacanada](https://arpacanada). Assessed 22/09/2022.

⁴⁰ Efebeh, V.E. Sports as an instrument of Development and National cohesion. *The Nigerian Experience*.

⁴¹ Barrett DB (2001) "The New Believers: Sects, Cults and Alternative Religions". Retrieved from <http://www.bytrendemon.co.uk> on 23/6/2001. Accessed on 12/09/2022, 25p.

⁴² Synder EE, Spreitzer EA (1989). *Social Aspects of Sports*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, pp. 3.

⁴³ Pitts BG, Fielding LW, Miller LK (1994). "Industrial Segmentation and the Sport Industry: Developing a Sport Industry Segmentation Model." *Sport Mark. Q.*, 3 (1)

the establishment of his University in 1965. He established athletic programme to bring recognition and prestige to the university. Not only this, church leaders like Reverend Billy Graham and Pope John Paul II also developed interest in sport and encouraged its promotion in the lives of their followers. From a position of strong opposition to recreation and sport activities, in the contemporary period, the church has made a complete turnaround or reversal in the last couple of years. The church and their leaders now heartily supports these activities as effective tools to promote "the Lord's work". This is apposite to the position that religion has utilised sport through churches and their leaders, church affiliated institutions and various religious organisations that are centered on sport.⁴⁴ One typical example of church leaders who has made a significant contribution to the development of sport in Nigeria is the General Overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, Dr. Daniel Olukoya who set up a department of Grassroot Sports Revolution in order to give the youth of the ministry the opportunity to develop their talents. The General Overseer said it was in response to the yearning of the youths that made him to establish Mountain of Fire and Miracles Football Club and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Basket Ball Club. The football club is one of the clubs in the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL)⁴⁵ This gives credence to the position of Nelson Mandela when he said that:

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers.⁴⁶

Church leaders provide sport opportunities including church leagues and tournaments, as well as various other sport fitness and recreation programmes. The Bendel Province of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has blazed the trail when they organised a soccer competition for the youths which started some years back. In line with purposes of church sport, churches have used sports for functions such as evangelism, fellowship, church growth and discipleship⁴⁷. The Redeemed Christian Church of God is also involved in sport development. According to Pastor Toks and Wonuola Adetayo, the event tagged Gospel-O-Sport featured three houses, including Joy (Yellow), Righteousness (Blue), and Peace (Green). They emphasised the importance of sport in Christian life, saying competition encourages believers

⁴⁴Hartzell, D (1996). "Spiritual Application of Sports" In Yessick, T. (Ed.). Sports Ministry for Churches. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, pp. 7-12.

⁴⁵ Olukoya. MFM wont stop its involvement in sports. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/sport/olukoya>. 13/07/2022. Accessed 13/09/2022.

⁴⁶ <https://sports.yahoo.com/blogs>. Assessed 23/09/2022.

⁴⁷ Sports Evangelism: Promoting the Gospel through Sports. <https://edarton.org/> Assessed 15/09/2022

to be patient and resolute to finish strong and well. Therefore, in the everyday life of man, the values and attributes that sport preaches are necessary for a peaceful coexistence and the development of human societies.⁴⁸

Intervention of church leaders is also felt in how they have used their positions to address the high rate of corruption in the country most especially among political leaders. Avarice, greed and the get-rich-quick syndrome have been identified as major causative factors. Despite the fact that some church leaders are guilty of this, a number of them make it a point of duty to tell members and those at the corridors of power of the ripple effect of their corrupt practices. It was also discovered that the church has used preaching, prayer, social action, exemplary lifestyle and sacrifice as strategies against corruption. There is therefore a symbiotic relationship between the Church and the State. Starting from independence, bribery and corruption have made steady and seemingly unstoppable progress up to the present and it seems to have become part of the daily life of Nigerians. This is so because those in positions of authority continue to embezzle money meant for the public without minding the level of poverty in the country. It is only when good and responsible people are in power that corruption will recede and the country will experience a new lease of life.

The attitude of our political leaders has made the youth to realise that hard work does not pay and that honesty is not worth trying. This is why hard work has been sacrificed at the altar of easy ways of making money like 419, ritual murders and corruption, bribery, nepotism and so on.⁴⁹ Church leaders in Nigeria have been engaging members and the public through motivational and ethical teachings with the aim of re-orientating the mentality of individuals in order to augment their productivity, efficiency and wealth creation. These are achieved through Sunday School services, Bible studies, seminars, Literature ministries, theological education and other such programmes using various medium.⁵⁰

Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa⁵¹ has population which includes members of different faith groups mainly Christians, Muslims and traditionalists. The country has suffered greatly from sectorial/ethnic and religious violence which has hampered the developmental efforts of government. Ethnic and religious related conflicts seem to be very prominent

⁴⁸ Pastor Emphasises importance of sports as RCCG LP19 holds inter house competition. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/sport/pastor>. 25/11/2015. Accessed 14/09/2022.

⁴⁹ Madu (2003). The Role of the Churches in Combating Corruption in Nigeria. <https://www.eduproject.com.ng>. Assessed 17/09/2022.

⁵⁰ Boyi, J.B. (2009) The Ministers of God as Agents of Social Reform. In Ed. Temitope B. James. The Church Transforming Society. p.37-48.

⁵¹ African Countries by Population (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.worldmeters.info.com> on 29/09/2022.

as its effects on families and the society is better imagined than experienced. Church leaders in particular have been at the vanguard of exemplifying the biblical principles of peace, love and justice, among adherents to promote peaceful co-existence and reconciliation. In areas affected by ethnic and religious cleavages, church leaders through their various denominations have helped reduced tensions and build trust among religious adherents. The Church faithfully discharges her specific mission of God's love in the world full of conflicts and war. They express their nearness to members through social doctrine of maintaining peace at all cost. The apt example here is in the beatitudes, where Jesus encouraged Christians to be at peace and to live in peace ((Mt 5:9).

It is important to also identify some misgivings about the activities of many church leaders that have caused them to lose membership to other denominations. It is a common knowledge that leading an organization is very complex and evolving. Many church leaders are guilty of time management. Church leaders need to inculcate the habit of time management. Time management is the ability to effectively organize and utilize time. A church leader needs enormous amount of diligence and discipline in this regard. They have the unique responsibility of setting an example for members. Effective time management produces a sense of balance to set both short and long term goal. Many church leaders are fond of wasting time at the detriment of their members who may have other things to attend to. Church leaders just as members must be able to manage their time properly, because it is not only a financial problem that must be regulated and organised, but also a matter of time⁵².

Another area that needs the attention of church leaders is the aspect that has to do with burdening people with too many duties and expectations. Church is considered as a place of refuge and safety. It is a place where love and care are exchanged. But, where there are abuses from the one providing protection and guidance, it leaves one's feeling broken. Bad experiences from church leaders can lead people to walk away from church for a reason. Bad church leadership can ultimately lead to a dying church. Church leaders are expected to know what members are passing through financially rather than trying to add to their burden. Some have to spend extra cash to meet up with demand. Politics has become a common practice in the house of God. Decisions which should be taken by trying to know the mind of God are being politicised. The political game in the church today is more profound than the one being practiced by the so called politicians. When churches are caught up in the game of the throne, it will definitely affect the spread of the gospel⁵³.

⁵² Andrian, T. (2021). The Concept of Time Management based on Ephesians 5:15-17 Retrieved from .<https://www.sceol.org> . Accessed. 28/09/2022.

⁵³ Abati, R. Politics in the Church. Retrieved from www.premiumtimesng.com. Accessed.15/03/2022. Accessed on 19/9/2022.

Recommendations

The Church is expected to live up to its spiritual and social responsibilities, to give generously, to encourage governments not to shy away from their responsibility of eradicating poverty in the land and to help the poor by relieving heavy debts and to work with church-sponsored agencies or non-governmental organisations to start programmes and projects intended to help specific target groups.

The Church must involve, engage and actively participate more in social structures and economic organisations (like providing micro-credit schemes, agric-business, cooperative system and other empowerment programmes) that will alleviate poverty to the bare minimum. Other denominations who have not keyed into the intervention are encouraged to do so for the betterment of the society.

But, the administrators of Christian university should be careful of the rot that had pervaded government schools-moral, intellectual and spiritual. The most important of this is that, Church leaders should always be conscious of their lifestyle, their teachings and their writings because they are also stakeholders in deciding the future of the Nigerian society.

The church leaders should, in all honesty, rise to the challenge of addressing the scarcity of credible leadership in Nigeria. Therefore, they should encourage members to join politics in order to have credible hands to run the affairs of the society. Christian religious leadership ideology should be re-orientated towards the wellbeing of the Nigerian populace, who find themselves engulfed in poverty and deplorable living conditions, rather than primitive accumulation of wealth that profits nothing.

Concluding Remarks

The church has a lot of responsibilities to discharge in order to address the various challenges facing the country. It is therefore not out of place for churches and their leaders to demonstrate high sense of sincerity in the discharge of such responsibilities. It is crystal clear that the successive administrations in Nigeria have failed and this is why the church is expected to do more in their intervention to transform the society. The sacred book of the Christians clearly shows that God cares for the poor and oppressed in the society and as such, the Church must do likewise. The Church's involvement in human development and social transformation is a sacred responsibility under God's divine direction.

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