

THE CLERGY AND NATION BUILDING: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The clergy is a called of God for the purpose of spreading the gospel and saving of souls for Christ and His kingdom. In a nation filled with injustice, internal colonialism, kidnapping and thuggery, vandalization of properties and destruction of lives, oppression and poverty, the clergy has a great role to play in building the nation. This paper seek to address properly who the clergy is, how the clergy can help to build the society from socio-religious perspective, through Church oversight, visitation, counselling, intercession, speaking against harmful cultural practices, speaking against gender inequality, seeking for peace in the midst of communal unrest, standing against corruption, becoming part and parcel of politics for good governance. The analytical method is being used in which books, journals and other relevant materials are used. This research recommends among others that the clergy should use the pulpit to correct the ills in the nation rather than compromising and singing the praise of the wicked

Keywords; Clergy, Nation Building, Socio-Religious Perspective

Introduction

A nation is a people with a common culture within a geographical territory. Some nations like Nigeria have multiple languages, cultures, tribes and ethnic groups where the African Traditional Religious practitioners, Muslims, and Christians are governed by a President. Nation building is a task which cannot be left in the hands of only political elites who are in position of power or in the hands of business men who engage in importation and exportation. It is not only the nation's mineral resources which are being exploited and mismanaged, that is seen as what can build our nation. Obviously, from the religious approach, the clergy has a serious part to play in moulding our nation. Nation building requires men "clergy" who will always preach and protest against injustice, marginalization, inhuman treatment and economic strangulations. The clergy are men who will at all times seek for social justice where all ethnic groups are treated equally and fairly.¹ Obviously, our nation which is threatened by terrorism, kidnapping

militancy, flood, and promiscuity is now at the apex and requires the quick action of preachers to salvage this situation through the Church and pulpit. The clergy intervene in a person's life or relationships, which they find difficult or impossible to cope with. It may be sickness, death of a close relative, adultery of a marriage partner, loss of job, etc. A group of people too can experience a crisis when something suddenly upsets their security. If the crisis is very severe, people may break down in their lives unless they are given help. On the other hand, if support and comfort is provided through a concerned pastor, the person or group may actually grow in theirs as the result of the crisis.²

Definition of the Term Clergy

To properly understand the issue that surrounds the term, it will really be of great benefit if a proper x-ray of the Church and the fivefold ministry which Christ instituted in the Church is discussed. Christ is the head of the Church and the only one allowed in scripture to direct the various members of His body, which is the Church. Now, as we come to consider the particular ministry of the Church, that of teaching, preaching and caring for souls, it is obvious that the clergy has enormous work or task committed into his hands. From Ephesians 4:7, 8, 11-13, Christ gave the fivefold ministry to the Church.³ To some he gave Apostles; Prophets, Evangelists; Pastors and Teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ and for "nation building.

Campbell posits: "It should be observed that there is quite a difference between ministry, Christian priesthood, and worship." Priesthood is universal and from man to God, while ministry in the world is an action through man, from God toward men. However, every priest (clergy) is given a ministry to operate which is geared towards nation building. Campbell continued that "Thus the gifts and true ministers whom Christ gives are for the benefit of the whole Church of God in a locality, country, or even in the entire world."⁴

Apostle and Prophet are the first two of the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some apostles; and some prophets..." They are what might be called the foundation gifts which God used for the purpose of laying a broad and deep platform on which the Church was to be built. This work was done by those whom God empowered in a special manner. In Ephesians 2:20, God chooses men for the ministry from all classes of society to reach all classes of people. Campbell states:

If we allow God to call and train His servants, we will have a divinely constituted ministry, taken from all ranks of society, from the highest to the lowest and fitted to reach all sorts and conditions of men without the aid of a religious College. We shall have the greatest intellects expounding the word as they learn it on their knees and simple ones spelling out the message in the same manner.⁵

"He gave ... some evangelists" Ephesians 4:11. Evangelists as the name would suggest, are heralds of the glad tidings preachers of the Gospel of the grace of God, who awaken

the careless and win souls to Christ. They are seen as men of prayer who have special concern for the lost and unsaved souls and their sphere of labour is the world. The last two mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 are Pastors and Teachers. These gifts are given for the care of new-babes in Christ and the purpose of leading and guiding them on in the truth. The Pastor cares and feed the flock of God while Teachers are charged with the responsibility of educating and applying scriptural truth aright. He unfolds its perfections, expounds its doctrines and explains its difficulties for proper understanding. These fivefold ministry found in the clergy is seriously impacting on nation building positively.

Jeremiah 1:5 and Galatians 1:15-16 show that God marks out and calls His servants even before they are born. In the light of this, He fashions the vessel for His purposes and orders all the circumstances of his life. Everything which he passes through is calculated of God to prepare and train him for his divine calling in life, even though he may as yet be unconverted and unaware of his heavenly calling. The apostle Paul is an example of a man possessing a most remarkable natural character, as well as extraordinary training and acquirements before conversion, all of which were providentially ordered of God to fit him for his special place of ministry in the Church of God and nation at large.⁶

Hence, clergy can be seen as the called of God into priesthood and a revered servant of God who has been trained in a seminary, theological school or Bible school for the sole purpose of leading the flock of God called Church, expansion of God's kingdom on earth and an intermediary between man and the Supreme Being.

The Place of the Clergy in Nation Building

The responsibilities of the clergy in building the nation are enormous. They taking charge of the Church, engage in visitation of members and non-members to identify with them in times of pains and joy, they are counsellors, they stand as intercessor/watchman in the place of prayer, they speak against harmful cultural practices in the land, they stand against gender inequality, they settle disputes when there is communal unrest, they lend their voice against corruption in the land and sensitizing members to take active part in politics.⁷

The Clergy Taking Charge of the Church:

There are certain actions that should take place to facilitate the works of a pastor when he takes charge of a Church. He is seen as a servant who serves others. Every clergy is a servant. If any clergy makes himself a master, then he is not fit to be called a clergy (Pastor). Jesus stated thus:

You know that the ruler of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man

did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt.20:25-28).

Aluko posits "that the minister or pastor in the Church is primarily responsible for presenting the truth and demands of the gospel in preaching, in leadership and in the care of the congregation". The authority to teach, preach, heal and lead others to repentance and forgiveness is bestowed upon the Pastor. Pastoral care as part of the function of a Pastor (clergy) in relation to nation building is a service to mankind in the spirit of Christ. The real clergy's authority arises out of the concrete incarnation of the spirit of loving service which by God's help becomes present in the care of souls. It is believed that a pastor must have inward calling and conviction to minister to all and sundry.¹⁰

The Clergy and Visitation

This act of visitation to members and non-members is indispensable if the pastor must know his members (sheep). Hence, love is displayed as he visits the lonely, dejected, rejected, the imprisoned, and the hospitalized and so on. He is a source of hope to the hopeless and brings life to the dying. Home visits can clearly demonstrate to members that he cares for them and that he takes seriously their responsibility as the shepherd of their souls. Spurgeon states thus "I venture to say that the greatest blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness."¹¹ Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has". Aluko (2000:45) states that:

Pastoral visitation reaches out to those who, could not be reached otherwise and bring them closer to touching souls. This results in conversion and reclamation. The visitation of the clergy helps him to understand the state of the people, what they are passing through, and the causes of their suffering and as well he will not only pray but also be a channel to proffering solutions to their problems. This has become a necessary way of building the nation.¹³

The Clergy as a Counsellor

The place of the clergy in the act of counselling is pertinent as it helps in nation building. The pastor is respected and recognized as having the necessary qualifications and skill, and filled with experience and wisdom. Taylo holds that in Churches where women are ordained or appointed to the pastorate on the same footing as men, or take a leading role in the congregation, there may be a recognized system of referring particular sorts of problem to them, while for other sorts of problem the counsellor is normally a man. There are also some areas where the pastor may not be recognized as a counsellor at all, except where specifically spiritual or religious problems are concerned. In many village situations, the pastor's role is seen as relating to Church' matters only.¹⁴ Everyday problems like family disputes, marriage difficulties, adultery, stealing etc, are dealt with by the community as a whole, with recognized community counsellors taking the lead.

The pastor has his place in the community and can make his contribution along with the rest of the people, but will only be recognized as a counsellor in matters directly affecting the Church. Counselling is a relationship between two or more people in which one person (technically called the 'counsellor') seeks to advise, encourage, help and support another person, or persons (technically called the 'client') to deal more effectively with the problems of life. The counsellor helps his client in changing attitudes or behaviour. The aim is to help the client to learn to deal more effectively with the reality of his environment.

Taylor maintained that the pastor is a representative of the Church, and there is always a religious or spiritual aspect to his ministry of counselling. There are often spiritual issues involved, even when the problem is not directly concerned with religious matters. Many are troubled by guilt, loneliness, fear of death, and many other thoughts and feelings relating to the deep spiritual issues of life. Often, they want to ask questions about salvation and forgiveness. A Pastor may have the opportunity to helping people to commit their lives to Christ as a result of his counselling. Spiritual issue should never be treated as less important than other sorts of difficulty. Similarly, it sometimes happens that what seem to be spiritual or religious problems is mere covering up some difficulty which may not be related to spiritual issues at all. The pastoral counsellor needs to be aware of the reality of spiritual issue when he is counselling people in need. But at the same time, he should not make the mistake of regarding all problems as spiritual and religious ones.¹⁵

Obviously, the Church, through the help of the clergy has really been intervening in community affairs and cultural situations and can make his contribution along with the rest of the people but will only be recognized as a counsellor in matters directly affecting the Church. The Pastor may of course need to call in professional help from other people, if the problem is very severe, or if the client appears to be either physically or mentally sick, or perhaps even a danger to himself or others. Here the expert help of a doctor, psychiatrist or qualified social worker may be required, and the pastor's job will be to try and ensure that the person in need receives it.

The Clergy as an Intercessor/Watchman

Every pastor/clergy is faced with the task of building the nation through prayer. The pastor must be an intercessor and a watchman who gives warning against impending dangers that wants to engulf the nation. He should mobilize members of his Church to pray for the nation, leaders, for peace and security. He should not be caught in the web of singing the praises of wicked leaders just to actualize his selfish interest. Ezekiel 3:17-19 states thus:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel, so hear the word, I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life that wicked

man will die for his sin and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his evil ways, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

The clergy is the right intermediary on grounds of relationship with God and man. Aluko states that "He cannot do otherwise whether he takes the toga of a priest, prophet or Shepherd". John states "God has made the spread of his fame hang on the preaching of his word; and has made the preaching of his word hang on the prayers of the saint". Remember, that they pray for the sick, pray to reconcile broken homes, pray for hope and pray for peace. We should not forget the fact that James 5:16f comments about the effectual fervent prayer of one man even that of Elijah that it availed much. It is very clear that there are pastors who are secretly going on their knees for safety of the land and nation.¹⁶

There are "false prophets" that are seriously seeking after their stomach in the name of "thus says the Lord." The pastor as a privileged person is always in the peril of losing his spirituality, his usefulness, his life and even drags the name of the Church in the mud when he is less prayerful. Aluko posits that "one of the qualifications that make a good pastor is not to be a lover of money (1 Tim.3:3). Money is a good servant, but a poor master. If anyone develops a love for it, it will become his master and he will start to do what it dictates".¹⁷

The Clergy Speaking against Harmful Cultural Practices

The clergy has always been a catalyst in the fight against so many obnoxious cultural practices in the world. Here, the focus will be on widowhood practice. The bereaved should not be made to suffer hardship at all because of the loss of a dear relative (husband) which is very painful. Okoye describes the mood of the bereaved person as grievous. The bereaved person suffers miserably because of the loss and the addition of the responsibilities of the dead one to those being shouldered by the living persons.¹⁸

In some communities in Ogoniland and Igboland, the widow will be asked to sleep in the same room with their dead husband and after the burial; she will be sleeping on the same bed in which the corps was laid for one week. Some culture will allow the hair of the woman to be bushy without combing or plaiting it for not less than one year. Others will immediately shave the woman's hair in honour of her late husband. In some Igbo communities, the water used in bathing the deceased will be given to the surviving wife to drink in order to prove her innocence of the husband's death. How about the issue of the brothers of the husband compulsorily inheriting her as wife without her consent and denying her of her matrimonial right of inheritance of property? All, these and many more, calls the clergy to speak out against inhuman treatment given to widows. The Church has become a caring community and has helped the widows to have a sense of hope in the society. The Church provides for them through the act of social gospel. More so, the priest has and should continue to preach against the in-deplorable act of man

against man as they talk to the congregation to convince the non-Christians for better change.¹⁹

In fact, Okodo posits that the religion of various people is unquestionable by the people. Various religions, like African Traditional Religion, stipulate stringent conditions of widowhood practices against their female adherents and they are not questioned. They accept all the dictates of the religions including making love to a widow by certain Chief priests in order to make her pure for another man to sleep with her. Otherwise any man that sleeps with her would die. The affected widows accept this condition whether they like or not. The clergy and the Church have been against other harmful cultural practices like killing of twins, sacrificing the albinos to the gods of the land with the view that they are unfortunate "whites" in Africa, etc.²⁰

The Voice of the Clergy against Gender Inequality

The position of women in African societies and beyond has generated serious debatable issues in the world today. In Africa, the position of women contributed immensely to the development of Africa but colonization has affected the legal structures, religions and cultures of African societies. Chika observed that there are basic issues inherent in human rights practices which accompany contemporary developmental practices. Yet, those human rights dictate pave way for gender issues including why women should be seen differently especially in patriarchal settings. But human right practices condemn any type of subjugation of human being.²¹ There is a clarion call for the emancipation of women from functional relegation in which they have been submerged over the years. Religion obviously is the bedrock of all types of socialization. Plato puts forth an analysis which clearly depicts him as one who overtly supports the equality of gender and thus posits:

If then we find that either male sex or the female is especially qualified for any particular form of occupation, then that occupation, we shall say, ought to be assigned to one sex or the other. But if the only difference appears to be that the male begets and the female brings forth we shall conclude that no difference between man and women has yet been produced that is relevant to our purpose.²²

For Plato "every one contributes effectively to a nation's growth and development, guardian and their wives share in the same pursuits." Aristotle differs in opinion with Plato's ideas that the feminine gender is a gender that is subservient and at the same time incomplete and he thus posit: "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities and thus we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."

Religiously speaking, Genesis 1:27 has a subtle biblical pronouncement on creation which is believed to render any argument on gender inequality inactive. Thus, "God created man in the image of himself in the image of God, He created him. Male and

female, He created them.” Issues of gender roles, as the Church sees it, are grounded in the basic understanding of the Church about human beings generally. Thus, everyone in the Church is called to perform a specific function which is rather participatory in the life of Christ. The Code of Canon Law states the place and the participatory role of the people of God in the Church thus, “Flowing from their rebirth in Christ there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ faithful. Because of this equality, they all contribute each according to his or her condition and office, the building up of the body of Christ”²³.

Chuks is very clear on this subject as he states that since the Church does not rule out gender roles, in terms of participation in sacramental administration, it stands to reason that the much stressed issue of gender equality, for the Church should not be over emphasized. Rather each person, man or woman should be seen as a relevant human being naturally created with minor biological differences. This assertion gives clarity to the place of the Church which simply is to recognize each individual in his/her full human rights, working collaboratively towards the desired global development.²⁴

The Challenge of Communal Unrest to the Clergy

Communal unrest and its extreme dimension, war are as old as mankind and have survived the merciless tide of change and modernization. Okafor posits that “In the earliest days, ordinary revolutionary pontifications by charismatic leaders, for example, were enough inducements to communal unrest”. Communal unrest could be seen as crisis, disturbances and clashes within, between or among communities in the form of riots, violent demonstrations, killings, outright war etc. The implications of this are enormous and do subject a victim nation to perpetual movement without progress development-wise. In such place people cannot worship freely. It puts the people on the run and also affects their spiritual state. Even the income in the Church also reduces drastically and culminates to starving the ministers who feed by the altar.²⁵

The clergy obviously has been a pivot to proffering solutions in terms of crisis via dialogue and preaching peace. As the pastor lives in a community, he as well leads in prayers even with the prayer team of the Church to intercede for peace and tranquillity. Sometimes, the entire pastors come together to address a particular problem in the nation. They advice leader, Government, chiefs etc on how to go about peace in an area infested with crisis. Today, the problem of Niger Delta crisis and that of Boko Haram has reduced to a great extent through intercessory life of pastors and the church. However, the challenge of Cattle Herdsmen ravaging the Nigerian nation presently will one day come to an end via prayer. Let us not lose sight of the fact that crisis can be caused by “political power and control of economic resources mutual suspicion, distrust, manipulation, manoeuvre, suppression and discrimination, and quest for better future. These and more are contributing factors to the causes of crisis” as stated by Uche

The Clergy against Corruption

Nigeria is a country with human resources of more than 160 million population and mineral resource like crude oil, coal, iron ore, timber, limestone and a host of others. But Nigeria is a country synonymous with corruption, injustice, embezzlement, unemployment, disease and political gambling which exacerbate the situation of the poor masses. Amujiri states that corruption is the bane of progress in Nigeria. This is a country where thousands of people graduate every year with no jobs available, and with little or no government policies to taking care of their jobless situations. Obiefuna, Ezeoba and Okoli are right when they said that corruption in Nigeria has its root in avarice and waste. Government agencies are involved in amassing the wealth of the nation with impunity and also in excessive spending of those amassed wealth.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace teaches that goods, even when they are legitimately owned, always have a universal destination. This universal destination implies that God created the wealth of nations to be used for survival by all human beings. Graudium says that "God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all people so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity".

Our Church leaders need to distance themselves from all dubious politicians in order to muster the courage to address the socio-political system which breeds poverty and oppression. The Catholic Synod of Bishops has advocated for an economy in service to the poor and strongly denounces an unjust economic order which has led to the perpetuation of poverty.

The Clergy and Politics

Is it good for the clergy to participate in politics? Most Nigerians are familiar with the interventions of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, Methodist Bishops Council and that of Anglicans on national matters. Sibani says that Christians should understand that this calls for their active participation not only to feature in the discussions but to take leadership positions as well. It is only then that we can bring to bear on the political arena the gospel message that we imbibe in the church.²⁷ Onaiyekan declares thus:

In the Nigerian context, the growing contentiousness of religious issues have been largely due to the politicization of religion, a process in which religion becomes largely a façade mask, or excuse for the pursuit of other objectives of individual or group interests. Since religion is very much a part of our lives as individuals and groups, it is an unavoidable element in Nigerian politics, and some recent government policies have tended to aggravate the situation.²⁸

The question therefore is not whether religion should influence our political life but how and to what extent? It is obvious that all the religions in this country profess values of

honesty, discipline, fear of God and other positive values. The crucial question which should concern us is how to bring these positive values to bear on our political life. This calls for the clergy to via into politics so as to affect the nation positively and to practice what they preach.

Conclusion

The problem of nations cannot be addressed only with other mechanisms exclusive of the clergy. The clergy builds the nation through building up of the human person. The clergy should encourage their members to via into politics and enthrone righteousness and justice. Obviously, the Nigerian nation cannot do without religion and the clergy in national matters as they are moral catalyst to nation building. The clergy performs pastoral duties; he is a counsellor, he disciplines, he advises the government and leaders and helps in keeping peace. He preaches also the social gospel which identifies with the poor, less privileged, prisoners, sick and handicapped, the aged and so on. It is obvious that the pulpit via the messages of the clergy goes to a great extent in changing so many lives even a sinner into a saint. Hence, the pastor should be encouraged and given every necessary support to fulfil the purpose of God for humanity. The clergy have been crying against gender inequality and gender discrimination which many families and societies today tend to practice at the expense of their female children. The females are less considered in certain positions in the society ranging from educational, political, economic, social, etc spheres which has militated against the female gender from climbing the ladder of life to the apex. The clergy should in a serious advocacy speak against this endemic issue which has eaten deep into our society and the Church today.

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Introduction

Hadith, more than other disciplines in Islamic Studies, has been a subject of controversy among Nigerian Muslims, especially in the southern part of the country, ranging from the religious leaders to the students of knowledge. Although, the issue of Hadith is said to have attained its maturity stage during the three best centuries of Islam, the generations were considered to be troubled as the fabrication of Hadith became a phenomenon due to sentimental or emotional reasons. At this moment, the concept of Hadith criticism and validation was developed by the Muhammadian, diversifying the Hadith