

Pastoral Ministry and Theological Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The society is filled with diverse occupation and several job descriptions; this diversity colors the human race in such a way that it increases the relevance, potential and effectiveness of human existence in the universe. This inherently complements the living of the human in the universe. Either formal or informal; it is imperative that before anyone ventures into a work, such person is adequately trained and mentored beforehand. This training or tutoring is often marked with a mode of certification. This *modus operandi* does not in any way exclude the pastoral ministry. The pastoral ministry entails great duties and responsibilities. It is a great work carried out by people who are called by God to shepherd the called out ones (Christians). The Church which envelops the people of God have become a common establishment in the Nigerian society, many denominations in Nigeria; and big men of God who are widely recognized in the universe as well as many other ministers who are locally known. It is observed that Pastoral ministry is now a common thing people venture into with the number of churches here and there in the nation. Meanwhile, the issue of pastor's training is an integral issue; because it has a long way to go in the discharge of the duties and responsibilities. Issues concerning pastoral ministry is always trending in the Nigerian news channels, having to do with the misnomer and abnormalities of Pastors: this is a serious dilemma. Therefore, the efficacy of theological training of ministers cannot be denied.

Keywords: Pastor, Pastoral Ministry, Theological Education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The place of the church in the nation Nigeria is of great importance, ranging from its contribution to the growth and development in several spheres. The church is a community of people, redeemed from sin, corruption, evil and wickedness. The Church encompasses the smallest unit of the society, which is the family. This in turn reveals the significance and efficacy of the Church to the society. Also, this connotes that the Church can and is in the position to lead the moral crusade in Nigeria. The argument of this research is built on the assertion that from all indications, reverse is the case in pastoral ministry in contemporary Nigeria. The research presents a lucid exploration of pastoral ministry in contemporary Nigerian context and several currents trending in the system; providing viable way-out for its besieging dilemma.

PASTORAL MINISTRY: AN OVERVIEW

According to Meyer pastoral ministry is the highest calling in Christian service. Taylor captures the concept of pastoral ministry with the word "shepherd and the flock", from Luke 12:32 and John 10:7-16 where Jesus himself

used the idea of a caring shepherd looking after a flock to describe His relationship with His disciples and faithful followers. [1] A shepherd is a well-known figure among the agricultural people, even the ancient Israel (Ps. 23).

However, the name 'pastoral' is a uniquely Christian term that expressed a fundamental concept that is deeply embedded in every biblical portrayal of a Christian ministry. The term succinctly refers to a rich scriptural figure that finds its beginning and end in God (Adams, 1981). Therefore, the idea of shepherd can be used to describe the work of a person (pastor) whom God appointed to care and encourage His people.[2] Jesus Christ never called himself bishop, elder or even preacher, but he did referred to himself as a shepherd (Jn 10:3, Lk 15:4).

Pastoral ministry is for the called and anointed of which they are bound to be tested and tried. Thus, pastoral ministry is not a child's play.[3] "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task" (NIV). Noteworthy are these words; "what" and "assigned". The usage of 'what' for

humans in the verse was neither a mistake nor for relegation or demotion sake; instead, Paul was re-establishing and reminding the Church their place as instruments used by God; absolutely for His glory alone. Therefore, pastoral ministry is an assignment. [4]

This letter was written to the Corinthians after Paul has been used of God Almighty and Apollos already recognized as a man mighty in scriptures. In other words, Paul was saying “we (himself and Apollos) are nothing but ordinary servants who are used by God...” Also, Paul’s message to the Corinthians connotes that pastoral ministry is not a basis for competition and rivalry. Instead, it is complementary and cooperative.[4]

More so, God arranged the pastoral ministry in such a way that each person comes in to perform that which he has been assigned. Meaning that, no single pastor or pastoral ministry is sufficient in itself. The study opines that the cooperative nature of pastoral ministry suggests that what a man is assigned to do seems to form the basic resource for another person to carry out his own assignment (I Cor 3:4-10). A cardinal purpose of pastoral ministry is to display God’s glory to the nations.[5] Today, there are those who sees pastoral ministry as an appellation; a meaning of making name and amercing titles for themselves, reducing pastoral ministry to a mere thing that serves as a basis for recognition.

Pastoral ministry in Nigeria is filled with preaching the “popular gospel of health and wealth”, which is not helping matters. Most Nigerian pastors today preach half-truths and are therefore producing half-backed Christians. [6] Meanwhile, pastoral ministry should be sensitive and flexible, such that it encourages people to develop their potentials.

OBSERVED RESPONSIBILITIES OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

As simple as the shepherd picture-language vis-à-vis the pastoral ministry, people who live in countries where there are no sheep or herds or those who live in town and urban centers (like Lagos) might find it difficult grappling the ‘shepherd and the flock’ concept. However, the understanding becomes vivid when the duties and responsibilities of the shepherd is considered.

The shepherd guides his flocks to pasture and safe resting place (Isa 40:11). He provides for the needs of the sheep (Ps. 23). He guides the

flocks from dangers (I Sam 17:34). He searches for any sheep that strays (Matt 18:12), even if it involves going to dangerous places. He knows the sheep individually even by name (Jhn 10:1-4). He tends the sheep that are weak (Gen 33:13). Therefore, being a shepherd means taking a deep personal interest in the welfare of the flock as a whole and of each individual sheep.

The highlighted responsibilities of the pastor are in line with Akanni’s opinion, when he said that the pastoral ministry is not a child’s play. This is because it calls for courage, patience and self-sacrifice.[2] Pastoral ministry in the early church adequately explicated these responsibilities; such that the disciples and the Apostles fed the new Christians with the truth; scaring for the needy and distressed; encouraging those who have become hald-hearted in faith; keeping order; discipline, spiritual guidance and direction (Jhn 21:15-17, Acts 20:28-31; I Thess 5:-15; II Tim 4:1-5).

However, the scripture reveals the reality of “false prophets” and “worthless shepherds”. The study observes that the thrilling issues to be thrashed in the next section of the research have been for long. The Old Testament speaks of the eagerness of shepherds concerning privileges (I Cor 9:5) while refusing responsibilities (Ezk 34:2-6). The New Testament also speaks of those who behaves like robbers and thieves (I Pet 5:2). Often, Paul warns the Churches of the danger of being led by ‘false apostles’ or ‘deceitful workmen’ (II Cor 11:13, Gal 2:4, Phi 3:2, Col 2:8). Succinct exploration is not to exonerate the current-negative trends ravaging the Nigerian pastorate. Instead, this is to establish the biblical purview concerning the roles and responsibilities of true shepherd; giving adequate hints on their distinctions.

CURRENT TRENDS IN NIGERIAN PASTORATE

Churches in Nigeria have done worse than the government in the area of morality where the Church supposed to be in the lead.[7] Records of pastor’s immoral acts have become the order of the day in Nigeria; for example, a senior pastor of the Light City Church, Egan branch, Pastor Gabriel Ajeaga has been arraigned before an Ejigbo Magistrate Court in Lagos for allegedly attempting to murder the leader of the church after he was sacked.[8].

Also, independent News report terrible sexual immoral acts of two Nigerian Pastors.

Twenty-year-old Fortune from Akwa Ibom State has exposed how her biological father Apostle Williams Okon Bassey defiled her in his church vestry and went ahead threatening to place a curse on her should she reveal her ordeal to anybody. According to the rather unfortunate Fortune, her father had always pegged his payment of her school fees on her acceptance to go to bed with him. Not only that, Fortune recounts as well that her father also demands sex from her before picking bills for her other needs. The traumatised lady further narrated to policemen that she was just 13 years when her dad started having sex with her. Her daddy, the Presiding Pastor associated with Mount Zion Light House Full Gospel Church, Obio Imo Lane, Uyo, Apostle Williams Okon Bassey, has been arrested by operatives of the Akwa Ibom State Police Command. The state Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Odiko MacDon, who says six others, including another pastor, were arrested for alleged incest and defilement, told newsmen that Lot of money said she got pregnant thrice. “She further revealed that the first time her father defiled her was in the chapel vestry. He or she threatened in order to place the curse on her if the girl dares tell anyone about his escapades. He also demands sex before paying her school fees or catering for her needs. [9]

The Law enforcement Command’s Spokesperson added that will “on October 31, one Anwanga Essien Udo regarding 7, Itiam Street, Uyo, aged 33, a Guía with Restoration Bible Church, was arrested for getting unlawful carnal knowledge of their 10-year-old step-daughter(name withheld). “When she has been left alone with your pet, rather than be a pops to the woman’s, he opted to turn the girl to a sex-machine.” The police spokesman warned perpetrators of such an act to be able to desist forthwith or become willing for you to contend with this full wrath of often the law. They, therefore, urged parents to help also make haste within reporting every form involving sexual harassment when noticed to the police or other Security Agencies in the state timely, as concealment connected with these crimes has only led towards an increase in violations. [9]

Recently, there is hardly a well-known denomination or ministry that is not linked with the performance of miracles. Thousands appear in churches and crusade grounds (both Christians and non-Christians) seeking miracles.[10] For real, healing miracles have actually become the real thing or the most

current issue in African Christianity today, with many ministers making the most use of the opportunity to extort and exploit people.[11] So called “pastors” in Nigeria perpetuate fake miracles, for example;

Pastors come under fire for alleged stage-managed miracles: The founder of Mountain of Liberation and Miracle Ministry, aka Liberation City, Dr Chris Okafor, has come under fire on social media after a video clip showing him performing what appeared like a miracle created a controversy. However, the same woman was shown in another video clip claiming she had the same problem as another unidentified pastor prayed for her in the public.[12]

Furthermore, Nigeria is a country where pastors can fight over money; in fact, Iloh lamented that Nigeria pastors are too greedy. Materialism has dominated the scene of Nigerian pastorate, blinding many from the fact that the greatest evidence of wealth is contentment.[13] Because of poverty and greed, pastors in Nigeria end up with bitter quarrels over finances marred the spiritual blessings of many. A lucid example is the April 29 – 1st May, 2005 healing crusade conducted by Benny Hinn in Lagos, as major rancor and counter-accusations ensued among the organizers concerning the handling of funds.

Steiner argues that the lust for materialism is aided by exposure to prosperity teaching and produces nothing but prosperity preaching in return. [14] This extreme erases the cherished values of honesty, truthfulness and contentment in Nigerian pastorate; such that it has established and elevated a “get rich quick syndrome” in the Nigerian mentality, with no exceptions to pastors and Church leaders in Nigeria.[11] Materialism creates problem for human community.[12]

Preaching is a really big business, almost as profitable as the oil commerce in Nigeria.[2] Abati lamented that Nigeria value system is bad and worse by the day, such that the only thing Nigerians value is money.[13] An average Nigerian can do anything for money. An evangelistic outreach that is watered down to a mere commercial enterprise can neither revive the Church nor heal the nation.[14] The concept of materialism emphasizes ‘having’ rather than ‘being’; meanwhile, the life of a man does not consist in the abundance of his possession (Lk 12:15). On a contrary, church money evidently symbolizes the highest source of wealth in the present day Nigeria Christianity.[15] The fact that wealth campaign is the order of the day

cannot be denied.[16] In fact, the damage “health and wealth preaching” has caused and cost Nigerian Christianity, even the nation at large cannot be discarded. [17]

Pastors and Church leaders in Nigeria have succeeded in institutionalizing falsehood, idleness and laziness. They employ falsehood methods and exaggerations to impress their followers. They manipulate testimonies and many a times claim to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit; meanwhile, the so called message is somewhat incongruent with the biblical standpoint.[17] The wrong teaching of wealth as solely a product of divine favor devoid of hard work have caused havoc and damage to the youth worldview; with the psychological imprint that poverty is a sin, therefore, they have to be rich by all means.[18]

The negative trends ravaging the Nigerian pastorate are results of charlatans looking for means of livelihood.[19] People of this status-quo who later turn general overseer, church founders or leaders do not care whether the people have eaten or not; all they care about is their own personal pockets; dubious and cunning to the extent that they brainwash their followers. Obviously, the Nigerian Church is now a den of robbers, a place for mischief makers, cheats and immoral acts.[20] The commercialization of Christianity has led to corruption, immorality and other forms of indiscipline in the Nigerian Church today.[21] Ehusani pictured what is spreading like fire in contemporary Nigeria as a false Christianity accompanied by a mass movement with elements of Christian ritualism.[22] Therefore, the church, with specialty to the Nigeria pastorate is obviously part of the problems of Nigeria.[14]

THE NEED FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA PASTORATE

Here, the study proposes a categorization for the salient issues in Nigerian pastorate discussed in the preceding part of this work. The two categories are; ignorance and igno-fact. The former has to do with the condition of being uninformed, uneducated or naive. Meaning that, Nigerian pastors who fall in this group are victims unintentionally. Although, the probability that ravaging issues in the Nigerian pastorate are intentional cannot be denied; the study posits that misnomer of some ministers are results of ignorance; since ministry is not limited to those who have theological training. This standpoint is built on the fact that Nigeria pastorate is filled with many individuals who

claimed to be called by God, leaving their vocation to start ministry without acquiring any formal theological education.

On the other hand, the later ‘igno-fact’ is a word coined by the research from the two words; ‘ignorance’ and ‘fact’. The study argues that “igno-fact” inherently captures ministers in the clique of perpetuating vices in the Nigerian pastorate, affecting Nigerian Christianity and the nation as a whole. In other words, Church leaders in the category are aware, just that they choose to ignore the fact. They do what they do intentionally and knowingly. The study observes that this is very much deadly, because ministers who falls in this category knows the right thing to do, but just won’t do it. This is really disheartening!

If this is the case, then what about ministers who possibly have no call, but became pastors in Nigeria through the money-making venture and business center mindset? The study sees the need for moral and spiritual reform in order to reduce and tackle the vice which had crept into the Nigerian pastorate. For the Church to move forward, it has to undergo a major reform in all spheres; without leaving any fabric of the church sectors and units. The Christian message must focus on the moral development of the human person. Through the experience of a new birth, ministers whose minds are filled with the pastoral ministry as a business venture can be disengaged. This indicates that there is hope for the Nigerian Church!

More so, the caption of this section (need for theological education) sounded as if there are no theological institutions in Nigeria. Meanwhile, there are many; The Apostolic Church Theological Seminary Amumara, Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu, ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja, Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomosho, Life Theological Seminary Lagos, Peter and Paul Seminary Bodija, and many others. If this is the case, how effective are these training centers? The study observes that the curriculum of theological education for training Church leaders should include more courses in the praxis of moral theology. This suggests a thermometer to measure the effectiveness of these institutions; the fact that the salient issues in Nigeria pastorate discussed in the preceding section of this research speaks for itself conscious effort to produce kingdom ministers who are not spiritually giant and morally dwarfs as in the contemporary scene.

Furthermore, the study argues that anyone who is sure of God's call will be concerned to achieve the best kind of preparation. Prime and Begg opined that God does not deal with everyone in the same way in the matter of training.[23] In fact, sometimes, the best training a person can receive may be within his own home Church, where he serves and proves himself. While not the right preparation for money, it is God's purpose for some to take straight forward university training in theology, theological seminaries or bible colleges. But in the case where there is commitment to a particular denomination, there will be a training institution where the individual is expected to train.

However, other alternatives can be explored when the person in question has family responsibilities. There are two (2) factors that seems to hinder the effectiveness of theological education. The first has to do with dogmatism. Differing personal circumstances demands flexible approaches to the subject. The second has to do with personal decisions on how to go about the training process. The study argues that theological training and education should be a product of consultation with those who are superior and are in the position to provide guidance.

SUCCESS AND SERVICE: A RE-UNDERSTANDING

Many people are in ministry; in fact, many are aspiring to go into the ministry without knowing how to secure resources that will carry out the work. This is why many pastors in Nigeria go about looking for resources in unscriptural ways to do God's work; thinking that success in the ministry is determined by how many resources they are able to gather around themselves. This is a pure wrong perception of the ministry!

Obviously, people may use different methods to get resources and those methods may seem to be working for real, but that doesn't mean they bear heavenly approval. Some things may work and yet not have any iota of God's approval.[24] God's way of judging a man is not based on works or results, but on faithfulness.[4] It does not have any inclination with the numbers of cars, huge bank balance, cars, among others. Services is not the pathway or preliminary to greatness as many commonly assume; rather, service itself is greatness.[25] This truth carries an enormous compensation; meaning that fulfillment in life lies immediately to hand in humble service (Mk 9:33; Lk 22:24-27). [26]

Therefore, the Nigerian Church must balance her teachings and preaching on prosperity, blessing, healing and miracles with sacrifice, perseverance, holiness and righteousness.

CONCLUSION

Pastoral ministry and theological training in Nigeria are really in a fix. The problem is multifaceted, such that it rears its ugly head in every aspect of daily life in Christendom and even the nation at large. The fact that the ill-nature of Nigerian pastoral ministry is affecting the nation as a whole cannot be denied. Therefore, this study recommends a moral and spiritual purge within the rank and file of the Nigerian Church. Then, the Church can serve as an agent of revolution and reformation by reconstructing the good collapsed values of the nation; no matter how fruitful a pastor is rated; if he is not faithful to God, then, he is not successful.

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