

Religious Bodies as Catalyst For National Development in Africa: The Case of The Living Faith Church

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Abstrak

Politik dan agama dari waktu ke waktu telah menjadi dua sisi mata uang. Hal ini terutama di Afrika, Nigeria inklusif, karena sifat kolonialisme yang disertai pengenalan agama Kristen. Betapapun dipahami, kegiatan berbagai badan misionaris yang datang dengan kolonialisme membawa pembangunan ke Nigeria di semua bidang kehidupan terutama di sektor pendidikan. Hal ini dapat dibuktikan dengan banyaknya sekolah yang didirikan oleh para misionaris Kristen yang memberikan pendidikan berkualitas selama beberapa generasi selama dan setelah pemerintahan kolonial di negara ini. Tulisan ini mencoba menyelidiki aktivitas gereja Living Faith (Winners Chapel) dalam membawa pembangunan melalui pendidikan. Artikel ini menemukan bahwa gereja Living Faith telah berinvestasi dengan giat di sektor pendidikan sebagaimana diwujudkan dalam pendirian dua Universitas dan rantai sekolah Menengah dan Sekolah Dasar di seluruh negeri yang terus melatih sejumlah orang Nigeria dan pada gilirannya berkontribusi pada pengembangan negara. Meskipun ada yang berpendapat bahwa jenis pendidikan yang diberikan oleh gereja ini terlalu mahal dan menyasar kalangan elit jika dibandingkan dengan pendidikan yang diberikan oleh misionaris Kristen awal. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa karena otoritas pemerintah di berbagai tingkatan terus mengabaikan sektor pendidikan terlepas dari kerinduan orang-orang Nigeria akan pendidikan berkualitas, biaya tidak dapat dibandingkan dengan layanan yang diberikan oleh gereja iman yang hidup di sektor pendidikan dan dengan demikian memberikan kontribusi sendiri untuk pengembangan Nigeria.

Abstract

Politics and religion overtime have become two sides of a coin. This is particularly through of Africa, Nigeria inclusive, due to the nature of colonialism that accompanied introduction of Christian religion. No matter how conceived, the activities of the various missionary bodies that came with colonialism brought about development to Nigeria in all spheres of live especially in the education sector. This can be attested to by many schools set up by the Christian missionaries that provided quality education for many generations during and after colonial rule in the country. This paper attempts to investigate the activities of the Living Faith church (Winners Chapel) in bringing development through education. The paper found that the Living Faith church have invested vigorously in the education sector as manifested in the establishment of two Universities and chains of Secondary and Primary schools across the country that have continued to train scores of Nigerians and in turn contributing to the development of the country. Although it has been argued that the type of education provided by this church is too expensive and targeted at the elites when compared to the education provided by the early Christian missionaries. The paper concludes that since governmental authorities at various levels have continued to neglect the education sector in spite of the teeming yearning of Nigerians for quality education, the cost of ignorance cannot be compared to the services rendered by the Living faith church in the education sector and thereby contributing its own quota to the development of Nigeria.

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Introduction

Politics and religion are two sides of a coin that cannot be easily separated. However, before the advent of the two foremost faith in Africa (Christianity and Islam), traditional religion was commonly practiced and this religious belief was held by many Africans; including people that occupied present day Nigeria (Ekeopara, 1996). The introduction of Christianity and Islam relegated the traditional religion to the background as many colonial territories in Africa embraced these new religions.

Methu (1985) asserted that Islam arrived in Nigeria through the northern part and came around 1000AD. Borno in northeast Nigeria was the first town to have come in contact with Islam and the religion was spread among the inhabitants of the city especially by the people of the upper class for reasons ranging from economic, social and political. It was the Jihad led by Uthman Dan Fodio that later spread Islam to every part of Northern Nigeria (Enwerem, 1995). From the forgoing, Islam became intolerant to the traditional religion and in the process; the unbelievers were forced to convert to Islam not by pervasion, but by the military might of the Jihadist (Ekeopara, 1996)

Christianity in Nigeria can be traced to the coming of the Portuguese in the 15th century. But the Portuguese were not successful in planting Christianity because they were involved in slave trade business rather than missionary goals (Galadima & Yusuf, 2001). Due to the failure of the Portuguese in entrenching Christianity, by the 17th century, the Roman Catholic missionaries made another attempt to establish Christianity. The Catholic missionaries moved into the hinterlands and in the process visited major cities like Benin and Warri where they traded and also preached. By 1833, the British abolished slave trade and captured slaves who have lived in Europe and America were freed. The freed slaves had accepted Christianity and by the expiration of the 19th century, some of the freed slaves returned home already educated through the education offered by the CMS (Christian Missionary Society) and they practiced Christianity and preached to their fellow kinsmen.

The early missionary's contributed immensely to the development in Nigeria and this can be seen in various facets of life such as; training the inhabitant in the art and civilization and government and in doing this, a major tool was through western education. The western education was treasured and utilized by majority of Nigerians and the schools was largely welcomed in most parts of Nigeria (Okpalike & Nwadiakor, 2015).

After so many years after the advent of Christianity in Nigeria and with different individually owned mega churches in existence, the statement of problem for this paper arises from popular claim that early missionary schools provided quality and free education for many generations of Nigerians, which new generation of Christian churches in Nigeria today are finding difficult to replicate. Instead a lot of Christians and Muslims and ordinary Nigerians cannot afford to send their wards to these schools due to its exorbitant tuition fee. Then if ordinary citizens cannot afford these institutions, of what essence is the effort of religious groups in raising these institutions? The paper thus seeks to answer these two questions; has the living faith church real-

ly contributed to educational development in Nigeria? Are there lessons to draw from the impact by religious groups? This paper thus seeks to investigate the Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel) and its activities in bringing development to the Nigerian nation through the instrumentality of education.

To achieve this, the study adopts historical and analytical approach in which content analysis was made. The study adopts a secondary data sourced from books, journals, newspapers, internet sources and other published and unpublished materials. For analytical purpose, the paper has been divided into different sections; while this section introduced the paper, the second section reviewed the major concepts in the discourse and provided a theoretical framework for this study. The third section provided historical knowledge of Christian missionaries and their activities. The next section examined and traced the contribution of living faith church to educational development in Nigeria and the last section was the concluding part.

Literature review

The well-being of a system depends on the effective functioning of its sub-systems. Religious groups are part of the Nigerian system and their actions and decisions can also mar or contribute to development in Nigeria. This section is concerned about reviewing basic and major concepts in this paper. Kitause (2012) provided a concise yet simple definition of religion. To him, it is conscious expression of response to the belief in a superior God who is believed to hold the key to existence of humanity. Metuh (1992) agrees with the above when he opined that it is the symbolic expression finding space between the heart of men and a superior God. Religion consists of values and practices that guide action and inactions of people. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004) see religion as a belief in the existence of an invisible world which is home to spiritual beings that are deemed to have superior powers over the material world. In the same vein, Watkins & Watkins (1992) observed that religion has to do with worshipping a central and Supreme Being called God. To him, because people believe a celestial authority formed the world and their existence is influenced by the divine expression. From the foregoing we can draw that all forms of religion believe in the existence of a supreme God. However the mode of worship is what distinct one from the other. The winners' chapel, the focus of this paper belongs to the Christian faith. Christianity reveals an expression of belief in Jesus Christ grounded in the Holy Scripture inspired by God. Christians believe that God became human in Jesus to provide access to Gods. To them, Christians view Jesus as the ideal human being, the full revelation of God's plan for humanity.

Education begets development as Oyinlola (2012) observed that it is impossible to expand the potential of an individual to contribute to the growth of the society without education. Burch (2006) states that education is necessary and has an intrinsic role in development. Ritzer (2012) opined that education refers to art of acquiring intellectual, physical and moral wherewithal for proper functioning of individual in the society. It is the process by which we acquire needed skills, values and knowledge which are neces-

sary in a society. However Aghenta (2001) categorized education into two, the informal and the formal. The former is a lifelong education initiated by the family, environment and peer group which results in the acquisition of knowledge of local traditions while the latter is acquired in schools and it is based on systematic method of teaching.

Development is a multi-faceted concept and be captured in social, economic, political and human terms. Todaro and Smith (2006) provided an encompassing definition of development describing the concept as physical reality and state of mind in which the society has secured the means for obtaining a better life. This goes through ensuring mental enrichment, wealth acquisition and good living conditions for all people. United Nations development programme (UNDP) (1990:10) defined development as a process of enlarging people's choice which translates to creative and productive opportunities. However, the ultimate aim of development is to produce a situation that allows people to enjoy an elongated, healthy and resourceful life. Development thus denotes a determined change in a society that adds to social and economic welfare and the improvement of its people without creating any resentment.

Functionalist Theory of Religion

This theory can be traced to the writings of scholars such as Auguste Comte, Tocqueville and Herbert Spencer. They borrowed from the systematic analysis of Easton in describing the society as a system with interconnected parts and within their system; various functions are performed for the maintenance of the system. However, sociological views of religion prompted questions such as what can religion do for the maintenance and advancement of society? What kind of religion will promote rapid development in the emerging societies? Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), a French scholar argues that religion exists overtime and can initiate and contribute to societal wellbeing. During his early life, he observed that American Evangelical Protestantism contributed to democratic growth in America. He recommended modifications in Catholicism with a view of fostering democracy in France. Auguste Comte another French scholar believes religion can foster greater commitment to society in his "religion of humanity". To him, people's belief in spiritual world brings certain dispositions to supreme values that are mostly connected to morality. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) an English philosopher likened the religious institution to every other institution in the society. To him, they have a part to play in the overall well-being of the society just like every other organ of the state. Various institutions must then cooperate among themselves.

Emile Durkheim, the father of modern sociology also argued that religion has continued to subsist because it has satisfied definite needs. Religion creates mental state in an individual which raises one above oneself and helps to lead a superior life. He explains that the sacredness of religion brings people to worship a supreme being and when a society collectively performs certain ritual cooperatively, the shared views are awakened. These shared views are symbolized by the sacrosanct object set apart by the society. The set of guidelines and procedures, characteristics of the

ritual, direct and transform the society into a moral community.

From the foregoing, we can establish the fact that religion cannot be relegated when it comes to societal advancement and just like every other important unit in the state; the religious institution provides a basis for attitudinal stability which often helps people in their response to work, community services and interpersonal relations. This theory is therefore central to the general build up to the study.

Historical insight into the activities of Christian missionaries

The foundation of Christianity in Nigeria can be traced to the early missionary activities. The pre-colonial era in Nigeria was marked with the existence of fragmented empires and kingdoms such as the Oduduwa Empire of the Yoruba, Fulani Empire of Zodge, the Benin kingdom, and the Aro Chukwu Empire of the Igbo. During this period there was a strong attachment to traditional religion and rites, an expression of beliefs finding solace in gods which are believed to be the source of peace and order in the society. Baur (2009) noted that several attempts were made by the early missionaries to plant Christianity in Nigeria but some failed while some succeeded to an extent. To Agha (1999) The Benin and the Warri in the Niger Delta region were the first to meet with the early missionaries. For example, the Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries showed up in Benin in 1485, a period when Oba Uzolua was the king. Unfortunately, the attempt at this time failed due to strong attachment to indigenous religion. However history reveals that under the reign of Oba of Esigie in 1514, Christianity received a warm welcome as the king and his chiefs developed interest in the religion. This led to them being baptized by the missionaries. What followed after this was the construction of churches, statues of saints, and Catholic emblems which proves today that somewhat success was recorded in Benin and Warri mission field. In 1841, Christianity had spread its tentacles to the Western part of the country. Dike (1957) opined that Christianity was welcomed in Lagos and soon after king Kosoko, a major promoter of slave trade was deported by British administration, Christianity started its operations in Yoruba land. The Church mission society (C.M.S) and the Wesleyan Methodist mission are part of the earliest missions in Yoruba land and Oduyoye (1969) observed that Samuel Ajayi Crowther helped these mission movements by reaching his own people in the West.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, mission activities were spotted in Calabar where the Scottish Presbyterian mission preached the gospel to the Efik people. Missionaries like Mary Slessor and Reverend Hope Waddle were pioneer missionaries to work in Calabar mission field. King Eyo gave full support to the missions and helped to spread the gospel to various cities and towns that was parts of the former Eastern region (Ajayi 1965; Kalu 1978). Mission work was also extended to the Northern Nigeria between 1870-1918. Archdeacon Henry John and Charles Paul were instrumental in making contact with the North and though no single person was converted, it was a chance to build on the opening. To Crampton (1979) in 1870, the Church mission society sponsored the Sudan party and Hausa asso-

ciation to translate the gospel into Hausa language. Though effort to convert people into Christian still proved abortive, mission stations were granted opportunity to stay which became foundation for spread of gospel in Northern Nigeria.

It is noteworthy that the activities of the missionaries were not just streamlined to the gospel as Ajayi (1965) observed that they were also interested in the moral, material and political advancement of the unenlightened people. Oduyoye (1978) noted that the missionaries trained some Nigerians to meet up with the nation building practices. The training led to Nigeria inheriting a public service armed with staffs with necessary skills at independence. The Christian missions sought for a social regeneration plan and thus started to affect this plan through churches and schools. It is upon this objective that formal education was introduced which was consequently patronized by Nigerians. Most missions provided basic education to ensure the inculcation of appropriate Christian ethics that enabled Africans attending the mission schools to become good believers. Also denominations put up healthy rivalry as they expanded their school system. This provided many educational options for local Christians. According to Ajayi (1965) the first set of schools that were built by the missions were at the center and the missionaries had to learn the local languages which helped them in bringing the schoolmasters up in English language.

Olukoju (1997) noted that the church mission society pioneered newspaper publishing in Nigeria in 1859 in the Nigerian newspaper *Iwe Iroyin*. However not only did they started journalism but also they started printing works. The Christian mission presented a variety of periodicals and journals printed by the church. They include African Church Gleaner, Nigerian Baptist and the African church through which politicians aired their views. (Gbadamosi, 1999).

The Living Faith Church (The Winners' Chapel)

According to the report of Adelagun (2013) the living faith church popularly known as Winners chapel started its operations in Kaduna in July 1989 after the founder Bishop David Oyedepo received a divine mandate from God to preach the message of faith to all men. Initially the living faith church had her name as liberation faith hour ministries. However after some years, pastor E.A Adeboye, the founder of Redeemed Christian Church of God ordained Oyedepo and his wife as pastors of the new church. Few years later, Oyedepo was ordained as a Bishop. Owoeye (2005) noted that pastor Oyedepo started with 48 members which rose to 128 members within nine months of operation. He moved from Kaduna to Lagos in September in 1989 and again moved to Ota in Ogun State which is the international headquarters of the church today.

Opoola (2010) noted that the Winners chapel has various branches within Nigeria located in 8 regions. Each region has a diocese headed by a Bishop. The Diocesan headquarters are situated in Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Warri, Ibadan, Owerri, Abuja, Ilorin and Kano. The operation of living faith church is carried out by the World mission Agency, an organizational arm of the ministry tasked with training, teaching and schooling men and women to dis-

cover and utilize their full potentials for the society. The agency also teaches scriptures to liberate men from poverty, failure and sort of vices in the society. The church holds an annual programme called "Shiloh" at Ota every year in December. The auditorium at Ota is said to be the biggest one in Nigeria accommodating fifty thousand and four hundred people.

Contributions to educational development

The living faith church has proved that it exists not only for spiritual purposes but also as an institution that has a part to play in educational development of Nigeria. This is seen in the establishment of chains of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Premium news (2016) reported that Bishop Oyedepo stressed the importance of investing in Education at Covenant University fifth inaugural lecture. He opined that people need to be educated before they can partner with stakeholders to achieve meaningful development. The level of education of the citizenry would help to drive nation building and development. In his address, he advised the federal government to focus on huge investment in education and also reviewing education policies in the country.

According to Education commission of the Living faith church, Bishop Oyedepo is a visionary leader who received the mandate to promote inclusiveness in education in Nigeria. He revealed that the involvement of the church in education is not for profit or competition but "the received of the Lord" to help destinies of young people. The Education commission for the church thus aims at bringing revolution in Education that will help the young ones to see the vitality in them, develop and fulfill God given purpose so as to be responsible to God and the society. The commission also helps to guarantee equal access to educational opportunities at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

The Nursery and Primary schools are called Kingdom heritage. Education commission of the church confirms that there are 156 of them spread across the entire country. The objectives of these schools are to help each child realize his or her purpose and cultivate their concealed abilities. To provide quality education, the church employs professional personnel with demonstrated uprightness and outstanding teaching, managerial and technical capabilities. They also have serene and conducive learning environment with best of facilities to aid learning. The living faith church also has chains of secondary schools called Faith academy spread across states in Nigeria. Currently the church pride itself with 21 schools offering quality secondary school education of which seven are full boarding schools, thirteen are day schools and one day and boarding school. The philosophy of the establishment is to produce and raise world changers, trail blazers, pathfinders and record breakers in their respective field of Endeavour. In attestation of the quality church high schools, the last highest jamb scorer for 2018 was a product of faith academy, Ota with 364. In order to maintain this standard, services of thousands of teachers are needed therefore creating massive employment.

Another contribution made to education is the establishment of covenant and Landmark universities. The

two universities have supplemented the efforts of Federal and state government in providing quality education in Nigeria. Covenant University prides itself with architectural master pieces and serene environment consisting of largest center for learning resources, college building, 3000 seat capacity student chapel, professors, seasoned Christian intellectuals, staff quarters and student halls of residence. Covenant University was rated the best private University by the National Universities commission (NUC) in 2005 and has held that position till date. The University graduated its pioneer students in 2006 and has continued to produce competitive graduates yearly.

Landmark University is the second university established by the living faith church in 2010 located in Omu-Aran, the home town of David Oyedepo. The school has its focus on agriculture and since then makes waves by becoming the second best private university in Nigeria. It has three colleges: Agriculture science, Science and technology, social sciences and management and Business. The school graduated the pioneer student from these colleges in 2014. The University runs a large scale farm with crops, big fishery and large poultry. The universities have helped in providing employment for teeming youth. Bishop Oyedepo also provides scholarships for students in Covenant and Landmark Universities as he insists that all children of school age not in school as a result to financial constraints will be catered for by the church. Many have been able to engage in business on campus as Covenant University has bakery, water bottling, petrol station, restaurant and shopping stores. (Rotimi, 2006). It is good to know that the living faith church is not ready to relent in providing quality education. By 2032 the living faith church total secondary schools would equal that of Oyo and its primary schools would equal that of the entire South west states in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The cost of ignorance is far expensive than quality education and if quality services can be provided in an environment where such is scarce then it should be appreciated. From the above discussion and findings, we can appreciate the effort of the living faith church in commitment to complementing the efforts of the federal and state government in reaching out to children and young ones to improve their lives through education. The structures, scholarships and presence of qualified personnel in these schools indicate more can be achieved in years to come. Just like other Pentecostal churches, the Living faith church has contributed to sustainable growth of Nigeria in the education sector. Their contributions generally have also made the church more relevant to the needs of Africans. We can thus assert that religion can be indeed a catalyst for national development. Religious groups should then intensify efforts to contribute their quota to the overall wellbeing of the society in terms of education as it is the bedrock of any serious society. However in other areas like job creation, peace and order and security, religious groups can also complement the effort of government. If religious groups recognize the fact that they are sub-system needed for effective functioning of the overall political and socio-economic system then actions should be taken to contribute consistently to

the growth and development of the nation.

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