

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AND ITS BACKGROUND TO NATIONALISM IN NIGERIA, 1870-1914

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Abstract

The issue of nationalism has remained a topical question in the intellectual discourse of political pundits, in the sense that it is strategic when mapping the social horizon of a given geographical entity. In the case of Nigerian nationalism, scholars continue to write as if the Church, and hence, the missionaries were not active participants in the great events that evolved the independent Nigeria, and more so, that Nigerian nationalism did not begin vigorously before 1914. Good as such historical data may seem, this research has argued that such observations may be misleading and not based on empirical data. The conviction is that Christian missionaries who had been operating in Nigeria since the nineteenth century had encouraged amongst their converts the idea of the creation of a modern state which would take its place in the comity of nations. Their activities helped to break down ethnic prejudices and to bring their converts in a loyalty transcending ethnic ties. Therefore, beginning from 1870, Nigerian agents of the missions began to reject the European appraisal of the African past and demanded a new orientation and improved educational facilities to effect this reappraisal. They broke with the European missions and criticized most aspects of colonial administration. Through the missionary education they became familiar with the British parliamentary system of government and at the same time became conscious of their rights to fight for the independent of their country. It was from this class of mission educated Nigerians that virile leadership for

nationalism and movements for self-government were drawn. The research therefore concluded, based on evidence, that there was a forceful nationalist awakening in Nigeria before 1914 which particularly arose from the mission circle; and it was constructive, purposeful, inspiring and fruitful and prepared the ground for the better known latter day nationalism in Nigeria.

Introduction

From the start, missionary propaganda in Nigeria was not just a religious invasion. In effect it was associated with a political invasion as well. Oosthuizen (1968) opines that “the Church itself in Africa lived on imperial and political favours and the Christian missionaries were at times pioneers of the white man’s penetration” (p. 6). It has been argued that treaties signed between the colonial government and the different African ethnic nationalities before the formal establishment of colonial presence gave the missionaries a foothold in several places in Africa. The enthusiastic support which the colonial administration gave to the missionaries predisposed the latter to even greater involvement in their work of colonial administration. However, ironically, the Christian missions who heralded British rule in Nigeria also began the process of its termination. As the white missionaries did not want to be excluded from the Church, nor did they wish the British rule to come to an end, so the Nigerian missionaries sought to use all the missions for the same end—to achieve political independence. The Church became the cradle of Nigerian nationalism, the only forum of nationalist expression, and the main focus of nationalist energies until after 1914.

However, the underlying ideas and social composition of factors present in these political activities are yet to be fully analyzed to enable us see to

what extent Christianity was a vehicle for the expression of political views. This missionary factor in Nigerian nationalism is a factor which many historians have tended to ignore, perhaps because it does not fit into any neat pattern. And yet, without it the history of the colonial period in general or Nigerian political development in particular, cannot be understood. Yet historians continue to write as if Nigerian nationalism and political development did not begin effectively until after 1914. They tend to write off, so to speak, the pre-1914 period as of little political and nationalistic significance. Okeke (2010) asserts that “it was in the 1920s that Nigerians began to be politically conscious and the spirit of nationalism was awakened. Egbo (2001) also believes that “a truly Nigerian and West African expression of nationalism began in Britain immediately after the second world war. He traced the origin of Nigerian nationalism to 1924 with the formation of Nigerian Progress Union which in 1925 was replaced by the West African Student Union (WASU). Even Ajah (2011) sees Herbert Macaulay as the father of Nigerian nationalism, stressing that he was the first to espouse the course of nationalism. He believes that Nigerian nationalist activities took off with the formation of the Nigerian Congress of British West Africa in 1917, and from thence, the political consciousness of Nigeria was awakened. It is in this line of thought that Coleman (1954) sees nationalism in a more restricted sense. For him, a nationalist movement would include only those types of organizations which are essentially political, not religious, economic or educational in character and which have as their objective the realization of independence or self-government for a recognized African nation.

These assertions did not take cognizance of the 19th century African Church movements which served as a seedling time for Nigerian nationalism. The agitations of the Nigerian indigenous missionaries for African participation in the affairs of Africa, and for self-rule in the Church, which opened the doors to a more significant quest for total liberation and independence are obviously ignored. The missionary contributions to the general socio-economic and political development in modern Nigeria are always downplayed. It is for the above mentioned problems that this research work is conceived to put in proper perspective the place of the missionaries in the awakening of the embers of nationalism in Nigeria. The work is based on the conviction that in several ways the Church was the incubator of Nigerian nationalism. Her teachings inculcated that every person is created free and a child of God, her system of western education directly or indirectly liberated people's mind and exposed Nigerians to European system of democracy, all these laid the foundation for Nigerian nationalism, gave it its initial impetus and even today maintain it indirectly in consequence of the children of the Church who she has reared and brought up.

The Establishment of Christianity in Nigeria

Attempts since the last quarter of the 15th century to plant Christianity in Nigeria met with discouraging results. However, the successful expansion of the Christian missions in Nigeria began in the 19th century. The first half of that century witnessed a revolution in European attitudes and policies towards West Africa. The protracted struggle to end the Trans-Atlantic slave trade registered its first decisive victory in 1807,

when Britain, the most powerful industrial and maritime power of the day proscribed the trade to her citizens and continued to put un-relentless effort to put a final stop to the obnoxious trade. Okeke (2006) notes that:

Thomas Fowell Buxton believed that the most effective approach to the anti-slavery campaign was to involve the British government, humanitarians, interested businessmen and the British missionaries in a cooperative endeavour. The success of the venture they anticipated would mean a death-blow to the traffic in person. (pp. 4-5).

The British government entered also into treaties with the United States of America and other European countries to enable them enforce the parliamentary Act of May 1, 1807. Britain therefore authorized her Navy to capture foreign slave dealers on the high seas. The slaves thus captured were sent to Freetown in Sierra Leone. Thus Freetown became a conglomeration of peoples from various Nigerian and West African tribes. The British exposed them to Christian doctrines and Freetown was to serve as a nerve centre for the spread of Christianity and western civilization in West Africa. Several educationalists, evangelists, and even nationalists were to evolve from this historical event. The missionary activities of these ex-slaves and the Creoles (children of the recaptives) were contemporaneous with the resolution of the British government that only by cultivating habits of industry and preaching the gospel of Christ could the Africans be redeemed and regenerated. Missionary activities thus carried with it building of schools, Churches, roads, hospitals, and of course other institutions of government. Several Nigerians soon passed out of these schools. Some were adventurous enough to board

ships to far away America, Europe and so on. Shortly after, these western educated Nigerians came home to heat up the political system. The movements which emerged out of this circle generated amongst Nigerians a political and national consciousness which though temporary driven underground, remained for that very reason stronger than ever and later re-appeared when the colonial administration could no longer resist its onslaught.

The anti-slavery movement did not only result in the founding of the settlement in Sierra Leone in 1787, but also in the entry of new missionary societies in West Africa. The Protestant missionary societies practically dominated the field during the first half of the 19th century. Between 1842 and 1892 eight Christian missions were able to establish themselves in different parts of Nigeria. Through the rigorous activities of these missions, Churches were planted in major towns in Nigeria.

The Vision and Policies of the 19th Century Missionaries to Nigeria

One of the publicized aims of the missionaries was the ‘civilizing’ mission which the British government sponsored in 1841. The involvement of the colonial government has been the strong ground on which critics base their accusations of the missionaries as both agents of and principal partners of imperialism in Nigeria. But the primary aim of the missionaries was to civilize and evangelize. Both had far-reaching socio-political, economic as well as religious implications for the emergent Nigerian nation. Onunwa (1991) recalls that the missionaries were convinced of how the ‘Bible and the Plough’ hypothesis would serve the course of civilization and Christianity. From the time the

British flag was hoisted in Badagry in 1842, and following largely the spirit of the Bible and the Plough hypothesis, the British government, Christian missionaries, and those in commerce generally were working together in the civilizing mission to Nigeria (Ajayi, 1965).

Generally speaking, the ideal state that should emerge in Nigeria was conceived by early European missionaries and the liberated slaves from Sierra Leone. The state was one that could compete with others in the comity of nations. It was to be based on the European model; it was to have a Christian foundation, weld several ethnic groups together and rest on a solid industrial base. The tool for the building of the nation-state would be Christianity, commerce and civilization. The only visible way to achieve the above objective, according to the missionaries and the liberated slaves, was to seek the assistance of European Christian nations. Ajayi (1961) captures the thought of the general secretary of the C.M.S. in 1857 in the following way:

We hope that by God's blessing on our plans, a large body of such native growers of cotton and traders may spring up who may form an intelligent and initial class of society and become founders of a kingdom which shall render incalculable benefits to Africa and hold a position among the state of Europe. (p. 199).

Wilson (cited in Akinyele, 1997) states also the submission of Henry Venn in 1853 thus:

The real interest of the missionaries is generally to train the inhabitants of this part of Africa in the arts of civilization and government, until they shall grow into a nation capable of protecting themselves and of managing their own affairs, so that interference and assistance of the British may by degrees be less and less required. (p. 289).

Henry Venn further instructed his missionaries in areas outside British colonies of settlement to let a native Church be organized as a national institution. The intention was the emergence of a national Church, a Church that would eventually give birth to a nation. This policy was attractive to Nigerians for political rather than religious reasons. It contained the principle of national independence in Church government, but was equally applicable to national independence. This general expectation formed the basis for the establishment of Christian native Churches as the first step to self-government. Nmah (2010) believes that “Henry Venn’s concept of self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending Church being established indeed improved the economic situation of the indigenous Churches that transcended the indigenous Churches and gave rise to economic and political nationalism” (p. 486). It follows that it was the Church who first conceived the idea of a modern Nigeria, a project that was only accomplished by the British force of colonialism. In order to achieve this, the desire of the mid 19th century missionaries to create a Nigerian middle class must be emphasized. It was reinforced by the argument that, for reasons of climate and of the expense, a large part of the missionary staff had to be Nigerians. The emergence of such a class was perhaps the most concrete feature of the social revolution the missionaries envisaged.

It was the policy of the missionaries to encourage a cosmopolitan point of view among these new elite, to take them out of the old society and gather them round the mission houses, and generally to weaken their attachment to the old order so as to be able to lay the foundation for the desired new nation in European manner. The new elite too, by and large,

supported this policy and on the whole there was good accord between them and the missionaries until the 1870s when strains began to be felt in their relationship and there were new developments in the elite's sentiment.

The Missionaries and Western Education in Nigeria

Education has been defined by Fafunwa (1974) as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives., that is to say, it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.. Uchendu (cited by Nmah, 2010) sees education as a social process designed to direct the rising generation into membership of their society. Here, education creates enlightenment among Nigerians that actually galvanized them into nationalism.

The history of missionary enterprise in Nigeria has ever been synonymous with educational development. To this Uruakpa (1996) notes that:

Right from the 1840s, various missionary bodies have done a lot not only to evangelize different parts of Nigeria, but also to bring about educational development here and there. By doing this, Christianity has therefore played an important role in Nigerian nationalism and nation building, even without intentionally doing so as a matter of policy. (p. 123).

At least, it is quite clear that these missionary bodies had common aims, and especially shared the philosophy of education as the sharpest

instrument for effective and result-oriented evangelism. Gwam (1961) states also that:

The introduction of western education in modern Nigerian was initiated and carried on by the Christian missions for over four decades before the proclamation of the British settlement of Lagos. After the establishment of the colony, the missions maintained their monopoly of educational activities for another twenty years. (p. 299).

While the primary goal of the Christian missions was the establishment of the Christian religion, the introduction of western education was accomplished with greater effect on larger section of the Nigerian communities. Mission education created enlightenment among Nigerians who passed through the mission schools, which in turn exposed them to European civilization, Christianity and the enhancement of their personality. They hoped to prepare the local Christians to be administrators of their own areas. This was an important part of missionary education policy, for it was hoped that the educated young people would get work especially from the expanding civil services. This part of the significance of the Christian missions was that in their religious as well as in their educational work, they were introducing Nigerians to the modern world into which they were now entering. At the same time, however, unconsciously, the missionaries were teaching Nigerians to weigh up and criticize the influence of Europe from within. From the standpoint of nationalism, the real significance of the missionary monopoly over education lay in the evangelical approach of mission schools. The mission school was a very powerful instrument for the rapid Christianization, and hence, Europeanization of the youths of

Nigeria. It was an institution in which full pressure of nationalist influence was applied. The school taught young Nigerians to aspire to the virtues of white Christian civilization. The extensive use of the English language in school curricula, made necessary by Nigerian's linguistic diversity, was a decisive contribution to nationalism. The Nigerians who acquired knowledge of English had access to vast new world of literature which awakened new aspirations, quickened the urge towards self-actualization, self-determination and provided the notions and the medium for the expression of grievances. More so, the English language served as a *Lingua Franca* for communication among the educated elements of all tribes, a bound of decisive importance in the development of a pan-Nigerian.

It was true that the intention of the missions was not to train people who would lead a revolt against foreign rule of which the majority of them were the greatest exponents, but once opportunity for education had been given, it was difficult to control the thoughts of the educated or to channel them along a predetermined course. It is for this that Ndoh and Emezi (1997) note that "the increase in western education led to the encouragement of the people which engineered courageousness in the citizens" (p. 53). Ajah (2011) adds that "the same western education that had provided the people with a common language also provided with them the essence and values of democracy so as to be able to attack alien rule" (p. 9). Nigerians who were ex-pupils of the mission schools learnt much from the European languages which they were taught in schools. The study of European, American and African history agitated the minds of many a nationalist. To some of them, such study challenged and

assured them that to fight for one's right was legitimate. As Onunwa (1994) captures; "such themes as the English Revolution of 1683, the American Revolutionary war of 1776, the French Revolution of 1717 made them ask "why not African Revolution?" (p. 36).

A more compelling reason was the refusal of Europeans to deal with the educated Nigerians on equal terms. The latter had adopted European culture in expectation of acceptance by the Europeans only to be ridiculed as a 'hybrid' who had lost all the virtues of the uncontaminated "native" but was at the same time incapable of comprehending European civilization. Many Nigerians who had attended higher institutions abroad could not be justifiably employed in the country. It was a situation where the tallest Nigerian genuflected before the shortest European dwarfs. Contempt for the 'hybrid' made the Europeans segregate the Churches, hospitals, cemeteries and Masonic lodges and to discriminate against them in many ways. The emerging scenario necessitated the group formation among Nigerians for a natural reaction. The first and most important of such groups was the Church. The Church became the only organization where the oppressed Nigerians could express frustration and desire for self-government.

It can thus be argued that, but for the incidental benefit of western literacy provided by the Christian missions, the struggle for independence, made possible by the existence of western educated Christians, would have been hampered and independence delayed longer than when it came.

The Church and Nationalism in Nigeria

Usually, one tends to think of nationalism solely in terms of strong national patriotic feelings of individuals or groups with the ultimate purposes of liberating their people from both internal and external dominations. At times, this is normally achieved through the formation of political parties and various pressure groups. One may then wonder what would have been the business of the Church with nationalism, since their main preoccupation is to cater for the spiritual life of the people. Be that as it may, it is no gainsaying that religion and nationalism are the two most sensitive issues in the world of the 21st century. Christianity preaches the brotherhood of all believers irrespective of race, ethnic identity, colour or gender; and though Christianity was one of the cords holding early nations together in adolescent Europe, it contributed to the growth of nationalism. Christians of different nationalities have fought fellow Christians on account of their different national interest.

Ola (1978) sees no difference between the motivations of the African Church movement and those that led to the formation of practically all other national Churches in Europe and elsewhere in the world. For him:

Anyone who is familiar with the history of the Church of England (Anglican) or the Lutheran Church in Germany and central Europe would appreciate the common desire on the part of these movements to free themselves from foreign domination of Rome and to establish or strengthen their sovereignty by placing Church bureaucracy within the management of national governments. These manifestations may be deplored by some on ethical grounds but that does not in any way alter the basic truth about this aspect of history of the church, it is essentially an expression of nationalism (p. 339).

From the foregoing discussion, the relationship between Christianity and nationalism in Nigeria can be established. The cooperation for the building of a modern Nigerian nation after the pattern of contemporary Europe that was the case in the early period of the missionaries' presence in Nigeria had been abandoned. Towards the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, certain contradictions had become too conspicuous. There had grown contradictions between the political aims of the colonial powers and the idealistic principles of the Christian faith which they represent. These contradictions became pronounced when the cultures of the people and their philosophies of life were ridiculed, and made to appear worthless by the colonial situation. The European missionaries employed what they meant to be restricted minimal literacy education to evangelize Nigeria and to create elite that would serve the religious and civil purposes of the missions and the government.

At the time most European missionaries tended to despise both African culture and African capacity. They believed that the Christian religion must go with a European culture and European leadership. Theirs was an enterprise which was to result in the creation of a completely new social order which would wipe away most of the customs and institutions of the old society. They saw the indigenous world view of the Nigerian peoples and their cultural milieu as unnecessary superstitions and unwarranted practices that called for subjugation and total extinction. Thus ideologically, and to a certain extent in practice, a potentially violent intrusion was made into the social and religious world of the Nigerian peoples with the advent of Christian missionaries. The missionaries also developed a fashion of making their native converts in Nigeria to assume

non-native names at baptism so much so that baptism came to be known as taking a new name as an outward sign of genuine conversion to Christianity. To this effect their meaningful names were described as 'heathenism' and they were meant to adopt Hebrew and European ones which in most cases were meaningless to them. Consequently they became deluded with the idea that the less African they were the more Christian they become. It was at this point that Nigerian converts began to perceive an intimidating, colonizing and discriminating agenda being pursued by the European missionaries. In Church hierarchy, it was almost a foregone conclusion that the native clergy must serve as assistants to the white missionaries and never to take the leading role. It was also evident to Nigerian agents of the missions that the colonial administration stood with the white missionaries and in one way or another endorsed their policy of white supremacy and discrimination. This must have been responsible for the emergence of political agitations from religious instead of socio-cultural circles. African Christians began to realize that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with their values which they had rejected previously. This level marked the beginning of protest movements and incipient nationalism. The basic problem at this stage was how to contain the colonial tendencies of the European missionaries and external control of the territory. It was a period when the indigenous Churchmen were more preoccupied with ideas that could capture the imaginations of the people and mobilize them to join the struggle against colonialism. They considered the fact that religious independence in a colonial atmosphere was not wholesome. For a complete package of Nigerian freedom there must be political

independence. People like James Johnson, Edward Blyden, Mojola Agbebi, to mention but a few, emerged to whip up the sentiments of the people. Their nationalist tour of the National Church of Nigerians and the Cameroon, as Coleman (1984) observes, was the first time in the history of Nigeria that large number of people were made conscious of the possibility of Nigerian unity. For some in the villages, it was the first time they learnt of the existence of the Nigerian nation. There were also local evangelists, catechists and Church teachers who were looked upon to direct the peasant community. These constituted themselves into a kind of pressure group to demand certain improvements in their condition of life. For a very long time, their voices remained submerged because of the backwardness of the peasant masses. Nevertheless, it was from this class of people who had come in contact with the white man that the core of anti-colonialist conscience first developed. In the early stage of the struggle in Nigeria, this class of religious men succeeded in fanning the embers of nationalist consciousness into the larger population. Like athletes in a relay race, these Church leaders took the lead in the race of nationalism, and eventually handed the baton to educated Nigerians like Herbert Macaulay, the grandson of Bishop Crowther and Nnamdi Azikiwe, an admirer of Edward Blyden, who themselves were ardent Churchmen, and had closely followed the activities of these Church leaders, and eventually fought and gained independence for Nigeria.

Independent Church Movement as a Political Protest in Nigeria

Barrett (1968) defines the independent Church movement as that geared towards the principle in which the individual congregation or Church is

an autonomous and egalitarian society free from any external ecclesiastical control. Idowu (1965) defines it as a movement for the Church of God in Nigeria, which must know and live in the watchful consciousness that she is part as well as “presence” of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Onunwa (1991) sees it as the desire for autonomy and independence of African Churches, which was the genesis of the development that crystallized into what we know now as African independent as well as the struggle for political independence. Independence can have the character of or be aligned with, movements of economic or political, but it was the religious factor which is mainly the root cause. According to Barrett (1968), the movements were alleged to arise primarily from the need for political outlet of some sort. This is particularly so because in a country where religion was the cement of the society, the guarantor of moral principles and the basis of secular authority, renunciation of the mission authorities implied renunciation of the moral civil and political obligations of the colonial administration. Thus, Nigerian converts not only imbibed a new state of religious beliefs but began to nurse alien ideas, economic ambitions and political aspirations of their own in such a manner that beats the imaginations of the European missionaries. For them Christianity should serve as a superstructure upon which nationalism should be founded. In this way, as the Bible was read, openly or surreptitiously, Nigerian Christians learned to recognize their lost country and cultural heritage in the references to Ethiopia and Ethiopians. They began to cherish all Ethiopian references in the Bible which had a liberatory promise and which, when contrasted with the indignities of colonialism, showed the black man in a dignified

and human light. In fact, in the thinking of Nigerian Christians, the adjective “Ethiopia” meant not so much a country as a condition of independence. Baeta (cited by Nmah, 2010) has described “Ethiopianism” as missionary factor which denotes a struggle between those who recognize the claim to equal participation in social and political rights with others and those who for themselves and their order assert a certain superiority of race, and claim for it as a consequence of causes, however accidental, exclusive and special privileges. The term “Ethiopia” as a symbol of African pride in indigenous culture and achievement, was used by West African writers and speaks well before the classical period of Ethiopianism opened in 1872. Thus, Ethiopianism provided a new focus of loyalty and interest apart from the tribe. It brought Nigerians together for a common cause, trained them for common action, and created an organized followership for Nigerian leaders. Moreover, Nigerians could claim, as some of them later did, that independence in one sphere of European controlled enterprise (the Church) should by ethical right be extended to other spheres (government and business). In this way, the Church became the first political organization in Nigeria to codify in its resolutions the philosophy of the nationalism which in fact dated back to the 19th century. They looked into the Bible for portions that would seem to justify their nationalistic thinking and the verse that became most popular was Psalm 69, verse 31, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God”. It was at this period that Edward Blyden, the renowned cultural nationalist, made a clarion call in Lagos for the establishment of African independent Churches in Nigeria. In response to the call, the United

Native African Church was founded in 1891 (Kalu, 1978). In 1888, African Baptist Church was founded for similar reasons. In 1901, the African Church was founded as a break away from the C.M.S. In 1914 in the Delta region, an anti-European group of Christians under the leadership of Garrick Braid, founded the Christ Army Church. Ogungbile (2001) also notes the founding of the Ethiopian communion Church on October 1, 1919. It is also important to note that Nigeria gained independence the same date and month that the Church was founded. These separatist movements were remarkably early manifestations of political protests against colonialism.

After the series of secessions of the African Churches from the mission Churches, there arose another type of nationalism referred to as cultural nationalism. African converts did not share the belief of many of their teachers that until they, the converts, became Europeanized they could not become genuine Christians. According to Ayandele (1966) “from the nineties onward educated Africans came to venerate their customs and institutions and the Nigerian cultural heritage became the touchstone by which the white man’s doings were assessed” (p. 242). One of the first steps in this direction in Nigeria was the repudiation of European names. Many Christian nationalists dropped their European names. Others retained their surnames but adopted Nigerian first names. For example, David B. Vincent became Mojola Agbebi in 1884, he also insisted in wearing Agbada even in Europe and America, J. H. Samuel became Adegboyeja Edun in 1901; Joseph Pythagoras Haastrup, in 1902, became Ademiyiwa Haastrup; George William Johnson became Oshokale Tejumade Johnson. James Johnson did not change his own name, but he

refused to baptize children with foreign names. And well into the post colonial periods the trend continued. Francis Ibiam became Akanu Ibiam. Today, the use of indigenous names in baptism appears to have become popular among the educated circles in Nigeria (Nwosu, 1993; Webster, 1964; Ayandele, 1966; Kopytoff, 1965).

Implications for Contemporary Church in Nigeria

It is discovered and painfully so that the contemporary Nigerian Church has not followed in the footsteps of the early nationalist Church leaders. The cause of this great decline is of great concern that led Olanisebe (2006) to ask such worthwhile questions as could it be because the country is no longer under foreign rule? Or does the Church want to claim that the self-rule or democratic rule being practiced in the country is without its catalogue of social malaise? Better still, is it that liberation theology, which is sometimes claimed to be the central theme of the gospel is no longer relevant in this age? Or is it that the socio-economic reality of the country is of less concern to the Church?

In many respects, the situation in Nigerian now resembles the situation in Latin America under which liberation theology irrupted. A situation under which both human and non human factors (external and internal) reduces the masses to abject poverty and misery. But instead of the Church as an entity to react constructively against the vices, the Church has spiritualized these realities. To this Olanisebe (2006) has this to say:

The economic distress, political instability and immaturity, the prevalence of corruption, poverty, and other social vices in the country are described as “sickness” caused by sin against God, which can only be cured by divine intervention. This divine intervention, to the Church could be actuated through prayer. (p, 319).

Lawuyi (1991) adds that “with the failure of the state to provide essential services, the belief in the civil society is that personal and collective problems can be solved religiously by prayer rather than hard work” (p. 232). Hence, it is not uncommon to find the Church praying for the country.

However, much as the Church’s prayer for the country could be commended, no concrete steps are being channeled toward the actualization of the desired change, and to relate the gospel to the practical issues, whether social and political, cultural and liturgical which confronts them. At least the Church should be able to demonstrate that the Christian faith is not something extrinsic to the affiliations of the oppressed, but it is rather a motivating force which demands that the oppressed must be liberated in order to make rooms for the realization of the historical salvific deed of Jesus and the salvific will of God. The interpretation of the scriptures must be followed by the programmes of action, aimed at uprooting injustice in the society. In situations where the forces of opposition and critics are silenced and the people intimidated by the dictatorial regimes, the Church should use the gospel as the voice of the oppressed, the only effective pressure group that could rouse the conscience of the political leaders. Nebechukwu (1992) suggests that the Church should be involved directly in the fight against the causes of social and political change of the situation. Ndiokwere (1994) adds that the Church should develop a critical awareness of the causes of social injustice and participate in actions to change the socio-economic and political situations that caused human suffering in Nigeria. This situation has therefore called for an adequate and clear theology and the

development of liberation praxis born out of the living experiences of the Nigerian people. Olupona (2004) suggests that:

The Church, as part of the civil society, has a fundamental advantage over societal institutions in that it contains sources of legitimacy, truth, and authority independent of the state. Thus, the Church depending on the situation can be viewed as supplementary entity to the state and a symbiotic alternative. The Church can be viewed as a source of opposition, rebellion, and conflict to the state. (p. 22).

The Church to be relevant to the people has to struggle side by side with them, sharing their joys, sorrows, anxieties and their daily burdens. It has to engage herself in the political, economic, social and cultural liberation of the people in transforming societal structures which breed humiliation, agony and death for a large section of Nigerian communities. This is why Nyerere (1997) opines that:

Unless the Church participates actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations which condemns men to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the Church will become irrelevant to man and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the Church, its organizations, expressed God's love for man by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present conditions of man, then it will die, and humanly speaking, deserves to die because it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to modern man. (p. 97).

There is the need to see the biblical material contextually. The Church can run self-help programmes that could generate funds and employment for the masses, run low-price transport facilities, community water tanks,

medical clinics, feeding centres, and so on. Iwe (1985) suggests that Christian leaders can at least offer some solace and relief. They can summon the people to cooperative endeavours, aimed at pooling their resources to provide necessary capital to improve their lost.

Conclusion

All that has been said so far about the rise and spread of nationalist ideology in the Christian Church in Nigeria reveals the fallacy in the assumption that there was no positive nationalist movement in Nigeria before 1914. This assumption did not take into account the fact that for the educated Nigerians of the 19th century the Church was by far the most important institution in their lives and that it was through the Church that they sought the achievement of their social and political aspirations. They believed especially in the last quarter of the 19th century, that Christianity was not just the pure milk of the gospel but was as well the most potent political instrument that could and should be employed in the creation of a virile independence Nigerian nation state (Ayandele, 1970).

The missionary teaching of equality and brotherhood of all men before God, which had been implanted in them, began to nurse seedling ambitions for political self-expression and self-government. Missionary education had already begun to stimulate critical faculties and they were becoming familiar with the general notion of British democracy, which all the Protestant missions were compelled to establish as the financial burden devolved on Nigerians themselves. Consequently the Church became an actual training ground for self-government. Ijeomah (2011)

remarks that “religious organizations were instrumental in promoting education which quickened the tempo of nationalist movement” (p. 94)

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