

Biblical Moses: A Model for Contemporary Christian Priests

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Abstract

Christianity is one of the religions of the world. In the religion, there is a form of leadership that is largely priestly in nature. However, there is non-priestly form of leadership in Christianity. Today, there is a seemingly decline in the comportment and conduct of the leadership of the Christian religion. It has come to a point that something has to be urgently done to ameliorate the sorry situation that the leadership of the Church has been plunged into. In doing that, Biblical Moses became the choice of this study. Moses lived at a time when ostentatious lifestyle was at the zenith in Egypt. Moses lived at a time when the Israelites were in bondage and still he remained unruffled, diligent and resolute. This he achieved by exhibiting the following attributes namely Education, knowledge, humility, faith, rebellion against abuse of the weak and multiplicity of ministry. The paper believes that when these Moses' attributes are recommended to the teeming Church leaders and they are applied that there would be rejuvenation of the leadership institution. In the study, we engaged biblical and analysis of the text and also employed secondary data and the use of the internet to generate data.

Introduction

Priesthood is one of the most developed institutions in Christianity. This explains the importance and significance of priesthood to the Christian faith. According to Hardon (1998:2):

With the advent of Christ, the priesthood of the old law was elevated to the height it had never before possessed. It also became the cornerstone of the Christian religion. So much so that we might almost define true Christianity as the religion of a divinely revealed priesthood. Christianity is indeed priestly and the priesthood is of its essence: no priesthood, no Christianity.

There is no doubt that religion has played apparent roles in the development of the Nigerian society from the pre-colonial era. Christianity has really championed and executed very many gigantic developmental projects in many sectors. Be in the health sector, educational sector, economic and many others, the evidences are there. There is no doubt that the place of priesthood in ensuring the sustainability of these developmental strides is unequivocal. In the days past the priests were taken more as gods than human arising from their conduct, piety, self-contentment and high moral standard. Christianity as a religion could achieve all the things they did in the time past among other factors as a result of the standard of life style orchestrated by the priests.

However, today there is a notable and an apparent decline in the rectitude of the priests within Christianity. Not far into any conversation bordering on religion and Christianity in particular, the sorry situation of priesthood will appear. There is no doubt that in this contemporary age, priests have sinned. The priests have actually missed the mark in keeping to the principles and the sacred code of the cultic office.

This paper wishes among other things to find out the factors that have occasioned the deterioration in the priesthood. This paper being curative in nature would bring to the fore an Old Testament personality in the person of Moses as a model to the priests of the contemporary age not minding the Christian denomination one belongs. In achieving this set objectives in this biblically based study within a societal background both ancient and contemporary, the researcher adopted the descriptive and analytical methods of inquiry into the various historical environments and periods.

Textual Analysis of Moses' suitability as a Model: Numbers 12:3

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”.

Of all the verses in the Bible that captures Moses as a model, none fits in more than that Members 12:3. Essentially, within the context of this paper, where Moses is being discussed as a model, none surpasses this text. In explaining this text, one would quickly understand the position of Moses in the sight of God. Assuming that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and of course, the Book of Numbers, one would have held it against Moses as an expression of arrogance for saying such a thing about himself. According to Billings (1999), “if Moses really said this in reference to himself, he is vain and arrogant, not ‘very meek!’ ”.

Could Moses have been very meek, and still have written this statement about himself? Yes. According to Butt (2011), first, if God was informing Moses what to write, then Moses had little choice in the wording of the description concerning himself. For Coffman, it is clear from the scope of the statement, which included “all the men that were upon the face of the earth,” that only God had the ability to know who was the meekest man living at the time of Moses (1987:365). In a similar vein, John still wrote similar about himself as the beloved of Christ and went ahead and disclosed himself as one loved by Christ.

Apart from Moses writing this himself as many insist, Carson (1986:230) reveals that “some explained it as the objectivity of an inspired man but it seems more natural to assume that it is an inspired addition like the account of Moses’ death in Deuteronomy 34”. This statement about the meekness of Moses can only be understood when one reads it within the context of the events of Number 12. That was where Moses was under attack by his siblings.

Meekness here refers especially to a person’s attitude to God. According to Williams (1997:345) meekness is a spiritual quality of patient submission and humility. In the Old Testament, its basic meaning is ‘poor and afflicted’ (Psalm 22; 26, 25:9). According to Zechariah 9:9, meekness would be a quality of the Messianic King. In the New Testament, it is an inner attitude produced by the spirit exemplified and encouraged by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:1; Matt 5:5) and underlying good relationships between Christians (Eph. 4:2).

The Negative Face of Priesthood in Nigeria Christianity.

For this sake of this paper, we have been able to identify four areas of interest where we can have a look at the current failure of the priesthood herein referred to as the negative face of priesthood. They include materialism, non-impacting sermons and teachings, immorality and high-handedness. This picture created by some of these priests is fast becoming like cankerworm and is burrowing into the fabrics of the adherents of the Christian faith if not properly and urgently checked hence the thrust of this paper.

The craze for materialism best describes the true colour of most priests today. However, this malady has been on but its pangs are becoming harsher currently. The high level of greed and materialism exhibited by many priests is a complete departure from the main thrust of the teachings of Jesus Christ contained in the gospels. The Church loses its stand as the conscience of the society when its leaders are greatly submerged in materialism. Obiora (1999:146) opines that:

What we are facing is the bastardization of religion for purely selfish reasons. Emphasis has now shifted from pursuit of God's grace and care for the flock to mundane things. Preaching of all kinds has been pivoted on the basis of giving God all your belongings that you may receive (1999:59).

Another area of interest is non-impacting sermons. Today, many priests see sermons as activity through which they could reach out to the masses to express themselves and promote their social or spiritual status. Non-impacting sermon is like non-nutritious meals. It

makes them really become easily taken away from their faith to do things that are against God and the norms of the society. This is why many people go to Church, yet the prevalence of crime is still very high in our society.

Highhandedness is also part of the evil plaguing the leadership of the Church today. This is apparent among the priests who exhibit much of this evil. The servant leadership, meekness, which was the model of priesthood, has degenerated among many contemporary priests. Priests are seen today employing all kind of strategies that are completely strange to the Church of Jesus Christ and be better described as highhandedness simply because such priests want to make known their power.

More so, we have the case of immorality is becoming so rampant among the priests. Apart from the recent palaver of homosexuality and lesbianism, immoral acts involving the priests have become common news. Some homes and marriages have been torn apart by the activities of these randy priests.

This ugly situation has rather brought the Church to a point of ridicule and there is every need to move the Church away from such spot of reproach. The effects of such unserious and unwholesome lifestyle of some priests has become so devastating that something has to be done. Further, the Church loses its stand as the conscience of the society when its leaders are greatly submerged in immorality, highhandedness and materialism. For instance, it is expected that when public servants are wrongly managing the resources of the people, that the Church through its leadership would call them to order and

condemn the act. But when the members of the Church's leadership class are themselves exploiting the Church members and looting the Church's treasury what face do they have again to challenge the public servants. So when we talk about the priests being materialistic, we are talking about something very serious that does not only affect the Church, but have far reaching effects in the society at large.

Factors militating the diligence of the Priests

Many factors may be responsible for the mess the Christian priesthood is into today but in this paper, we are restricting ourselves with the following.

i. Alternative to Employment

Originally, men went into priesthood when they felt that God was calling them into it to serve him. In those days, people considered priesthood as a vocation. However, today very many people have joined the priesthood simply to earn a living. Ituma (2000:20) succinctly observes in this direction that: "dropout and uneducated are now becoming preachers and pastors...whosoever hits hard luck in his business sees it as a call to the ministry. God wants him to go into the ministry".

Many who join the priesthood today do not have any iota of burden. What such come into do is to eke out a living and unfortunately and regrettably to a luxurious height. The spate of unemployment and joblessness in this country has even exacerbated the whole situation. Ituma (2000:21) in looking at this further enthused "the work of the clergy is presently becoming like the secular business world..." Still (1996:82) in supporting this view says that "many Christian ministers

accept pastorates or ministry as a means of basic security of a living”. Materialism is growing wings today because great percentage of the priests has come in as job seekers. The virtue to serve God and humanity is grossly lacking. They device all kinds of intrigues to exploit the unsuspecting members thereby enriching themselves which originally was their intention of coming into the priesthood.

Lamido (2007:34) describes this kind of priest as:

Professional pastors. They pastor for financial gain. They are interested in what they can get from the flock. They contrive their own ease, advantage, and honour. Some of them will “prophetic” in order to obtain some financial favours from the people.

ii) Alternative to Political Position

Considering the place of priests in any society and the relevance of priesthood in any culture both ancient and modern, many people have gone into it. In some places, the priests determine certain things and affect certain policies in a given locality. This of course has made some people to venture into priesthood as an alternative to political positions. With their positions in priesthood, they could get to level of influencing certain things in the communities mostly for their selfish interest.

Recently, the way and manner some priests pursue positions in the Church is an eloquent expression of their motives into the order. Taking the Anglican Church as an example, we find an undeniable expression of serious politicking among some priests when a new diocese is about to be created and or when a bishop is about to retire.

There is a robust lobbying and lips services to enable them clinch such exalted position. This is purely coming from the ulterior motive such people had while joining the priesthood. Lamido (2007:53) identifies this kind of priests when he avers that:

They want to compare themselves with people in other professions and vocations. They are not straightforward in their dealings. They can pull down others in order to make it. They engage in what is popularly known as Church politics. They are quota system pastors. They promote tribalism and sectionalism in the Church to serve their interest. Some of them will even go to the next level of joining cultic groups in their desperation to make it. All these are done in order to occupy certain positions.

More so, with the mindset described above, the servanthood attached to the leadership of the Church is dwindling. Most priests even bishops are already likening themselves with the political leaders. Some see their dioceses as states and themselves as the governors.

(iii) Poor Training

The importance of training and education in any society cannot be overemphasized. Right from time, the priests were revered as people who are learned and versatile in knowledge. This is because they are exposed to a number of studies apart from theology before they become ordained. The idea is to enable them stand tall in the midst of the congregation and provide answers to wide range of questions, which may be put to them by the members.

Stressing further the importance of sound pre-ordination training, the Primate of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion Okoh said that “we commit ourselves to the best Anglican tradition of sound theological education before ordination...crash programmes, sandwich and other similar unserious training arrangements ridicule the priesthood” (2010:6).

Unfortunately, today, pre-ordination training has been thrown over board. Many Church leaders make bold to announce their unrepentant resolve to ordain men and women into priesthood without training. Most of the negative experiences we are having today, are partly caused by lack of preordination training. Supporting this view, Amusan (1998:75) advises that:

Before ordination, learning should be emphasized. Whenever this aspect of preparation is neglected, there is danger, and it will be well for the Church if her leaders do not throw the training aspect of ministry to the dogs for whatever reasons...

Lamido (2007:66) expressing his disgust over the poor pre-ordination training says “it is totally naïve and misguided take up pastoral responsibilities without receiving formal theological training...” There must be calling by God through the power of the Holy Spirit, but there is no substitute for training. Training and re-training of the pastor is not only important but very crucial.

(iv) Current Contemporary Situation

There is a global trend, which affects everybody within the society. The on-going economic crises, climate change and terrorism

are simply indices of negative trend capable of redirecting the attention and focus of people including priests. “This makes pastoring harder now than ever before” (London and Wiseman; 1997:30). The unprecedented shifts in moral, social, and economic conditions are jolting congregations and bringing into question the way ministry is done. These changing circumstances and values directly affect pastors and their way of life. According to Obuoforibo (2009:114),

Priests are immersed in the secularized world where faith and an accepted morality cannot be taken for granted as in earlier times. If one is not solid spiritually, one can easily be a reed shaken by wind in the welter of opinions. For today, society tends to pluralize even in spirituality; it is a matter of a convinced and chosen path of one’s cherished faith.

Many pressing contemporary difficulties were largely unknown in earlier periods of Christian history. As a result, pastors’ concepts of ministry are in flux. Now personal fulfilment and meaning are routinely expected where former generations seemed satisfied with sacrifice and suffering. Current research findings done by London and Wiseman (1997:30) support the conclusion that 80 percent of practicing pastors think ministry negatively affects them.

(v) Crave for Independence

The pastoral life of priests can be helped in no small measure by a system of apprenticeship, whereby priests who are coming newly into the field are attached to more experienced priests for a period before being assigned to take care of parishes or other areas of apostolate on their own. It is a well-known fact that seminary

formation alone does not fully equip priests for their future life and ministry. Amusan (1998:80) perfectly captures this idea when he opines that “occasionally, a priest could serve a period of internship”. This provides the priest the opportunity to learn under a more experienced priest.

Today what is in vogue is ordaining a priest today and assigning him a parish or a Church to pastor independently. This makes close supervision and monitoring to be ignored. Most worrisome is in the case where a pastor received little or no training at all yet would be posted to a Church to pastor alone. This brings about a very big and colossal problem to the Church.

These are a few of the challenges staring the contemporary priests. They contend with all these on daily basis. The unfortunate thing about the whole scenario is that the whole challenges are growing as the days go by. It is so bizarre that the priesthood is gradually becoming something else. Given this backdrop therefore, the traits of Moses clearly stand as reference point for the contemporary priests.

The Moses’ Personality Traits

Moses was not born differently but circumstances around him suggest specialty upon him, however he was just an ordinary Hebrew. Moses’ life, which spanned 120 years, was lived in three equal periods of 40 years each. The first period was in the civilized and ostentatious world of Pharaoh’s court in Egypt. This second phase of life was lived in the desert of Midian as a shepherd-servant in the household of Jethro. The last phase of 40 years witnessed Moses leading the Israelites out of

Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses lived up to this challenge courtesy of the priestly and leadership qualities with which he was endowed.

Moses stands out as a model of good leadership to leaders in all ages and to contemporary priests, which is the thrust of this work. Corroborating this view, Osei-Mensah (1990:8), enthuses that “contemporary leaders of the Church in Africa have witnessed poor leadership”. Below are the qualities in Moses that are highly recommendable to the contemporary priests.

i. Education

Moses like the other privileged boys in royal court and bureaucratic circles in Egypt, would have commenced his education at the age of four, attending school from early in the morning until noonday for about twelve years (Sarna; 1987:33). Murray (1964:73) captured the content of the curriculum of the school, which Moses most probably attended when he revealed that:

The school curriculum largely centered on reading, writing, and arithmetic, the second of these subjects receiving special emphasis. The art of penmanship and the cultivation of style were both highly esteemed as the indispensable prerequisites for a sound education. Drill and memorization seem to have been the chief pedagogic techniques.

As far as Moses was concerned, according to Kitchen (1965:343-344) “the likelihood of him receiving such a conventional education as was achieved by the sons of the privileged is substantial...”

In his first forty years, he was trained in Pharaoh's own court as his own son. In his view, Anderson (1986:49) agrees that Moses was brought up and trained in Egyptians circles, although it was coloured with elements of folklore. There was no doubt about his training and upbringing in the Egyptian palace. Deffinbaugh summarizes his view on Moses in this direction viz:

An epitome of human accomplishments and skill due to the upbringing he had received as the "son" of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses was a powerful man. He had the right family connections, the right education, and all the right advantages and so it was this powerful man. He had been raised in the royal court of the greatest nation on the face of the earth at that time. He was well-trained and skilled in his speech (2009:2).

Moses received further training. These series of training were observed by Arnold (2007:2) who comments thus:

Moses was also trained in Egypt in military matters and administration; therefore, he was able to organize two million Jews in the desert. His training in Egypt had given him the ability to write and therefore provided a means by which these accounts would be recorded for eternity. In his second forty years, Moses was in the desert, the very desert he would later cross with the children of Israel. During this second forty years, he was given desert survival experience and the know-how of travel in this area. But, above all, he went to the "Desert Theological Seminary" those second forty years where he learned God's word and how to trust God. Eighty years

Moses was in training for the one, big event of leading Israel out of Egypt into the land of Canaan.

ii. Knowledge

Moses' life and ministry were guided by what he knew about himself, God and his people. He was by this knowledge poised to help the people actualize their destiny. It is important that a leader understands what he has been called to do. Moses no doubt demonstrated that he knew and understood both the people and the task ahead after the burning bush encounter.

We find Moses combining the knowledge he acquired from the court in Egypt and his experience as a shepherd in Midian in leading and administering the people. The success of a good leader depends to a large extent on his understanding of himself, his people and the work (Still; 1996:11-15).

iii. Humility

Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's court where simple lifestyle was unknown. Life training and everything treated him as a prince. In all these, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Ryle (1979:133) in discussing the potency of Moses' humble life enthused:

Pleasure of every kind, no doubt was at his feet, if he had liked to take it up-sensual pleasure, intellectual pleasure, social pleasure-whatever could struck his fancy. Egypt was a land of artists, a residence of learned men, a resort of everyone who had skill, or science of any description. There was nothing, which

could feed the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life, which one in the place of Moses might not easily have commanded and possessed as his own.

Moreover, Moses exhibited a high sense of humility in all ramifications. For instance when he encountered God at the Burning Bush, he pleaded with God that he was not worthy of the assignment because of his speech imperfection. In Exodus chapter 4, Moses expressed his weakness – he has problems speaking sometimes. That was another expression of humility.

In further expressing the humility of Moses, Langerak (2003:2) captures Moses' emotion during the attack from his siblings (that is Miriam and Aaron) as an eloquent expression of humility and meekness. In his word: "Moses is most humble. He does not after all, proudly and angrily defend his reputation against his siblings; he humbly leaves the rebuttal up to God, who is the only one recorded as getting angry". Butt (2000:1) views that act of Moses in line with Langerak thought above when he opines that

Moses was such a meek and humble man, he refused to take it upon himself to squelch this rebellious attitude. Therefore, God had to step in and speak directly to Moses' siblings, informing Miriam and Aaron that he had a special relationship with Moses.

This therefore makes the statement about Moses as the most humble man on the face of the earth very true (Num. 12:3). The

conditions that make many priests grow wings like the peacock were superlatively more at Moses' disposal but he ignored them.

v. Rebellion against the Abuse of the Weak

Priesthood is an institution, which manifests justice and fairplay to all. Offering protection and security as much as possible is not just demanded of an institution like the priesthood but is essentially enshrined in its formation. This was typical of Moses.

Early in his life, partly in the palace in Egypt and out of the palace, Moses had manifested such traits. Sarna (1987:33) captures the essence when he averred thus:

Three incidents in his (Moses) life that occurred while he was still attached to the palace are given prominence in the narrative because they reveal aspects of his character and disclose his commitments. Having witnessed the labour of his kinsfolk and become sensitive to their sufferings, he cannot tolerate the sight of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

This is very thoughtful of Moses. He was better placed in the palace but had the feeling of his kit and kin. He became sensitive about their plight. To further prove that inner feeling, he moved into avenging for his fellow Hebrew that was beaten up by an Egyptian.

Continuing, Sarna identified the second incident when Moses encountered two Israelites who were quarrelling with each other. He averred, "Moses remonstrates with the bully, once again evincing instinctive sympathy for the underdog" (1987:33). The third incident

identified by Sarna was the experience Moses had at the well in Midian. At the well, when he had ran out of Egypt, he witnessed rough shepherds pushing aside a group of girls who were first in line to draw water from the well. Sarna observed that:

...once again he (Moses) could not remain indifferent. His spirit rebelled against the abuse of the weak by the strong. He cannot tolerate this blatant infringement of the girls' rights and he immediately rises to their defense, driving off the offending shepherds, and himself watering the girl flock (sic) (1987:33).

Ami (2004:2) overwhelmed by the attitude of Moses in this regard poses a question:

When a person exhibits such concern for the other with such total disregard for his own person, much less with out concern for his own personal gain, is not he the perfect candidate to lead the Jews out of Egypt and be God's intermediate to give the divine law? (<http://www.jewishmag.com/76mag/moses/moses.htm>)

The welfare of the weak, the poor and the downtrodden engulfed Moses' spirit. He provides defense, protection and justice at any time. A good leader in the opinion of Stott (1990:358) places himself in the mould of his followers. Moses exemplified this virtue per excellence. No where was this demonstrated in his life and ministry than when God wanted to wipe out the people of Israel from the face of the earth and raise another generation for Moses (Exo. 32:9-14). But he rather chose to go with the people if God would not relent in his plan.

viii. Faith

There is a striking feature found in the person of Moses worthy of discussion and commendation. That feature is faith. For Moses to refuse that, which is generally called good, to choose that which is commonly called evil, can only be explained on the ground of faith which he had. According to Ryle, “faith was the mainspring of his wonderful conduct. Faith made him to do as he did, choose what he chose and refuse what he refused. He did it all because he believed” (1979:137)

Faith as we discuss it here is not just faith. Moses had an extraordinary kind of faith. This kind of faith is required of any priest especially in the face of the on-going global economic crises, insecurity, threat to peace, and sanctity of the dignity of human life. There is a feature in the Moses’ kind of faith. The feature is durability. Langerak (2003:6) observes this quality of faith in Moses and avers thus:

Forty years had elapsed since then, during which he passed through varied experiences and sore trials. But now that he is eighty years of age, faith is still active within him. That spiritual grace moved him to withstand the attractions of Egypt’s court, had led him to relinquish a position of high honor and wealth, had caused him to throw in his lot with the despised people of God; and now we behold faith enabling him to endure the wrath of the King.

ix Multiplicity of Ministry

Priesthood is a kind of ministry in the Greek sense of it as service. It is required of the ministry to be multiplied as the need arises. Not only that it makes the man at the helm of affairs to be stronger and more like a leader but it also makes the led and the church to be more proactive.

As soon as Moses brought the Israelites into the wilderness, his father-in-law Jethro welcomed him and in the course of their staying together, advised Moses towards Multiplicity of Ministry and he (Moses) quickly accepted it and implemented it. What a Leader and Priest! Deffinbaugh (2009:8) observes that “great men of God are those who are not threatened by the ministry of others, but who gratefully embrace it as God’s plan to multiply ministry, rather than for men to monopolize it”. That was exactly what Moses did.

Conclusion

So far from this study, we find that priesthood has a very strong place in the Christian religion. We equally noted with dismay the sorry situation the priesthood institution has fallen into due to certain factors and challenges. However, the situation is not entirely hopeless believing that the contemporary priests would imbibe the personality traits found in the person of Moses.

The effects of the malfunctioning of the priests are so adverse not only to the immediate members of the Church where they pastor but they have far reaching impacts negatively on the larger society. There are ripple effects. The conscious role of the Church to the society has a way of impacting positively to the sustainable development of the

society and that can be achieved when the priests begin to see themselves in the like manner of Moses of the Bible.

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