



Apostle Johnson Suleman

# CHURCH AND THE NIGERIAN STATE;

## BATTLE OF THE TWO OPPRESSORS

**H**ow times fly and man easily forgets. Recall how the federal government of Nigeria raised an alarm, using the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) to feel and gauge the pulse of the Nigerian churches, especially the founders and the general overseers regarding matters of corruption in relation to the registration of their churches as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). This happened sometime in 2020, and we all saw the reactions of the church and the members, both from the informed and uninformed perspectives, against the Act and what it stands for. The gullible members and followers were misinformed and made to believe that the act was a clandestine move, that the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, who is a Muslim, wanted to clamp down on churches in Nigeria.

Whereas, it was a deliberate move by the government to put a check on the excesses of the Pentecostal Ministers, especially those of them who had been too vocal and had almost turned themselves into another opposition party, so to speak. Ever since that happened, one can notice a shift in the stance of those Ministers of God such as Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living faith church [aka winners chapel] and the like from the extreme if not to zero to at least moderate. Pastor Tunde Bakare, who also is a founder and general overseer of one of the Pentecostal churches at that time, was of the opinion that why should ministers of God like him be so worried by spitting fire and brimstone if they had no skeleton in their cupboard. This was food for thought then but no one considered it.

The true state of the Nation according to the book of Ezekiel is this: "Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence. Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they

shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction cometh; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none. Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of the land shall be troubled: I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them; and they shall know that I am the LORD" – Ezekiel 7:23-27.

Change is inevitable in our nation Nigeria but the question is where should we expect the agents of change to come from. The church under normal circumstances should be the factory where the agent of change should be produced, but unfortunately that is an over estimation because charity begins at home and no one gives what he or she does not have. The wisdom of God, which in other word is the Bible, admonishes that the horse should be put before the cart and not the other way round as it is in our churches today, especially the Pentecostal churches where the Pastors milk on the congregation instead of feeding them first as the book of Proverb 27: 23 - 27 instruct: "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds. For riches are not forever and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs are for they clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy house-hold, and for the maintenance for thy maidens"

The priority of the church as we have it today is faulty and that is why you find in most of the churches, especially the ones with large congregations and big names, that the majority of the congregation who are

youths are unemployed and nothing significant has been done to change the situation. Instead of investing heavily on projects that can absorb the unemployed youth, what tops the priority list are building of mega churches and universities that can only produce graduates who will end up joining the band wagon of those in the labour market. Something urgent has to be done if the church will recapture her lost glory of being the citadel and factory of both moral and spiritual products of the nation.

Power is in degrees and of different types. There is the talisman, which is common with the Hausas and Fulanis of Nigeria and which has its source in the Quran. There is the "juju" power, which is common among the Yorubas and other ethnic groups in Nigeria and there is also the power of God Almighty, which can only be derived from the Bible. The first two mentioned do not require that a man or woman becomes a believer or a born again Christian to engage them because they are magical in nature. There is also no shying away from the fact that even the Bible is being used by some "Christians" who make extraction from it and combine their extractions with rituals for efficacy. These bring us to the conclusion that there are powers but there is just one power that is reliable, eternally effective and without negative consequences and that is the power of the Almighty God and invokeable only through the name of Jesus Christ. This is the power that most Christians and churches have lost today due to the lust for the mundane things of life and the very reason while the Fulani herdsmen are tormenting Nigerians. When the cat is away, the mice will play. It is not as if God of the prophets of the Bible is dead or is powerless. His ears still hear prayers and His hands are not shortened to save us but our iniquities have built a wall of separation between Him and us.

For instance, the majority of the youths who staged the EndSars protest are from our churches but were hopeless just like their counterpart who were unbelievers, so there is hardly a way of differentiating between the "believer youth" and the "unbeliever youth" because all of them are under fire instead of being on fire. I think it is time for the youths to take their own destiny in their hands and for this to happen, there is a need for them to hold their church founders and general overseers to account for their stewardship in a transparent manner.



*Bishop David Oyedepo*



*Pastor Tunde Bakare*

The CAMA issue needs to be revisited and the only demand should be to mandate all the general overseers and founders of churches to publish the names of their church trustees for scrutiny since everyone is of the belief that the church of God belongs to no man but God and the members who contribute financially to the development of the churches. The ministers of God who deserve to hold the government officials accountable must also be accountable to their members. The same thing that happened at the Lekki toll-gate on October 20th 2020, which is referred to as "massacre", is only different in one or two ways from what people go through in their churches. The notable difference is that while the government uses guns and the police personnel's terrorize and subjugate the people, the founders of churches use the Bible and their anointing to threaten any group of members who challenge their authority by demanding accountability and transparency from them.

On a final note, the nation Nigeria and every other nation of the world, is a reflection as well as a replica of the church in operation in it. Thus say the Lord, "woes unto the foolish prophet that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the LORD. They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word. Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you saith the Lord GOD. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord GOD" - Ezekiel 13:3 – 9.

Change is imminent in Nigeria and because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it, His hand also shall perform it. It is either the Lord is in the city or not, Period!

*By Samuel 'Tunji Adeyanju*