

Re-Engineering Presbyterianism for Relevance in Contemporary Nigerian Society

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Abstract

This paper is geared toward the study of missionary agenda and their implementation in Nigerian society by the Church of Scotland Mission (now the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria). The study showcased that the Presbyterian Church came to Nigeria under the auspices of the Church of Scotland Mission in April 10, 1846 at 10.00a.m. The study further showcased that missionary agenda include evangelization, education, socio-economic, industrial and human resources developments. Indeed, the clergy man, Hope Masterton Waddell arrived Calabar with printer, printing press in 1846. Historical research method was adopted. Impact assessment provided that Presbyterian Mission pioneered education, human resources development, empowered vulnerable groups and paved way for rural transformation. The Mission had problems of over concentration in Calabar, tribalism and ethnicity that frustrated and narrowed Christianization as well as development rate of the mission in Nigeria. The findings further showed that the church made greater impact in the past, than now. Projects of the Presbyterian Church functioned efficiently in the past and Itu leper colony was adopted by the Divinity students of New College Edinburgh as one of their 'schemes for the year 1934'. The economic benefits engineered the first rural electrification in Nigeria at Itu leper colony in the same year at a cost of \$120 (Macdonald, 1957:27). The failure of Presbyterian projects in contemporary society intoned that management committees of the projects suffered acute integrity deficiency syndrome (AIDS) as they persistently presented annual deficit accounts with insistence for the church to offset. The economic powers that the projects could have boosted for contemporary development were lost as such the church lacks capital financial base. The researcher recommends that men and women of faith, integrity, intellectual genius, beneficiaries of the church's scholarship, political class, business magnets, philanthropists and captains of industries both home and abroad should re-engineer the church and reposition her for greater relevance in a globalized society. The Presbyterian church can re-engineer herself with implementation of 1999 Ogoja General Assembly Decision on transfer of headquarters to Abuja, a similitude of the churches giant beginning and a repositioning in contemporary Nigerian society.

Key words: Missionary Agenda, Implementation, Challenges, Impact.

1. Introduction

The Calabar Chiefs wrote letter of invitation to foreign mission and donated land in 1843. The Presbyterian Mission came under the auspices of the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) and arrived at Calabar in April 10, 1846 at 10.00a.m. The mission was led by the Clergyman, Hope Masterton Waddell.

The developmental history of the Church of Scotland mission under scored a giant beginning at the Centre of Nigeria. The church of Scotland mission laid claim to Nigerian soil, made choice between the two Bights of Benin and Biafra in the society and constituted her first presbytery as the presbytery of Biafra in 1858. Subsequently the presbytery of Biafra was constituted into Synod of Biafra in 1921. Consequently, the Synod of Biafra was reconstituted into the Presbyterian church of Biafra in 1945 and her resolution of October 19, 1945 meeting became a rule attested to by all ordained ministers of the Gospel in the church. The Presbyterian church of Biafra was changed to the Presbyterian church of Nigeria (PCN) on June 16, 1960 that ushered in the now of the church (Minutes of Synod 1960-1962; Macdonald, 1957:25; Njoku, 2008:136, Eme, 2014:348-353).

The topic of our study evoked barrel of questions. If the Church has existed for 166 years why should she call on people now to re-engineer the Presbyterian church for relevance in contemporary society? What did she do in those years? Does it follow that within the period she did not build at all? Could it be that she built but her efforts could not stand the test of time? What principle did she adopt in her labours in the field, in other words, is the principles of building the people first new to the Church? Uka said:

I see in the theme a call to understanding what it means to reposition and build'. I see the call to understanding how to deal with challenges in the process of building. If we must build structures and institutions successfully, the people must be built first (2012:10).

The views of Uka can hardly be underlined in any Scholarly circle. He re-stated the principle of successful builder by which the Presbyterian Church is known-building the people first and the people build the churches.

Efforts to contextualize provided the framework for understanding the theme. While impact assessment showcased missionary agenda, contributions, and challenges that warranted the Church to call people to rebuild and reposition the Presbyterian Church in Nigerian society. The study stressed that sustained development shall reposition the Church for more relevance in contemporary society.

1.1 Contextualization

The book of Nehemiah is the last historical book in the Old Testament, It is the autobiography of Nehemiah's call to rebuild the wall. Nehemiah learnt from Hanani a returning Jew and his own brother (Neh .1:2 cf Neh, 7:2) about the pitiful state of Jerusalem. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates burnt down with fire and in ruins. A number of the Jews that remained in Babylon and Persia returned in 445BC and one of the Jews living in Persia then was Nehemiah. He was described as capable man elevated to the position of cupbearer (Personal Secretary and Valet) to King Artaxerxes and Monarch of all Persia. The cupbearer was virtually the Prime Minister, the second in command and had personal expense account and direct access to the king of Persia.

He was responsible for tasting the King's wine, in an era of intrigue and constant attempt to eliminate people (Willmington, 1981; Howard and William, 1991), Nehemiah was a younger contemporary of Ezra. He was a politician and a builder. His main job concerned the protection of the people of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was upset, broke down, wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. He had total response, emotionally and spiritually to the ugly report. Nehemiah's heart was broken by the report.

King Artaxerxes had shown kindness to Ezra some ten years ago, and would also honour Nehemiah's request to return to Jerusalem. The king was the son of Artaxerxes and therefore the stepson of Esther. His step mother no doubt had much influence upon Artaxerxes' attitude toward Ezra and Nehemiah (Halley, 1965). God had Nehemiah in strategic position as cupbearer that, the King of Persia gave him permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall and the city. He was able to leverage that position to accomplish God's purposes (Neh. 1:8-11).

In the same vein, the missionary enterprise to Nigeria came to establish and implement the gospel mandate to the unreached people of the earth.

1.1.1 Missionary Agenda

The Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) led by the Clergyman Hope Masterton Waddell came to Nigeria for evangelization, education, socio-economic, industrial and human resources development, indeed, with a printer, printing press on April 10, 1846. Bowen said:

Our designs and hopes about Africa are simple, to bring as many individuals as possible to the knowledge of Christ. We desire to establish the Gospel in the hearts and minds and social life of the people, so that truth and righteousness may remain and flourish among them; without the instrumentality of foreign missionaries. This cannot be done without civilization. To establish the gospel among any people they must have Bible and this implies instruction (1857:321).

The Church of Scotland Mission in Nigeria started implementation of missionary agenda with building human resources development. Ajayi (1948) criticized Presbyterian Mission for extreme concentration in Calabar and 'applauded her for placing the education of Nigeria people above missionary expansion. Schools were first established in Presbyterian Mission along with instruction within the compounds of various houses in Nigeria. Hope Waddeil opened school at Duke Town in May 6, 1846 barely twenty six days after arrival of the CSM in Nigeria. The expansion rate of the Presbyterian Mission was rather at a snail pace, it took forty two (42) years to reach "Unwana" (Igboland) and one hundred and thirteen (113) years to establish in Eastern Nigeria even though she managed to start work at Kaduna and Zaria. The mission laboured for twenty six (26) years to produce the first indigenous Clergyman and one hundred and eight (108) years before the first indigenous woman was ordained an elder. The CSM had no evangelistic explosive expansion policy and failed to bring people from other ethnic groups early enough to form a National Church. Hope Waddell in Kalu and Njoku said:

It is not our wish to disturb any other body of Christians who may be engaged in similar labours. We would rather cooperate with them and, for that would respect their arrangements for the benefits of the natives and avoid disturbing their operations, even as we would expect the same consideration from them in respect of ours (2008: 75).

Although the Primitive Methodist, Baptist, United Free Church, Qua Iboe and Anglican Church have explosive

expansion policies yet they reached gentleman agreement on the sphere of missionary labour with the Presbyterian church which the Roman Catholic Church rejected in 1909. Other missions quietly shifted grounds while the Presbyterian Mission chose to remain in Calabar of course, highly under the restriction of the Chiefs of Calabar and Church Union in Nigeria failed in 1965 (Kalu, 1978).

The Presbyterian Mission opened Hope Waddell Training Institution in March 8, 1895, which was the most comprehensive College in West Coast of Africa in Colonial era. Agha in Njoku said:

The institution had Departments, printing press, teacher training, secondary and primary schools, tailoring, carpentry, bakery and engineering. The industrial education of the institution paved way for socio-economic order in the society as the girls' wing of Hope Waddell Institution was transferred to Greek Town and was known as Girls Institute in 1898 (Njoku, 2008:65).

Ayandele (1966) applauded Christian Missions for human resources development that remained the fulcrum of Nationalists' strength in the society that gained independence for Nigeria.

1.1.2 Impact and Challenges of the Presbyterian Mission

The original picture of Hope Waddell Training Institution Calabar has faded, in spite, of its strategic position. It appears like a glorified secondary school in contemporary society. The institution has become the broken temple of the Presbyterian Church, in spite of great achievements recorded in that institution as the most famous game of football World over was first played in Nigeria at Hope Waddell ground and late Honourable Nnamdi Azikiwe first President of Nigeria was one time student of Hope Waddell institution along with Ezeogo Akanu Ibiam, Denis Osadebe, and others.

Macdonald (1957) said, the Presbyterian Church pioneered the establishment of leper colony in Nigeria in 1926. The Itu leper colony project consisted of hospital, school, Court and Court of Honours. Others were Presby farm, workshop built for Palm Oil Mill, Scout and Guide houses, and Communal kitchen that provided buffet system for individual taste. The impact of the project attracted the Divinity students of New College Edinburgh that adopted the colony in their project scheme in 1934 and the colony became the first rural electrification project in Nigeria the same year at the cost of one hundred and twenty pounds (£120) (Macdonald, 1957:27 & Njoku, 2008:139).

Bishop Thomas McGettrick was the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Ogoja and Abakaliki Dioceses as well, a regular visitor to Itu Leper Colony from 1934 to 1940s. McGettrick said:

It was then that I saw the centre as a self supporting, independent town, with its own market, outdoor cinema, football and tennis pitches, a veritable medical fortress of charity, hope and love and a blessing to the inmates who without treatment would be left to walk alone/ live alone, and die alone. In 1934 when I visited Itu, there were 3200 lepers in the settlement. About one third of them were Catholics. A large number of them came from the Igbo country, as the Itu settlement kept contact with places as far as Onitsha, sending a small lorry each week to Onitsha market returning patients who were cured and bringing others to the settlement for treatment. So in October 1934 when I passed through the gateway of cement block wall at the entrance to the Itu Leper Colony and read the inscription over the arch. In His Name-I saw the great charitable work done behind that wall and I was edified (1988:195).

Miller (1957) posited that numerous other large leprosy Centers of today found the challenge and their inspiration for the beginning at Itu such as "Garikida, Uzuakoli, Oji River, Sudan Interior Mission Leprosy Settlements in Northern Nigeria and McGettrick Roman Catholic Leper Settlements in Ebonyi State"(Njoku, 2008).

What has happened to Itu leper colony project of the Presbyterian Church that it can no longer function but those that copied her have remained viable and relevant in Nigerian society?

Most worrisome is the Presby Press that missionaries came along with in 1846 that had commercial undertone yet it failed to develop into a company and establish branches all over Nigeria. In 1980s, the Presby Press floated offer of shares and Presbyterians thought that the giant had arisen to build, sustain and raise the economy of the Church but to no avail. At best it exists only in the name Presby Press. New Generation Churches' printing press print Presbyterian materials while Presby press serves as a sign post.

The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria at her General Assembly held at Abuja in 2000 received dividend of five hundred thousand naira (N500,000.00) from Uburu hospital when Senator Anyim Chukwu Ude (Elder Chief) was the Chairman Board of Governors since the Institution's establishment in 1913 and thereafter the Church

has never received any dividend rather has to source fund to offset deficit accounts annually.

Furthermore, it was the time of the Vangapen's that board of faith and order (BFO) forwarded dividends from sales of printed materials to General Assembly (GA). All the projects of the Presbyterian Church that function in other churches have failed the Church including Mbembe and Yakurr farms and institutions of training men and women. This Church has suffered great set back and economic ruination during the era of the slogan of the "sinking fund" and every venture taken including conferences, special celebration of one hundred and fifty years of existence of the Church and foreign bank accounts have failed to provide the needed fund to embark in new projects in Nigerian society and beyond.

Furthermore, Norwegian Church Agricultural Project. (NORCAP) established in affiliations with the Presbyterian Church in 1963 at Echara Ikwo was managed and financed from Norway. The project started receiving financial aid from Norway in November 8, 1977 in lieu of transferring it to the management of the Presbyterian Church, in July, 1981. Surprisingly, the Presbyterian Church handed over NORCAP to the then Anambra State Government in the same year while the takeover ceremony was held in March 5, 1982 and the researcher was an eye witness (Njoku, 2008).

Before the handover to State Government, NORCAP was valued at three million five hundred thousand (£3,500,000) pounds sterling with overhead cost of two hundred thousand (N200,000) naira in 1981. The project had developed animal husbandry and health scheme in which cattle ranches were established, supervised, health care and maintenance of the cattle were at controlled labour in "Abina, Igweledoha, Akunakuna and Odomowo" respectively.

Rural Improvement Mission dispensary at Ndegu Echara Ikwo was absorbed into NORCAP health scheme, Ndufu Echara maternity at now premises of Ikwo Local Government Area was opened and the NORCAP health scheme further erected the hospital block backing Agubia Presbyterian Church Agubia Ikwo at the now Agubia Cottage hospital and handed it over. The health programmes operated mobile clinic that offered health services to all villages in Ikwo and beyond.

NORCAP water scheme project operated in three phases in which bounded water reservoir led to the establishment of dams at "Ndufu Echara, Igweledoha, Ekpelu, Ifelemenu Ekpa-Omaka, Omega Echara, Obegu Eleke, Ndufu Umota, Abina, Agubia, Amangwuru and Okpuitumo as well as combated guinea worm infestation in the area. Most of the reservoirs attained the second stage of sand filter as water that had been filtered into the deep well was safe for drinking. It was only Agubia water scheme that had reached the third stage of pumping device before NORCAP was transferred to the Presbyterian Church in 1981.

The group farm scheme of NORCAP established twenty seven (27) group farms in Ikwo, with modern techniques of farming, various varieties of upland rice and erected chapels in all her project sites that projected the vision of the Presbyterian Church on "Forward Movement". NORCAP scheme opened up roads in Ikwo land. Above all, was NORCAP scholarship for the Community that implemented educational programmes from primary to University levels and beneficiaries cut across Assemblies of God Nigeria, Amazing Grace, Church of Christ, Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church, This is a distinguished contribution unequally anywhere in the implementation of missionary agenda in West Coast of Africa.

The flicking breath in Rural Improvement Mission hospital Ndegu Echara Ikwo and Uburu hospital up to 2015 has been through sustainable support of Ebonyi State Governor. Certainly, tribalism, ethnicity and acute integrity deficiency syndrome (AIDS) have frustrated the prosecution of projects and people entrusted with management of Presbyterian investments farmed the system and had always demanded for reimbursement of deficit accounts. Tribalism, ethnicity and lack of personal integrity and identity have been allowed to rear their ugly heads such that non-indigenes cannot head projects outside their ethnic regions. People pay nonchalant attitudes towards funding projects outside their zone for which the Presbyterian Church has been struggling to build a University of her own after other churches that started as late as 1950 have completed theirs. Certain positions have become a preserve of particular locality otherwise; nothing would work in the church of God even as the thought of relevance in contemporary society challenges the church.

1.1.3 Repositioning the Presbyterian Church for Relevance in Contemporary Society of Nigeria

The path to recovery and relevance has been initiated through the creation of National Directorate of Missions (NDM), launching of operation plant a church (OPAC) in May 23, 1999 and twenty two (22) indigenous ministers were sent on mission to North and West of Nigeria and parishes were selected that adopted the mission

fields in April 30, 2000.

Furthermore, the Presbyterian Church in July 2010 sent Nigerian missionaries to establish Presbyterian Church of Nigeria in Canada and in August 2010 other Nigerian missionaries went to open the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria in Mali, Burkina Faso, etc. The Presbyterian Church further adopted the change in nomenclature as the number one citizen of the Church is now addressed as "His Eminence, the Most Reverend, the Prelate and Moderator of General Assembly" in November 19, 2010 (Eme, 2010).

The Church in the same vein resolved to implement prove of ministry in which products of the Presbyterian institutions labour to establish Churches within the first four years of their Ordained Ministry to justify their call into the ministry in areas PCN had not existed.

The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria is a pace setter in education and pride of every known organization lies in the quality of her products. The policy of training the people first have been fruitful and many people in different field of endeavour have built churches and handed over to the Presbyterian Churches. Beneficiaries of the Presbyterian scholarships are in position of trust and human resources development is a major factor in societal development.

The repositioning of the Presbyterian Church should be focused on training and retraining of personnel with the visionary goal of driving human resources capacity building for relevance home. The theological education of the Presbyterian Church should increase capacity building in her drive that would enable graduates to perform effectively as a project developers with apt knowledge of concept and project circle, participatory monitoring and evaluation as well, environmental safeguards/management operations. Others include maintenance and sustainability, leadership and team building, conflict management and resolution, documentation and disclosure, financial management and resolution, contracting and procurement of goods and services. The position of gender and vulnerable in development programmes and implementation procedures even as they perform as first class evangelists.

So beyond teaching, the institution must emphasize qualitative teaching, in order to maintain quality assurance and thereby drive home academic contents of the syllabus. Therefore theological education of the church should be all embracing to enhance repositioning of the church for relevance in Nigeria. The retraining of the Presbyterian personnel need lots of intellectual investments to show the way, more productive way of getting things done. The retraining for continuing relevance demand seminars, workshops and conferences on capacity building that cover restaurants, cafeterias, bookshops, shopping mall/butteries, petroleum products, hebron drinks, campus house, guest houses, bakery and cabs/shuttle services. It would further collaborate with University of Technology on ICT, governmental agency on agro-biotechnology; on food security in the society and management experts in firms and industries.

The Prelate and Moderator of the Presbyterian Church should as matter of urgent importance implement 1999 Ogoja General Assembly decision on transfer of headquarters to Abuja and Synod autonomy to fast track the repositioning of the Church in contemporary society. The operation of Synod autonomy would empower leaders of the various autonomous Synods to compete favourably in development programmes. The Presbyterian Church should improve on posting more members of the clergy to a parish and a schedule of duties based on areas of specialization to maintain unity in diversity in the ministry. The church should diversify her ministry and further studies based on the areas of one specialization that would guarantee gainful employment from various segments of national economy in other to plough the knowledge and expertise into the running of the Church. There should be deliberate effort of the Church to restrain herself from further handover of acquired property to secular government. The unproductive ventures of the church should be reactivated through the services of experts in various fields related to the project and the church can retrain manpower according to needs of the system.

1.1.4 Conclusion

If Nehemiah had preferred to remain in Persia because of his exalted position, he could have lived, died and forgotten as a slave in exile. His resolve to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem to remove the shame and disgrace that the people of God were facing immortalized his name and all nations and peoples of the World are challenged to emulate his distinguished character. The executive actions of the Prelate and Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and supervisory positions, monitoring and evaluation by other functionaries of the Church in capacity building imparted to the Church's personnel shall produce fruitful results. Let it be known that there is no other people better than the products of the Presbyterian academic institutions, beneficiaries of the church's scholarship, retraining programmes, and autonomous Synods, Presbyterian Church members as professionals, as

well as politicians, captains of industries, business magnets indeed, friends of the Presbyterian institutions to re-engineer Presbyterianism for continuing relevance in contemporary society of Nigeria. The Presbyterian can fast track re-engineering and repositioning of herself through implementation of 1999 Ogoja General Assembly decision on transfer of headquarters to Abuja as a similitude of her great beginning and effectual relevance in contemporary Nigerian society.

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