



The Church of the 21ST Century in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper argues that the church of the 21st century in Nigeria stands at the crossroads of ministry opportunities as well as militating tides against her institutional survival. The focus of the article is the church in Nigeria, which means the total of all the church denominations that operate within the country. The aim of the article is to put on the alert those on the steering seat of the church as well as those who are still being fashioned in the 'factory' to be conscious of the changes in their context of operation when they are out of the 'factory'. The article argues that despite the available opportunities offered by technological advancement and postmodern culture in the 21st century, the Nigerian institutional church may be terminated by the militating tides now sweeping over the whole of Africa. This argument is premised on the fact that although Jesus Christ pronounced the eternal victory of his church over the gates of hell, he was not necessarily referring to the institutional churches because he did not start institutions. The wiping off of the institutional church across Asia Minor and North Africa in history are supporting evidences that guard this argument from falling. The argument is driven by the research question: What are the 21st century ministry opportunities and militating tides threatening the survival of the institutional church in Nigeria? Through the lens of historical analysis, the methodology utilized for data collection to answer this research question is pragmatist systematic review of related literature to achieve an outcome that meets research rigour, validity, and reliability.

Keywords: Church, Church of the 21st century Nigeria, ministry opportunities, institutional survival, militating tides/challenges

Introduction

This article argues that even though the 21st century has come with more opportunities for church ministry, the concomitant prevailing challenges could wipe out the church in Nigeria. History has a lot to support this argument. Although the focus of this article is the Nigerian church, reference is also made to the wider African context as well as Asia Minor to find support that validates this argument. This argument is also premised on the fact that if the churches in North Africa and Asia Minor are no more, because of internal and external factors that militated against them, despite being the home to the most celebrated theologians on the African Continent like Tertullian of Carthage (Tunisia/Algeria), Clement of Alexandria (Egypt), Origen of Alexandria (Egypt), Cyprian of Carthage (Tunisia/Algeria), Athanasius of Alexandria (Egypt), and Augustine of Hippo (Numidia/Algeria) (Oshitelu, 2002: 1-15), it can equally happen in Nigeria.. The paper analyzes some of the 21st century technological and postmodern emergencies that are posing both positive and negative implications for the survival of the institutional church. The paper calls the favourable emergencies opportunities, while the unfavorable ones are simply termed militating tides.



Clarification of terms

For clarity in articulating the argument, clarifying key concepts utilized in the paper becomes necessary:

Church as used in this paper refers to the two forms of the church: Church as institute and church as organism. On the one hand, church as institute, as the name indicates, refers to the institutional church, designated and organized with hierarchical administrative structures, dogmatic leaning, policy and constitutional matters, and denominational name (Bosch, 1991: 119). All the denominational churches that we know, whether mainline or not, are institutional churches. On the other hand, within the institutional churches is church as organism, which includes only members who truly have conversion experience and are in a living connection with Jesus Christ. Presently they exist within the institutional church until the return of Christ to separate the weeds from the wheat (Matt. 13: 25 NIV). The organic church has other names like true church, universal church and invisible church (Bosch, 1991:117) because no one knows the members except God. Presently, these two forms of the church exist in each true believer and they wage war against each other sometimes.

Church of the 21st century in Nigeria in this paper refers to the embodiment of all the institutional churches existing and ministering in both forms in Nigeria. By church in Nigeria, this article does not mean “The Church of Nigeria” as adopted by the Anglican Communion in the country; rather, it is the total number of all the churches existing and ministering presently within the changed culture of the 21st century in Nigeria.

Ministry opportunities depict those favorable and mission-friendly means of propagating the wholistic gospel of Jesus Christ, which were not there before. These opportunities include globalization expressed in fast means of transportation and communication, better trained gospel ministers, younger gospel ministers and simplified ways of interpreting the Bible as well as translation of the Bible in local languages.

Institutional survival refers to the possibility or otherwise of the institutional churches and continuous survival in the midst of the threatening tides of the 21st century in Nigeria.

Militating Tides/Challenges in this article include both internal and external factors threatening the constant dogmatic affirmations and institutional existence of the church in Nigeria. Some of the internal factors, on the one hand, range from proliferations of prosperity teaching within the churches, which waters down the basic tenets of sound Biblical teaching, competition for social approval among ministers of the gospel and symbiotic alliance with oppressive structures of society which destroys the prophetic ministry of the churches in Nigeria. On the other hand, external factors include terrorism (*Boko Haram*), politicization of religion by politicians for political gain and bad governance that feeds life-denying poverty among the church members thereby crippling the economic power of the churches in Nigeria (Ishaku, 2009: 67).

Structure of the paper

After setting the stage, the paper develops in the following structure: First, the methodology utilized for data collection and analysis to respond to the research question is explained. Second, the paper surveys some of the ministry opportunities of the 21st century that are available to the church. Third, the paper gives the highlights of the threatening tides/challenges that are waging war against the institutional survival of the church. Fourth, the researcher postulates some signposts as the way forward for the institutional survival of the church in this turbulent century.



Methodology

As stated in the abstract, this paper is a product of pragmatist systematic review of related literature to collect data and analyze them through the lens of historical analysis. The choice of this method is informed by its relevance in answering the research question stated above. Systematic literature reviews has emerged in the field of social sciences as a new methodology of research from the field of medical science and later, the field of education. This method, according to Professors Sleep and Clark (1999: 307):

Represents one method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing available evidence relating to a single phenomenon; a rigorous and exhaustive process of searching and appraising both published and unpublished literature on a specific question.

Systematic review of related literature is different from the traditional literature reviews called a “library method” because it adopts and adheres to a strict scientific design so as to make it comprehensive and yet minimize bias and ensure reliability, validity, and rigour (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005: 22-23). There are two main types of this method called *Purist* and *Pragmatist*. The purist type calls for accessing many and varied databases to make research outcome valid and reliable, but the pragmatist form allows for the use of a single database provided the systematic-ness is strictly adhered to (Bambra, 2009: 17). For this paper, the researcher has utilized the pragmatist type because of the scope of the paper. One database was identified (ATLA Religious database), accompanied by supplemental hand-searching of relevant texts like books, peer reviewed articles in journals, website citations, archival materials, CD-ROMs and other oral sources that make relevance (Wilson *et al*, 2010: 15-16). Prior to highlighting the opportunities and militating tides facing the 21st century church, it is pertinent to highlight briefly the ministry and social functions of the church (*mission-dei*) of every age.

Ministry and social functions of the church

The reason why the church of the revolutionary Jesus Christ exists in the world is to participate [the *Missio-Dei* (mission of God), which includes the total welfare package of God for his creation. The enabling presence of the church is needed wherever there are spiritual as well as socio-economic and political needs. This constitutes the progressive redemptive package of God for His created order. To implement this wholesome agenda of God, the church’s mindset ought to be in line with Nelson Mandela’s maxim: “The church should think service, speak service, and live service...there is no greater service than to help a community liberate itself ...and enjoy true freedom which is more than just casting off chains of slavery from their hands to living a dignified life...in achieving this, we are ready to disappear under the clouds of glory so that others can appear” (1995 Documentary).

The way the church understands herself determines how she pursues social functions within the society in which she operates. John Howard Yoder describes the church as: “*An alternative community in which disciples and people of virtue, or rather, of faith are formed. It is a laboratory of imagining and practicing new forms of social life, a hermeneutic and creative community in diaspora; a people of God offering the world a vision of restoration of humanity in Christ, in the faith community, and beyond*” (2002: 488). So the church ought always to be conscious of her uniqueness as a catalyst for wholistic social transformation pro-actively.



This is not to assume that the church is a perfect social giant. Yoder did not perceive the *ecclesia* as a fellowship of moral giants nor did he perceive it as being beyond error and sin. From his perception of the church as a product of forgiveness, the *ecclesia* should propagate the message of forgiveness in the angry and bloodletting world of the 21st century (2002: 488). The first task of the church is to be the *church*, a community that can clearly be distinguished from the world. She is shaped by a story that is markedly different from the world's story; her most important social function is to be *herself* (2002:449); resisting to be co-opted by any human system or ideology. She is called the community of the Cross; an alternative community and a beacon of hope. One must be different from the status quo to be able to challenge the status quo; hence, the church of this century has the responsibility of resisting any temptation to conform to her constituency. She is called to prophetic vocation, which, according to Jim Wallis, is "*challenging the old order and announcing the new order*" (1994: 24).

Some pertinent questions raised include: In what areas has the 21st century church demonstrated her social uniqueness from the larger social order? Is the church of this century still an alternative community? How has the church of this century lived *church*? What evil is out there that is not found in the institutional church? Why are the Elijahs' silent when the Naboths' farmlands are forcefully occupied by the Jezebels and the Ahabs'? Why are the Nathans' praising the Davids' for transgressing social laws instead of confronting them? Why are the Esthers' still waiting for a convenient time to approach the thrones to avert the plot of the Hamans' and to stop the citizens from living in IDPs in their own land? Why has "thus says the Lord, the sword shall never depart from your household" become "you will surely make it if you sow the seed?" Is this not why the church of the 21st century is at the postmodern crossroads of opportunities and militating tides?

(A) Ministry opportunities for the 21st century church

It is no news that the 21st century has brought ease of life in every aspect of human endeavor and survival. Technological advancement has offered several opportunities that humanity could utilize to curtail most of the crises of life. On the general note, Hans Kung, the Roman Catholic theologian, and the most renowned scholar I have ever read on the subject of *ecclesia*, is of the view that the church of the 21st century is rapidly approaching its third millennium because for the world in which she lives, the future has begun (1967:3). For him, the church is fortunate to live within such a dynamic world but he equally expresses doubt as to whether the church is surviving the tides and utilizing the opportunities offered effectively. For the Nigerian context, Set Usman Nden who has written prolifically on the church in Nigeria, has supported Kung by arguing that the 21st century church in Nigeria is fortunate to have most of her ministers younger than in the past (2005:56). One could argue that it is possible for the church to live in the midst of opportunities and yet fail to utilize such opportunities constructively either because of conservative attitude or gullibility to anything that comes. The under listed technological and postmodern factors could be regarded as ministry opportunities for the church of the 21st century:

(a) Ease of communication and transportation

Kung argues that "the 21st century has provided increasingly rapid means of communication and transportation; there is an explosion of new instruments, synthetic materials, methods of production are being rationalized, the expectation of human life has been increased by a decade or more; tremendous achievements have been made in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Medicine, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, and Theology, all of which have brought Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the whole earth at the doorsteps of the church to reach with the gospel" (1967: 3). Lami Gotom, a wife to a former Bishops of one of the churches argues that even ministers' wives have accessed freedom to travel for theological training to support their husbands in ministry



which used to be a taboo during the recent centuries (2009:78). Soja Bewarang in his submission, expresses fear of having to minister during technological explosion when pastors who have no technological expertise to communicate effectively will have to be forced out of ministry (2011:26-27). One could see that fast communication and transportation have afforded ministry opportunities but which have come with accompanying challenges that militate against the survival of the church in Nigeria.

(b) Globalization

Kung goes further to argue that the 21st century church has recorded a heartwarming progress because the highly industrialized nations of the global north have spread their knowledge throughout the world as peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have come to life (1967: 3). The world is becoming one with a single economic unit, a single civilization, and a single culture is fast emerging (1967:3). One would expect that with this global unity and proximity come a natural common participation in the Great Commission to dip the entire globe in the knowledge of Christ, but like Augustine of Hippo used to say, “Walls do not make Christians” (Blog); so our connection to each other has brought destruction instead because of our irreversible desire for cutthroat competition and comparison. This is a time when the most distant journey that we need to endure is travelling from ourselves to others instead of the shortest journey of travelling from others to concentrate on ourselves alone! To Kung, the church of the 21st century is caught up in a transforming world of progress that offers opportunities for ministry if the church cares to harness such opportunities constructively.

(c) Translation of the Bible in local languages

Technology has engendered the availability and translation of the Bible into the local languages of receivers; it has also provided Bible windows and means of interpretation at the door steps of the laity thereby bridging the old hierarchical and water-tight gap between clergy and laity, giving way to priesthood of all believers; technology has reduced the gospel to both print and soft tracts that facilitate the dispensing of the gospel everywhere thereby overcoming the challenge of geographical divides that kept people apart (Dafer, 2018: 34).

(d) Trained church leadership

Another opportunity is that the church has risen from leadership by traditional vernacular leaders to leadership that is formalized and sophisticated. There is no place for *lallaba* (struggling to manage) in ministry anymore because leadership training has increased drastically. In some churches now the preacher on Sunday is called to answer questions about his/her sermon on Monday, which is good! So there is no hiding place for those who used to feed on the ignorance of ignorant congregations, which the researcher treats as an opportunity because it makes us sit up and eschew laziness expressed in complacency in our sermon preparations. Even lecturers in seminaries are beneficiaries of this opportunity because sources of knowledge are no longer their monopoly; students can access information before lecturers come for lecturing; and this facilitates the teaching-learning process.

(e) More younger ministers joining church ministry

That most of the church ministers in this century are young people is an opportunity. This doubles as a sign of hope in a digital world of scientific miracles, which is on their side. The cultural change that has shifted community leadership from elders to the youths in this century serves the same



purpose in the church. The Hausa adage *zomon zamani sai Karen zamani* (modern hunting dogs for modern hares) applies here. Higher theological certificates in the hands of younger ministers is a sign of good things to come, although for some of them, these may only be like badges on their chests because what ultimately makes a certificate effective is the life of the person holding the certificate. Let me quote Matthew Hassan Kukah, the Catholic Arch-bishop of Sokoto to illustrate this:

My dear graduands, you are stepping into a world that is at war with itself. However reconstructing that world is your challenge and each of you here has the right weapons to bring about that change. Your certificate is more than a thousand armored tanks...A catapult and a stone in my hands can only frighten a little bird. But in the hands of David, it killed Goliath. It depends on whose hand the stone is in. A tennis racket in my hand may hit a ball across a net. But in the hands of Serena William is worth millions of dollars. It depends on whose hands the racket is in. A soccer ball before me is nothing more than an inflated leather. But, in the feet of Ronaldo or Messi, it is worth millions of Dollars. It depends on whose feet the ball is before. A certificate from the University of Jos is perhaps just a piece of paper. But with it, Yakubu Dogara is now the Speaker of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It depends on whose hand the certificate is in. So, my dear friends, let your certificate be your roadmap, but you be the essence. With them, you can form the strongest army in the world and conquer all the herdsmen and women in the world. With it, you can defeat death and its sponsors. With your certificate you can cross any ocean, climb any mountain and limitless frontier of impossibilities. Go ahead, conquer it and create a new, peaceful and just Nigeria. Fear not, the good Lord is ahead of you, help create, united, just and strong Nigeria where no broken truth exists (Convocation Address, University of Jos, 2018).

Kukah's argument appears valid because one of the things that have militated against ministry success in this century is certificate worship. We forget the person and go for the certificate. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted by Oprah Winfrey had said something similar:

You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato or Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermo-dynamics in Physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love (Anagwonye, 2012: 50).

King is NOT throwing certificates to the dogs; all he is saying is that it is the hands that own the certificates that matters. What this means is that what matters is YOU and I, not the theological degree certificate in our names! If secular University students deserved those comments, you and I should imagine how much more we do. The past leaders of the church did not have high theological certificates in their names but they had more successful ministry because service was above certificates; but in this century, we have the high sounding certificates but ministry is an uphill swimming!

When an institutional church begins to give too many laws to control its members, it is a sign-post towards collapse because these laws appear as the last kicks of a dying horse. When has the church become a legislative arm of government dishing laws upon laws? As survival strategies get exhausted, we fall back to legalism; but how long shall we sustain people's allegiance to laws?



Mere formulation of laws may not sustain institutional churches as much as a deep and positive change of hearts by leaders and members! Why should we not experience a massive exit of our youths to ministries when we have only bombarded them with laws almost including how they should eat food and drink water? Jesus Christ the owner of the church always put life above laws!

(B) Militating Tides/Challenges against the 21st century church in Nigeria

(1) Denial of normative biblical truth

If there is anything that is constituting a deadly blow to the survival of both organic and organized church of this century and particularly in Nigeria, it is globalization and its life-denying attacks on the normative truth: that there is nothing like universal norms to be followed by everyone; truth is reduced to relativism, everyone is capable of holding what is truth for themselves. This excessive anomia is threatening Christians' universal claim to normative biblical dogma because it is challenging the Bible left, right and center both within and without the church circles. This postmodern mindset has pushed the grace and love of God too far beyond boundaries because the maxim on which it hangs says, "Who are you to judge others, after all, God loves every one?" God loves even homosexuals; lesbians, gay couples, and trans-genders therefore, they must be accepted by the church as full members without discrimination. The above situation is common in Nigeria as lamented by Pandang Yamsat, who wished that ecumenical councils could be reverted back to correct such derailment from the truth of the gospel (2007:42).

(3) Over-institutionalization and misconception of church ministry

Another devastating tide against the 21st century church in Nigeria is excessive desire for institutionalization which is a misconception of church ministry perspective. Institutionalization in this context is more than just being an institution; it is an ideology that militates against the common good and unity of purpose within the Nigerian church. If there was anything Jesus kept warning his followers against, it was excessive desire for hierarchy and institutionalization (Matthew 20:26, Mark 10: 42-45 NIV). Hierarchy is the mother of institutionalization; and institutionalization is the mother of comparison and comparison is the mother of competition; and competition is the mother of internal violent conflicts; and this is the mother of every internal crag that makes the institutional church vulnerable and ripe for the kill by the militating factors; especially in Nigeria where intra-ecclesial competition has reached alarming rate (Ukah, 2014:32).

Excessive institutionalization kills creativity and individual gifts because it restricts certain functions to "seniors" even if they do not have the gift. We know that Jesus gave a parable of farmer who called some labourers in the morning, some in the afternoon, and some in the evening, but there was no iota of recognizing seniority in rewarding them (Matt. 20: 1-16 NIV). When those who were "seniors" complained about receiving the same wage with "juniors", the master said something horrible that those of us who capitalize on seniority may hear one day, "*Are you envious because I am generous?*" (Matt. 20: 15 NIV). This is enough warning to quell any excessive desire for institutionalization in the country (Nigeria)!

Regarding internal dangerous competition among churches all over most of African countries, Professor Jesse Kanyua Mugambi of Kenya laments that the plague of Christianity in 21st century Africa is its internal division and rivalry, not external threat (1995: viii). The kind of competitive spirit characterizing the Christian family is such that can leave crags for external threats to invade and destroy the church. The various institutional churches in Nigeria are at each other's throat fighting to create a space for social approval because they have derailed from the common rudiments that bind them together. Look at how every church is struggling tooth and nail to start



a University of its own in Nigeria ostensibly to restore social morality but the underlying motive is crave for social approval. Mahatma Gandhi (cited in Yamsat, 2007:54) argues for a spirituality that helps shape a new social order and direction by positing that: “when you begin a new project, look at the faces of the poorest and most helpless people whom you may have seen and ask yourself if your projects will be of any use to them. Will they be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore them to control over their own life and destiny? If it will not, then your project is a support to oppressors against the oppressed by continuing to blame the victims.” Gandhi’s submission begs the question: How is the church helping the poorest and helpless of the society by establishing her own educational institutions in Nigeria? These church institutions only make room for the cream of society, most of whom have emptied the coffers of the country; so by implication, the church has been co-opted in to that evil. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the church and state in Nigeria that pushes the poor out in the rain.

When the church pushes herself too far into officialdom and technicalities of institutionalization, she will face the temptation of either spreading the *gospel* or her *institution* (empire building). Like in the time of Emperor Constantine the Great, the church of this century is busy competing to take over the state or even become like a government of her own instead of being the conscience of the state and government (Kenyatta cited in Pokol, 2016:234). This is what Allan Boesak (2005: 119) describes as “a co-opted church” because the state has co-opted the church into excessive desire for capitalism, elitism, and bourgeoisie to silence her prophetic voice. Institutionalization develops gradually and in very small way that we hardly know when it has started.

This should raise a fundamental question to the Church of Christ in Nations (thereafter COCIN) (researcher’s denomination) as she moves into other nations: Is she advancing the gospel or advancing COCIN as an institution? This question should guide us so that if we are advancing COCIN, then we should know that the host nations will see us as business guests; but if we are advancing the gospel, they will see us as partners in progress; and the better for us because we shall soon wean the converts and take off our hands just as Karl Kumm and his colleagues have done! One could also argue that so long as we take the path of over-institutionalization, the technicalities of institutionalization will destroy the church from within because it will overstretch our finances too. For instance, excessive regard for academic certificates and paper qualifications is already eating up into the fabric of the spiritual organisms of the church because even pastors have joined the wagons of trooping to miracle centers to pass exams for the church to accept them.

However, this paper is not completely opposing every trace of institutionalization and human desire for recognition because of what Reinhold Niebuhr, the religious realist of the 20th century, calls “natural human self-will-to-power”, a tendency in every one of us wanting to dominate; hence, this paper qualifies its argument by “excessive desire for institutionalization”. The paper also makes a case about how the church of this century has re-ordered ministry by putting the desire for **food** above **servicing** instead of the other way round (John 4: 32-34). Tell me which pastors are at each other’s neck, and I will tell you which food they are fighting for! **Pope Francis** lamented how quickly Pastors of this century have adopted bureaucratic styles of ministry treating their followers only officially for food with nothing pastoral:

How are we treating God’s people? The ministers of the gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of their people, who walk through the dark night with them...The people of God want Pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials...Jesus did not follow that path; he lived simply for his followers to simply live (Pokol, 2017).



The church is called to offer a transformative witness to the world; and she cannot do this effectively if she co-habits with oppressive structures in a subliminal and symbiotic relationship. Professor Emily J. Choge argues that the church must be different from other social institutions:

The church is the concrete reality in the world that portrays God's purposes. Our understanding of that purpose with regard to socio-political involvement is important... The church that understands her identity as a pilgrim community will be better prepared to fulfill her purpose in the world: proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ, the pilgrim per excellence; being God's instrument for change across ethnic and national boundaries; living as a paradigm of God's will for society; serving the communities in all aspects of life. This is what a church guided by the pilgrim motif is called to... One of the requirements for the church in order to bear such witness and render such service to society, is to adopt a position of critical detachment, in order to be free to be the watch-dog of society. If church leaders allow themselves to be drafted into sycophantic thinking and accept "patronage" from state officials, they will lose their prophetic freedom to correct whatever is wrong in the society (cited in Guchire and Stinton (eds.), 2008:95-98).

Choge obviously is not calling for a pietistic separation between church and society, but he is emphasizing their functional disparity because the church cannot be in symbiotic relationship with society and still be a critical voice within it.

(4) Misapplication of Romans 13, 1Peter 2, and 1Timothy 2 in the pluralist Nigeria

History is said to repeat itself; the Constantinian error of drawing the church into cohabitation with government in the fourth century seems to be repeating itself again in the 21st century. The church has never been ordained to be a symbiotic partner of government. The church is ordained in the order of the prophets in the Old Testament to be a critical and uneasy voice and partner of government (Pilgrim, 1999: 56). This is not to sound insensitive to Romans 13, 1Peter 2, and 1Timothy 2 on what believers owe the **state** and not **government**. The church of the 21st century must critically analyze these passages by comparing them with Revelation 13 to draw her balanced position on this matter. Romans 13, 1Peter 2, and 1Timothy 2 were written when the state was theocratic and not pluralist like the 21st century Nigeria. The passages were meant to warn the Christians of that time and not to justify the accusation of the state against them: when Christianity became *relligio-illicita* (Boer, 1976: 109) because Christians refused to worship the state. The principle of contextual hermeneutical interpretation does not allow the church of the 21st century to just throw these passages to herself directly without allowing that gap of socio-cultural and political changes.

The church of the 21st century is called to develop people and not to uncritically promote deadly political systems that destroy human lives. Development of human life, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is the first line of defense, while impoverishing people is the worst violence against them (cited in Wallis, 2013/14: 123); therefore, the church cannot afford to be co-opted by evil governments that feed on and celebrate the poverty of their citizens. The church of this century is responsible to champion the cause for life-giving conditions in the country. For instance, S.G. Elton argues:

We must not be content to chant hymns and say prayers in [the church buildings] while the crisis deepens [outside there]... There must be a change of thinking and



attitude towards life and our responsibility for the condition of our nation and society. The great need of Christians in Nigeria is to realize that they are responsible for the present [economic] crisis because of their indifference and inactivity when they have the Great Gospel to solve the crisis (cited in Ojo, 2012: 12).

Elton's submission may suggest that the church is aware of the challenges, but mere awareness is not good enough to challenge the status quo. The church in Nigeria must check her irreversible colonial psychic damage of over-reliance on western education as passport for successful living; she must encourage those who are not called for academic excellence to explore other avenues and endeavours for survival. The church needs to begin the project of economic participation otherwise, she is heading for a mega institutional fall since white-collar-jobs have given way. Now she has depended for too long on western style education and now poverty looms among her members. She boasts of out-spoken and rich pastors who appear very determined to handle the emerging tides constructively, but such determination ends as a mere smokescreen behind which symbiotic cohabitation takes place. This is not an accusation because it finds justification in the speech given by the General Overseer of RCCG, Enoch Adeboye:

In Nigeria we can become a fantastic force for good. What kind of force? A fantastic force for good for this nation...Brethren, God expects us to reach a situation whereby we will decree that there will be no rain in Nigeria. And until we call for it again there will be no rain. The Almighty God wants us in a situation where we will say, alright, because the government could not do what it was asked to do, from henceforth we ask the supernatural power of God to paralyze the electricity and power generators, they will not work because the current will not flow...We will take over the whole of Africa...When the spiritual climate is right, things will happen in the economy (cited in Marshall, 2012: 6).

One could hold such church leaders accountable for the epileptic power supply that Nigerians are experiencing because his institutional church now has some of the most exorbitant services in the name of redemption camps (Ukah, 2014:32). Professor Asonze Ukah also reveals how some church founders like Adeboye have 'repainted' God in their own image:

God is the God of the rich, and his closest friends are very wealthy. Therefore if you will become one of the closest friends of God, you will become rich...Birds of the same feather flock together. The rich are friends of the rich, and the poor are friends of the poor. Therefore, God decided to befriend the rich (Adeboye cited in Marshall, 1989: 3).

Ukah further reveals how Adeboye used, and is still using, financially unfaithful politicians to furnish his redemption camp with state-of-the-art-facilities. One may accept this because he recently ordained a prominent politician's wife as an assistant pastor (Reuters). Tinyiko Maluleke observes and argues against such unholy alliances between church leaders and political opportunists:

When the Church is too involved in governments' bureaucracies, its voice would not be heard in the social landscape of the country. Priests and Theologians have "jumped ship" and become politicians, Civil Servants and Business people. So that fact of the Church that was prophetic is now in bed with government. The leadership appointment of the Church has connections with politicians so that the Church has become a fishing pond for politicians (2010: 9-10).



However, Maluleke's argument does not mean that the Church should have nothing to do with government, but her deep involvement with government should not be one that makes her a 'bed-fellow' of government as she compromises her prophetic voice.

(5) Terrorism

It is no news that the activities of terrorists have exerted negatively overstressing the lean resources of the institutional churches in Nigeria. This has posed many challenges within and without the church because while the terrorists destroy church facilities, their activities have left uncountable widows and widowers for the church to cater for, apart from the relief materials needed for the numerous Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Nigeria. Gotom argues that the church in Nigeria is forced to expand its budget to cater for the widows and orphans left behind by the activities of *Boko Haram*, who have destroyed lives and property worth millions of naira over the years (2009: 40). The economic life of the church has also been grossly affected because most Nigerian churches depend on weekly offerings for financial income; however since the terrorists have targeted markets and farmlands, churches have lost their sources of financial income (Ishaku, 2009: 42).

(6) Gender issues

The church of this century has risen to find herself called to answer questions about gender equality to reflect the equality of creation. Apart from movements like Women's Liberation and Feminist Movements, there is an emerging body of women theologians (A Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians), with members cutting across the entire sub-Saharan Africa. This body is writing a lot to create a space for women within the institutional churches to truly demonstrate the equality of creation (Nicolaidis, 2015). The world is replete with gender biases and social structures which delineate the women's responsibilities, feminism is seen as an activist movement as well as thoughts that underscore the need for an affirmative transformation of society in a way that females and the critical roles in society are not marginalized. Conservative churches are already trembling because even the population of women in the churches is enough to scare them. The typical face of the Nigerian church is that of patriarchy and excessive denial of gender equality. If the church truly reflects the justice of God, equality of creation ought to be its watch-word (Chammah &and Pokol, 2015: 15-16). Gotom also blames the religio-political crises that have bedevilled the Nigerian context on marginalization of women in church and society (2009:24). Now that most churches have more women in number than men, the future of such churches is not guaranteed.

Conclusion

The main argument of this paper has been that the institutional church in Nigeria may be submerged by the emerging postmodern challenges of the 21st century because she was co-opted instead of co-opting the world for fullness of life. To prove this hypothesis, the paper focused on analyzing the ministry opportunities that have come in the 21st century Nigeria church and the accompanying challenges militating against her institutional survival. The Nigerian church needs to take the dynamic world of the 21st century seriously by navigating its way to fulfilling the mandate of God by being prophetic, just and fair to all. I have also argued that once there is over institutionalization above the desire to implement the mandate of God, the Nigerian church will only become another institution thereby losing its 'light' and 'salt' value. It could be concluded that because the church leaders in the country have abandoned their primary mandate and taken to competition for social approval, terrorism has risen to destroy church properties thereby halting



its economic progress. The aim of the paper has been to alert the Nigerian church leadership of these militating factors because it is said that 'to be warned is to be armed!'

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