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Role of Church in Enhancing Stability, Security and Democracy in a Changing World

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Abstract

The paper titled “the role of the Church in enhancing stability, security and democracy in a changing world” deals with survey of the Church from AD33 to the present stage. The research covered 4 eras of the church history with responses of the church on specific issues that concerned the church. The design of the research was secondary qualitative review of literatures. It has been discovered that in early church, the apostles, church fathers and theologians responded to false teachings, persecutions and compiling of scriptures. In second era, medieval, the church responded to theological and doctrinal controversies, political struggles and development. It was a darkest history of the church that caused divisions and lost. The reformation period dealt with reforms, the separations and starting of enlightenment. The modern period was a period of mission, evangelism, education, liberation, independent of African countries and civilization of 3rd world. The new era, 21st century is the present age where the church is battling with terrorism, bad governance, liberalism and greed. 4 recommendations were proffered to Christian leaders to adhere to their Churches’ vision and mission, use Bible word of God and stand on truth of the gospel for the matters of faith and practice.

Keywords: Church, Stability, Security, Democracy

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Introduction

Church has been a hope for mankind since when it started in the 1st Century A.D. The Church is founded on Jesus Christ her savior whom he called His bride (Eph. 6:25-27). The mandate of the church rested on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:11-20), love (John 13:34-35), justice (Luke 4:18-19) and righteousness. Christian Religion is the world most persecuted Religion (Burns, 2007). The Church from its birth to the present suffered tremendous persecution from different groups of people for their different reasons, but Church remain the light and salt of the world (Mtt. 5:14-16).

The church leaders and the theologians responded differently to their situation. The focus of this paper is to analyse church's role in changing world, tracing the time of Apostles, church fathers, theologians of different timeline to specific Nigerian situation. As the world changes, so also the response of the message of Biblical teachers changes in contextualisation. The responses from the church leadership across Christian timeline can be categorized into defensive, apologetic, dogmatic, exegetical and persuasive.

Definition of Key Concepts

a. Church:

Literally, people see Church as a building and place of worship. Some see it as a particular denomination, but professionally, Everett (2005) defines Church as a body belonging to the Lord. From a Greek adjective "Kuriakon", firstly used as "the house of the Lord," then "of His people". Ekklesia is a Greek word for the public assembly summoned by herald (Acts 19:32, 39, 40).

In the Septuagint, normally abbreviated "LXX", it means the assembly or congregation of the Israelites, especially when gathered before the Lord and for religious purposes. In New Testament, it is used for the congregation of the Living God. The special gathering of the children of Jesus Christ, which He is the head. The Church is the spiritual family of God, empowered by His Holy Spirit in fellowship as their souls are united. The Church also can be seen as a supernatural institution of God in this present age and the age to come (Rev. 7:9-17). The Church is universal from all races, nationality and color. Church is not denominational, but all who receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and are baptized in His name.

Milne (2008) sees Church from biblical images as the people of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, vineyard of Christ and flock of God. In this study, Church is regarded as the people, the structure and an institution.

b. Stability:

The word denotes calmness, tranquility and firm, unshaking and reliable. It also explains resistance to negative change. It is a balance equilibrium against disharmony and steady during turbulence and crisis. Bible describes how Jesus calms a storm and their ship became steady and the water became peaceful (Mark 4:35-41). Church is called to be a peace builder, stabilisers during chaos and equilibrium in morality and spirituality, even if the world sink into perversion.

c. Security:

It is a protection from harm or danger. It is a safety from threats and terrorism. It is an assurance of wellbeing whether physical, financial, emotional or spiritual. Bible says that God is the only absolute security to mankind (Milne, 2008).

d. Democracy:

It is a system of government where it is believed that power rests in the hands of the majority. People elect their leaders directly or indirectly through representatives. The principles of democracy ideally should include: free and fair elections, protection of human right, accountability of leadership, good governance and rule of law.

Survey of the Christian Timeline: Ages in Church History

The Church has been existing for about two thousand years (2,000). Its history has been divided in categories in line with its roles and struggles in different cultures, policies, theology, and impact. Palmer (2015) categorized the periods with specific Church engagements as following:

i. Early Church History from AD 33 to AD 500.

The Church is believed to be born on the Pentecost day, 50 days after Jesus resurrected from the dead (Acts 2:1-47). The first Christian leaders, theologians, Apostles and other New Testament writers like Luke, Mark, Jude and James who were not Apostles of Jesus Christ. The next Christian leaders were the disciples of Jesus Christ called "Church Fathers" and other renowned theologians and bishops. These renowned people were: Clement of Rome, Polycarp of Symarna, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin of Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Augustine of Hippo and many other renowned teachers of the Bible from AD33-500. At this period, the church responded to false teaching of Marcionism, Gnosticism and Montanism. The response included the canonization of the Scripture, compiling as well as developing of the sound doctrine which we are using today. The Church also responded to severe persecution of 300 years and maintained its integrity, faith and unity.

Persecution did not start with the early Church. It goes back to the founder of the Church, Jesus Christ who explained in His teaching that persecution will be part of the Church because the world will hate His disciples as they hated

Him (Matt 5:11). In all the teachings of Jesus, there is nowhere He said that His followers will be safe from evil and violence, but He assured them that He will be with them up to the end of the age. The persecution from the beginning was from the Jews with clear examples in case of stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54) and killing of James the brother of John (Acts 12:1–19). As time goes on, persecution from Romans began from Nero in AD 64 and extended to the time of Decius until the end of persecution by Constantine in AD 313. Christianity was considered as “*religio illicita*” meaning illegal and unlawful religion (Boer 1976). Christians were persecuted mainly because of their refusal of emperor worship. In addition, Christians were persecuted on the charges that they were haters of mankind for they refused to work in public services and military. Christians were blamed for causing calamities and natural disasters due to their refusal to sacrifice to Roman gods. They were persecuted because of the name of Jesus. Bearing the name of Jesus was sufficient enough to be killed or imprisoned as in I Peter 4:14–16.

The Church during the early period responded to the violence, instability and cruelty in line to Jesus’ steps while on earth. The Church Fathers who were called apologetic theologians responded through non-violence. Jesus Christ did not fight back during his arrest and death, but he condemned the evil structure of the government of the period. Jesus spoke against injustice and wickedness. Jesus asked his disciples to respond in love (Matt 5:43–48). Apostle Peter taught believers to entrust their lives into the hands of God who is the true judge and rejoice in their suffering only if not punished for their wicked deeds (1 Peter 4:14–16). Apostle Paul in the same vein admonished the Church not to repay evil with evil (Romans 12:17–21).

Some Church Fathers like Jesus, the Apostles responded also with examples of Justin Martyr (150 AD) who challenged the Roman Emperor, Roman Senate and general public on behalf of those that were unjustly hated. He wrote “Apology” not apology we know today but defence for Christians for unjust maltreatment because they are only called Christians. He accused the Roman authority for jailing Christians for answering the name “Christians” and set free those that denounced the name. He called for justice and equity for maintenance of peace and stability. For him, quietness is a sin in the midst of injustice and oppression. Tertullian (197–212) responded to the Romans who mocked the God of Christians in his Apology XVIII. It was a defence of Christian morality, peace and stability. He said God is greater, powerful above the gods of Romans and their emperors. He radically defended the Church’s position on belief and practice, unity and faith. The Church Fathers’ position caused them their lives but they believed that “the blood of the martyrs is seed of the Church.” Almost all the Church Fathers were executed by the Roman Government but they stood their ground on the justice, security and stability of the Church (Jowitt, 2010).

ii. The Middle Ages (500–1500 A.D.)

The middle Ages covers the period that the Church suffered division, theological controversies and Church attacking itself. Example, Roman Church called “Western Church” attacked the Eastern Church called the “Greek Orthodox”, because of political and doctrinal differences. The freedom enjoyed after persecution spoiled the church. They engaged in politics after Constantine became Emperor and Christian, the Church was spiritually weakened. Dirty things happened in the Church. Bishops from Alexandria, Ephesus and Rome struggled for fame and had sharp disagreement. This division opened the door for Islam that came and took over Africa and East in mid-15th Century.

Even though historians see the period as dark age because of invasion that led to the fall of Roman Empire, the period also experienced positive response of the Church which includes the Establishment of Papal authority till date that survived Islamic attack and who reclaimed Jerusalem from Islam (Turks). This period also developed Monasticism and Reforms that gave birth to world first and best Universities and Seminaries. Scholasticism were developed and the rise of Classical Theists like Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and John Wycliffe.

The period also recorded Church Architecture and Art. This period was most difficult moment to Church Unity, progress and faith. It was a period that recorded the rise of Islam in full force till date. We must take it to the account that Islam had never captured a place and lose it unlike Christianity that lost some of its stations and towns up to this present generation with Europe in caution.

iii. Reformation and Post Reformation Period (1500 – 1700 A.D.)

This was the turning point in Church history. It was a theological and Ecclesiastical movement that sought to reform the Church and Society. The movement gave birth to Protestantism. One of the key players was Martin Luther (1483 – 1546), he was a German theologian who led to challenge Church’s authority through the 95 Theses. That later on gave freedom of the usage of Bible by the lay people, translation from Latin to German and subsequently other languages. Clergys were allowed to marry and review on Holy Communion as well as other Christian practices.

John Calvin (1509 – 1564) was a French theologian who developed the Calvinist theology emphasizing predestination, sovereignty and authority of the Scripture over tradition by the Church. Huldrych Zwingli (1484 – 1531) was a Swiss theologian who led Reformation in Zurich, he focused on Biblical preaching and the Lord’s Supper. This movement gave birth to Protestantism that influenced literature, politics, education and modern society. Church responded to challenges positively through scholarship and debate. Reformation challenged Roman Catholic Church to put their house in order through Roman inquisition, Society of Jesus (Jesuits), council of Trent, regular clerk and other processes.

iv. **Modern Period 1700 – 1999**

This period started in 18th Century and ended in 20th Century. It was called the Enlightenment period because of many discoveries and scientific advancement. This period was called a period of reasoning. This time was fruitful in human right especially the abolishment of slave trade, the Great Awakening, the Evangelical Revival and the emergence of Pentecostal Movement. Some important theologians at this period were the “Wesleys”; the John Wesley and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edward, George Whitefield, founders of Clapham Sect that moved for the Abolishment of Slave Trade, Henry Venn, William Wilberforce Henry Thornton etc. also, the Missionaries like other Church Missionary Society; Sudan United Mission, the Sudan Interior Mission, the Baptist Mission, Methodist Mission, Roman Catholic Mission, Church of the Brethren Mission and all other Missionaries of 18th – 19th Century. It was a liberation period that Africa has seen the light through the Gospel and Western Education. The freedom from the oppression of Islamic and Arab raiders especially in Northern Sudan. Church responded to situations of slavery, illiteracy, health care and development. (Darwish, 2000).

In America, it was a period that Martin Luther King Junior and other theologians in South America developed liberation theology, non-western theology and inculcation. This period also marked the black theology and reggae Music for freedom by musicians like Bob Marley using biblical stories like Exodus experience, Babylonian exile and war of Armageddon to depict struggle of the blacks in America, Europe, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The gospel and education opened the eyes of many people to see who they are and responded to their situations.

In other hands, non-formal theologies emerged to form some African Initiated (Independent) Churches. Mixture of African spiritual experience with biblical interpretation. This period opened door to Holiness Movement, Miracles, Speaking in Tongues and Casting of Demons with emergence of title “General Overseers”. The negative experiences of this period cover the First and Second World War, the liberal and critics of the Bible and extreme feminist theologians (Mamza, 2018).

v. **The Postmodernism, Digital Age 2000 to Date (21st Century)**

21st Century is the current century of the Anno Domini era in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar. It began on 1st January 2000 and will end 31st December, 2100. It is the first century of the third millennium. It is termed and known also as the era of freedom and technological advancement; it is also period of digital world. The driver of this period is Internet and through Information and Communication Technology and Artificial Intelligence (Webster, 2018). This generation is a very complicated one in comparing with previous eras discussed. The stability is swift in music, dressing, sport, education, governance, military, commerce, democracy, and many more. Names of criminality are refined with specific example of prostitution now called “hookup”, financial fraud “cash out”, human ritual “Yahoo, Yahoo+”. Crazy activities by young men and women, they will say “Gen Z”, “Cruising”. People want to be independent in Church, family, school and workplace. The concept freedom and democracy are misinterpreted to be “anomia” lawlessness (Bulama and Mamza, 2024).

Nigerian Democracy came to stay in 1999, that’s just one year before the start of a new era, 21st Century. The freedom from military rule and entering into a new era affected Nigerian society a lot. The double approach experience led to serious crisis where different people wanted to exercise their democratic freedom in new global era wrongly. Example, this freedom led Muslims to ask for Sharia laws in 2000 that led to war in many cities of Nigeria, the freedom of expression led a lady to say something about Prophet of Islam on beauty contest that led to war in Kaduna and other cities that caused thousands to be killed. The freedom of expression led Maiduguri Muslims to kill Christians because someone draw cartoons in Denmark and ended on innocent people in Nigeria (Mamza, 2018). On Christian side, the freedom opened doors for freedom of worship and association and so many churches are established but some engaged in criminalities of massive rape, baby factory, money laundering, dealing in drugs, financial fraud, human rituals and all forms of evil (Bulama S. and Mamza, 2024).

The 2011 election was one of most deadly in Nigeria and so many politicians used religion for mischief. Religious leaders and politicians became merchants of war. And no one can. Good governance has become difficult due to religious differences, tribalism, and corruption. The Church that is supposed to be the light and salt are always accused of corruption and massive bribery during elections. The Church leaders take sides among their members during campaigns and so the process creates enmity.

The 2023 election revealed the picture of the Church on corruption and failure in sustaining stability and democracy. The Church leadership were accused of collecting money from politicians but still claim that they are against Muslim-Muslim ticket. Pastors say one thing on the pulpit and different things in the night with politicians in hotels (Bulama and Mamza, 2023).

The attitudes of religious leaders and politicians made Nigerian masses more vulnerable in the hands of criminals and so create serious insecurities. It is worrisome recently based on report online, when World Council of Churches (WCC) published that 5 out of the richest world pastors are in Nigeria but no one church in Nigeria is in 10 richest churches in the world. Certain religious leaders are richer than their churches or denominations. They are like politicians, as it has been revealed that the money spent on 109 senators in Nigeria can pay 4,708 salaries of professors in Nigeria (Hamzat, 2023). The actions of Nigerian religious leaders, judges, top military leaders, police officers, many professors (returning officers), help politicians to manipulate, rig and impose themselves on Nigerian masses. If they emerge as leaders, they will be tough, unkind, wicked and brutal because the masses did not elect them. Those that supposed to challenge them like pastors, the

judges, the academics and militaries were bought during election. No wonder, heads of Christian denominations after meeting with politicians rebuke their members from participating in protest due to hardship but same people led 2011 protest against former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (Olamidekun, 2024). Despite the negative attitudes of the majority of the Christian leaders in Nigeria, many churches (denominations) have contributed to Nigerian security, stability and democratic process through economic policies like micro finance banks that help masses in short time loans, water supply, health care, Education and Agriculture (Attah, Mamza, Y and Ruth, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Church from its inception has been a source of hope for mankind to date. We have seen the Church's role during the early church for standing on her faith and defending true doctrine. In the Medieval period, the Church began monastic observation that gave birth to universities and research. During Reformation, there was a birth of enlightenment period, review of some Church policies and scientific discoveries. The Evangelical period (called the modern period) was a period of world missions, liberation of slaves, independence of most of the African countries and human right. The Church in this century especially in Nigeria must work hard against the wave of Western Liberalism, African Greed and Asian Terrorism.

1. The Church through Head of Denominations should work on their Mission and Vision Statements towards Nigerian stability and democracy.
2. The Church should have a clear mandate and be careful with the politicians.
3. Bible should always be a Christian's watchword for development, stability and democracy in 21st century.
4. The voice of the Church should be like the voice of Master Jesus Christ in condemning evil, rebuking sin and upholding righteousness for the stability, security and democratic Nigeria.

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