

THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF THE PASTOR IN NATION BUILDING:
PERSPECTIVE FROM THE BOOK OF AMOS

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ABSTRACT

Post independent Nigeria of forty-eight (48) years ago, had witnessed various forms of governments in which many of them end up with bad records of exploitation and reckless plundering of the nation's wealth for personal gain and leaving the poor masses in pains. Nigeria has witnessed high crime rate, insecurity, injustice, moral decadence, poverty and so. Upon all these social evils, most ministers of the gospel stood aloof. What a pity?

The situation of Nigeria calls for the spirit of boldness on the side of the clergy, like those who rose stoutly in Judah and Israel to address the situation on ground. The Nigerian churches need prophets like Amos, whose voices will reach the corrupt leaders and citizens of his time, in and outside the church.

In this paper, the intention is to challenge the prophetic or pastoral ministry in Nigeria in relation to pastors of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. It is high time to intensify their services to bring about national transformation. It is their duty to speak out amidst of silence in Nigeria, if Baptists truly hold the tenet of righteous living in high esteem then the Nigerian Baptist Convention can begin to declare war against all form of ungodliness and unrighteousness in our nation. Pastors should be made to know that they had the role of advocacy in equity, fairness, justice to change the nation for better.

The research work is divided into five chapters: Chapter one is introduction, chapter two is literature review, chapter three is on Amos and his prophecies, chapter four is on Nigerian socio-economic context and chapter is for summary, conclusion and recommendations. The research work is purely library research.

5.2 CONCLUSION

As Nigeria has been rated the third most corrupt nation in the world, it is ironical that it has also been acclaimed one of the most religious nation in the world. This is attested to by large numbers of religious building that can be found all over the streets of Nigeria. There is no denying of the fact that Nigerians are religious and that religion has exerted, and is still exerting enormous influence on the populace. It is

however disheartening that majority of the government officials and the ordinary citizens that are being caught in many of the social vices belong to one religious organization or the other. But in this paper, the researcher is more concerned with the Christian tradition, knowing fully well of the influence of religion on the peoples' mindset, what should religious leaders do to help ameliorate the social or ordeals that are hampering nation building.

The message of Amos is very much relevant in contemporary Nigeria. The Hebrew prophets were not philosophers uttering eternal truth in the abstract. They were God's spokesmen at given historical situations. Their messages are still valid today because neither the character of God nor of human sin has changed. The historical situation that brought about Amos's prophetic vocation is traceable in the contemporary Nigeria.

Secondly, as Israelites identified themselves as having covenantal relationship with Yahweh, many Christians in Nigeria also see the country as having an important role to play in God's agenda for the end time. Many preachers in the Nigeria religious scenes often express this mentality. Church as part of civil society, has fundamental advantage over other societal institutions in that it contains sources of legitimacy, depending upon the situation, can be viewed as a supplemental entity to the state and a symbiotic alternative.

In essence church leaders have social responsibilities within the civil where their constituencies are domiciled. They need to strive to get rid of the socio-political maladies and inhuman treatment of the downtrodden in the society. The cleansing work needs to start from their immediate religious institutions. Desirable moral and ethical values should be revisited and inculcated in their members who are part of the larger society.

It is disheartening hearing and reading stories of embezzlement of both public and church funds by some church leaders and laities. This is an indication of the martyrdom of moral values. If church leaders succeed in dealing with themselves and their members, they may then proceed to the public sphere and make a difference to the social disorder in the society. They should not hesitate like Amos, to confront, if need be, the political hegemony and the affluent in the society of their corruption, marginalization of the poor and perversion of justice. For such work like this the only weapon is the Word of God. They must constantly and continuously wield it to prick the conscience of the people. The result may not be immediate or encouraging, yet they must persist in declaring the word of God and the impending judgment on the recalcitrant. Frantic effort should be made to correct the social anomalies in the country. This could be achieved through unrelenting analysis of government policies in the light of God's word.

Both the print and the electronic media should be patronized in airing their views on any unjust governmental policies and the decaying moral and ethical values in the society. As I have argued elsewhere, any church leader who is indifferent to the socio-political realities and the marginalization of the poor in the society is not worth his sort. He could be likened to some false prophets in the Old Testament. Today they are plenty; they suddenly became "praise singer" of the administration in the face of wrongdoing. At times they kept mute so as not to utter any offensive statement against the king that may earn them disfavour. But this is an indirect way of collaborating with an unjust, unconcerned and oppressive administration. Prophet Amos overcame this temptation when he spoke against the rulership of Jeroboam II and even told him that his lineage would be swept out with sword. And Amaziah, the

priest, had to instruct Amos to leave Bethel at once. The Nigerian religious leaders should learn from him.

In Nigeria, church leaders normally preach against social injustice and lopsided government policies while they are in their churches. But they tend to be silent while in the public probably as a result of fear and attempt to curry favour with the political hegemony.

The focus of the prophets was practical in that they were charged with the responsibility of calling the people to individual and corporate repentance and drawing the nation back to the principle of divine law. Nigeria which is seen as a corrupt Nation today can be changed through the efforts of genuine prophets or pastors. God is waiting for us to make this change.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prayer: Amos does not hesitate in pleading for Israelites, pastors today must equally pray for Nigeria. The Bible even makes it abundantly clear that God expects His people to pray to Him. Hear Him as it finds in II Chronicles 7:14. God does not expect the ungodly or the unbeliever to pray. The healing of the sick nation is not committed to the politicians or to the freedom fighters, but God says, it is the responsibility of His people, those who are called by His name. He expects His own people to come to Him penitently in prayer. I Tim. 2:1-2 shed light on who to pray for. Psalm 122:6 urges us to pray for the peace of our nation. Pastors should pray out corruption, nepotism, tribalism and other social vices in our nation.
2. Pastors should preach and promote righteousness, Prov. 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people". We are to live righteously and encourage others to follow. True righteousness involves being really

obedient to the law of the land and the recognition that all men irrespective of colour or race are of one blood having been created in the image of God.

3. Pastors should uphold both prophetic and pastoral ministry in high esteem. The prophetic responsibility be directed first towards condemning the ills of the society – the perversion of justice, the oppression that is being institutionalized and the sins that are being glossed over. Like the Old Testament prophets, the church must awaken itself from the slumber and condemn every evil and self-righteousness. The prophetic ministry must also be directed towards revealing God's will and message to people while the pastoral responsibility to minister comfort and hope to millions of Nigerians, who are daily experiencing hopelessness through the political uncertainty of the country and the unending economic adjustment, through counseling, teaching and social support.

4. Pastors need to comment on public issues, for example, issuing occasional press releases commenting on the political issues in the country. A press conference could be called or a press statement made to point out the issues at hand like corruption, abuse of power, violation of human rights, tribalism, land grabbing, electoral malpractices, religious crises among others. The pietistic, keep free from politics missionary teaching rarely produces critical Christian leaders who see the relevance of Christianity to socio-political life, and this theology must be reassessed. In reality, ministers of the gospel to join the government to sanitize the system, don't say you are not part of the government. Encourage the good people in congregation to take public posts for the purpose of rendering services, it is from the house of God that we start imbibing good morals.

5. The minister must widen its scope of activities and seek to carry its witness to the economic and socio-political arena. We are aware that the church is in precarious

position. As a social institution, it suffers from the weakness of its society, but unlike the society that must search for economic and ideological answer from International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other western countries the church has an answer in the scripture.

6. A minister must be aware that theologization worth to embark upon today, is that which makes meaning to people in his existential situation.

7. The time has come for the spiritual leaders to re examine their policies of the "Social Gospel." Which has its goal for the provision of social amenities to make life more meaningful. Some of these programme that can be influence by pastors are: (a) Humanitarian service (b) Educational development (c) Employment generation (d) Social and ethical development (e) Governance by example (f) Improved economy and (g) Spiritual and moral development

8. Our theological seminaries, colleges of theology should also include in their curriculum a focus on the political issues in our country. Students must understand the different kinds of governance, human right and trends. Otherwise those who are being prepared as ministers but do not understand these issues, will never help their congregations who are part of the body of politics in the country.

9. Pastors should act as the mouthpiece of the masses, voice of the voiceless, must not rest on their oasis. Continually and persistently cry out loud into the eardrums of Nigeria leaders. They should also take a concrete view point alongside the oppressed, the improvised, the marginalized, those denied of their rights and those discriminated against.

10. The Gospel ministers should avoid the message full of popular theology or expedient theology that is theology which merely meets the mood of the day.

Doctrine of cheap grace must not be part of Gospel message, it means justification of sin without the justification of the sinner, and grace alone does everything. The advocate of cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance. Theology of judgment need to be brought to limelight as God is going to judge every work Ecclesiastes 12:14.

11. Discipleship, the problem with Nigerian churches is that there are more members who are not discipled. The church has to seriously embark on discipleship which can cause massive spiritual rebirth in churches which will in turn affect the nation.