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**THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF THE CHURCH PASTOR:
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE BOOK OF AMOS**

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ABSTRACT

The Prophets of the Old Testament were instruments of reform in all human endeavours in their societies. Prophets also were part of the leadership of the Church in the New Testament. The Church Pastor today is expected to play the prophetic role. This is the thrust of this essay.

Prophecy is God speaking through His servant to a people in a particular existential situation which have eternal benefits. The prophetic Pastor is one who speaks the mind of God to His people with the aim of causing a deeper commitment to the Lord and a better relationship with human beings.

Prophecy has in its nature **forthtelling and foretelling**. The prophets address the present situation and also project into the future. Prophecy cuts across the religious, the socio-economic and **political** aspects of life. It is all encompassing. Prophecy can be conditional or **unconditional**.

The contemporary church has varied and diverse attitude towards prophecy. The Older Churches are **aparthetic**, the Charismatic and Independent Movements make use of prophecy in an **unbalanced** manner. There is need to employ prophecy in the Biblical manner for contemporary christians to reap the full benefits of prophecy.

There are challenges to the contemporary Pastor in the ministry of prophecy. The challenge from the Biblical worlds. The challenge from African converts who are used to prophecy. The challenge of spiritual and church growth. The challenge of Prophet Amos who as a prophet was educated, courageous, **emparthetic** sympathetic and tactful.

In order for Pastors to play their prophetic roles effectively, they and the Church members need to be educated. Prophecy also should be recognised in practice as it is in principle. Prophetic Pastors should be disciplined and apt in administration. Without prophecy the whole world is in gloom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that prophecy cannot be subterfuged in the contemporary church and society. It is a gift from God to His church for strengthening, encouragement and comfort (1 Cor. 4:3 N. I. V). It is also a catalyst for social and spiritual revolution in any given society as in the case of Amos' prophecies to the people of Israel. Therefore, to neglect it is to neglect a vital aspect of

Biblical teaching, to take it with a non-challant attitude is to berate spiritual harmony in the church of God. To say that prophecy has ceased is tantamount to heresy, while to misuse it is not less heretical. It is an essential part of the gifts, which God has given the church, which has to be exercised as any other gift. It is sublime.

As important as prophecy is in the church, it is nauseating to see how the ministers of the gospel handle it. In some churches it is completely submerged, while in some it is made latent. Also in some its exercise is unbalanced. The correct diagnostic description that can be given to the state of prophecy in the contemporary Orthodox Church is that it is in coma.

Having seen the expectations of people in the church and the society concerning prophecy, it is expedient on the part of the local church Pastor to play his prophetic role as and when necessary. These recommendations will help the Pastor to play this prophetic role effectively:

Education of the Pastor/prophets

It is noted that the repulsive attitude of people to prophecy especially in the older churches is largely due to ignorance. This is not limited to the ranks of the laity alone, it is also found among the clergy. Moreover, it is another face of ignorance by some Charismatic Church Movement who practise an aspect of prophecy at the expense of the other.

The only curative agent that is available for this deadly disease is education. People in the church should be taught. David Oyedepo suggested six areas of concentration. The formation of monitoring committee on the activities of the prophets, organisation of periodic lectures on prophecy. Also educating church members on how to identify true and false prophets; observation of the moral life of the prophet, measuring prophecy in time with scriptural

injunctions and periodic review of the curriculum of the Bible schools on prophecy.¹ All these are relevant for the education of people in the church.

The beginning point should be on prophecy and its importance in the lives of the individual believers and the church as a whole. It is only a people who have firmly grasped the basics of prophecy that can identify truth from falsehood. It is knowing its value that can make people invest their precious time upon it. The criteria for identifying true prophecy should be clearly spelt out. Agreeing with Oyedepo, Philip Akinbobola identifies three ways of doing this namely: interpreting a particular prophecy by the teaching of the scriptures which has to be directly congruent, the witness of the Holy Spirit authenticating the prophecy and the collective judgement of the church². This three-way test will continue to be relevant until the final prophecy of the church the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is fulfilled.

It is the opinion of this writer also, that this teaching should involve the leaders of most of the major denominations. It is believed that if this is done, it will break the barrier of denominationalism and enhances, the understanding of the fundamental Biblical teachings on prophecy. This will reduce to a great extent the misuse and abuse of prophecy in the church.

It is important to emphasise that the education of the church members on church growth should of necessity include the role of prophecy along this line.

1. David Oyedepo, "Prophecy in the Chistendom" Tribune on Saturday (Ibadan), 26 June, 1999, p. 22.

2. Philip Sunday Akinbobola, "Biblical prophecy as the Right Response to the Contemporary Prophetic Movement with Special Reference to the Practice in some Aladura Churches in Nigeria" (BTh Essay, Ogbomoso: Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990), pp. 35-40.

