CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS: ANAMBRA STATE EXPERIENCE

Benjamin Chukwunonso Nwokocha

Abstract
The Church and state are expected to work together for the maximum benefit of the masses irrespective of diverse religious affiliations. The researcher have observed, however, that the two institutions seem not to work together in Anambra State. The two institutions seems to be divided owing to the culture of unhealthy rivalry among different religious groups and churches in the state. Based on the religious differences the church and political leadership of the state could not conveniently partner together as two sides of the same coin. This as a matter of fact has hindered the corporation that should have existed between the church and state leadership. To execute this research, the researcher employed the use of primary and secondary sources in gathering data. The primary sources involves interviews and direct personal observations while the secondary sources investigated the views of various scholars, which are gathered fromwritten documents like books, journals and other literary documents. This study attempted to proffer some workable solutions on how to bridge the gap that have long existed between the church and the state. The paper recommends that it is necessary that the church and the political leadership in Anambra State will work together as two sides of the same coin (that is, working together as two distinct social institutions) in alleviating the plights of the citizens especially among the youths. With this in place there will be a remarkable progress in overall developments of the state.
Keywords:

Introduction

It is an obvious fact that the government efforts alone cannot suffice to address all the problems in the society. Anambra like every other Nigerian states can thrive well with the corporation of the church. Anambra State is comprised of many Christian denominations with dominant ones being Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. Following the dominance of Christianity in the State, with its attendant rivalry and unhealthy competitions amongst its various groups and denominations; it appears the Christian religion is yet o contribute enough towards tackling social problems in the public space (Nwokocha, 2022). It is estimated that the Christians constitute over a half of the total population of Anambra state (Osondu, 2018). Despite this pool of active Christian faithful, much has not been achieved by way of channeling their pious Christian values in correcting some anomalies and bad conducts in the political circle. The church is also expected to partner with the government in the economic emancipation of the poor masses in the state.There is a recorded massive rural-urban drift, especially amongst the youth, who feel that they can make it better,

economically in the metropolitan areas of the country(Echebiri, 2005). In consequence, the unemployed simply have to fend for themselves and grapple with this new phenomenon to create jobs independently. The thrust of this research is how the church can form an alliance with the government of Anambra state in affecting the lives of the general public.

The inability of the Anambra state government to effectively partner with the church in harnessing the potentials of its citizens and link them to the real sector has continued to foster poverty and undermine the potentials of economic growth. Thus, to conveniently achieve an overall development in Anambra state, there is a growing need for partnership of the church and state. Such partnership can generate employment and provide social and financial security for the people. The partnership will thereby address some of the socio-psychological and socio-cultural problems and anti-social delinquency that are prevalent in the society. In view of this fact, Ononogbu (2006) observes that government efforts alone cannot suffice to address all the problems in the society; hence, this research solicits for the all hands-on-deck approach. This approach entails that the church and the state should contribute towards tackling social problems in the public space. It also implies that if a comprehensive front is adopted to address social problems, there will be a higher degree of success. This study, however, builds upon a systematic and vigorous social theology that the church and government can partner to develop a biblically authentic and culturally relevant society.

The Church and the Affairs of the State

One other major reason for the church/state partnership is to fight poverty and insecurity. In the recently released report by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS,2019), the south-east states performed badly and below expectation. While Ebonyi was the worst in the south-east with 80% of her citizens being described as poor, Enugu took the second position with about 60% poverty level. Following was Abia state that recorded 31%, then Imo 29% while Anambra scored 15%. On the average, the poverty level in the south-east is about 43% which means that about 43 percent of south eastern citizens of Nigeria are classified as poor. With a below per capital annual expenditure of about 137,430 naira as the baseline for being poor using a population estimate of 50 million means that about 21.5 million south-easterners are unable to afford and spend about 11,000 naira per person every month. Of the ten states with the least poverty level, only Anambra made it at 8th position. The big question would then be, where is the branded entrepreneurship skills of the Igbo people? Unfortunately, this precious attribute of the Igbo people seems to have been replaced with church business which has not favored the people. Again, intensifying the poverty crisis with the unprecedented level of insecurity which the governors of the south-east have through their clumsy actions and inactions allowed have escalated and heightened the crime rate and state of insecurity in the south-east and Anambra state in particular.

However, a key question would be on what has been the impact of the economic development agendas in those states. Was reducing the level of poverty in their respective states ever considered an important governance and performance measurement variable? With the terrifying level of insecurity, where did all the billions of security votes that the governors collect every month go to? Furthermore, with the Enugu's own more particularly sad with their legacy as the capital of former Eastern region, it is difficult to understand how about 60 percent of her citizens are still below the poverty line following the gross underdevelopment of the state. Meanwhile, it is a public knowledge that the closeness of south east states, there is no reason why a detailed and robust regional economic development plans should not be developed and effectively executed. With the nearness of the states, there is no reason any of the South East states should record a poverty rate of more than five percent if effective and visionary leadership is utilized to exploit and manage the abundant resources the region is endowed with. For instance, given the fertile and comparative advantage in some economic trees like cashew, coconut, palm trees, avocado pears, and bitter kola, south east can easily generate annual revenue of over 10 trillion naira. With an annual revenue of about 25,000 naira each, coconut trees or even any of the above economic trees, the south east can generate an annual revenue of 6 trillion naira if they can agree and just plant 50 million trees per state.

The essence of the above illustrations is to show the lack of strategic thinking and long-term vision that the south-eastern people of Nigeria have not been able to harness for their financial growth and development. It is, however, the duty of the church as the conscience of the people to facilitate this strategic thinking within the political space. They should not fold their hands and watch the God-given natural resources waste without harnessing them for the overall development of the state. The government alone cannot do it without the support of the church. The argument however, is that there could be a place where the church should help the government to better the lives of the people. The problem of the Igbo people is more physical than spiritual. With a good synergy and a strategic think-thank, the true entrepreneurial spirit of Ndigbo will be unleashed to turn south east to the true Dubai of Africa(Ngwu,2019). With this in mind, this study insists that a committed partnership between the church and the state is the best approach to solving most of the problems of governance. This is because of the fact that the church remains the conscience of the people and the hope of the common man (Nwokedi, 2017).

Setbacks to Harmonious Relationship between the Church and Anambra State Government

Certain reasons have restrained the supposed relationship between the church and Anambra state government. One of them is continued influence of religious politics in the government of Anambra State. This has enormous consequences ranging from religious intolerant, religious discriminations, and fanaticism. Considering the rate at which religion interferes in the political matters of the State, Odey(2013) remarked that "if religious politics should cease from Anambra State, the State would be one of the best in Nigeria"(p.5). Odey(2013) further maintained that if religious politics

continues to be tolerated in the State, the dreams of many would be shattered. He wondered why the Anglicans and Roman Catholics should continue to struggle for the control of the political system of Anambra State and when any of the churches clinches to power, the interests of other churches would never be catered for. It then becomes the survival of the fittest, a situation whereby no one would allow another to triumph . This destroys church unity and political governance. Almost all the governors that ruled in the State struggled with this politico-religious dilemma in their quest for public support. Some of them have bowed to the pressure of their churches to deliver dividends of democracy, employment and political appointments based on religious reasons. This however, have resulted to unhealthy competitions and aggressive proselytism in the State.

The moral and ethical implications of this is condemnable. With this type or religious war in the State, it will be difficult to have a meaningful dialogue between the Catholics, Protestants, and other religious groups in the State. It will also be difficult to achieve a meaningful and adequate progress in the State. The most annoying consequences of this politico-religious malady is that the tyrant leaders would be promoted in the State and the people that are governed by those corrupt leaders would be denied of their rights as the citizens of the State. The people will also look down on religion as the guardian of morality due to the way its leaders abuse the privilege of their positions as the leaders of religions. At the same time, their religious leaders would keep protecting their interests by presenting their good pictures to the public. Instead of openly condemning their evil deeds would rather assist them to succeed politically because of their selfish interests. When the church leaders who are meant to be the mouthpiece of the people are abusing their honour and privilege by taking side in political matters either overtly or covertly, this would always have an adverse effect on the church. Anetoh(2004) observed this fact as he reported that: "Ngige disappointed a bishop who came with five names for political appointments, the governor nearly asked the bishop out of his office"(p.8). Against this backdrop, one wonders the motive behind the action of the bishop. This shows that level of moral decadency amongst the supposed church leaders today. If these church leaders continues to meddle in the political matters of the State, they will in no small measure belittle their prestige and honour.

Since religion serve as the conscience of the people, preachers of these religions ought not engage in political fraud for it will stain their image and personality and also bring insult to the church that the people might cease to see and appreciate the taste of religion. What concerns the people should equally be the concern of the church. Odey(2013)reiterated that a religion which is only concerned with the salvation of souls but not interested with what affects the people in their day to day endeavours is a useless religion. The life of the people will not be balanced if only their spiritual lives were attended to. It could be in this light that Okwueze (2018) stated that the church must be in politics but not of politics. If that is the case, the irregularities that characterize the Anambra State polity will be drastically reduced. The argument of

this study is not that the church should shy away from the political matters of the State, it is their duty to prayerfully direct and correct the erring ones as regards to political affairs. According to Echma(2016), God's intention for delivering His people was both socio-political and religio-political. In Lk. 4:18, Jesus declared that His mission is to set the captives free, recover sight to the blind and set a liberty those that were oppressed. If Christ could carry out such a mission, the church should equally do same. The arguments of the study however, is to address the areas the church is digressing in achieving the singular purpose of serving as the mouthpiece of the human society. When church leaders indulge in sorts of political corruptions, oppressions becomes the other of the day. When the church leaders are rightly representing the masses in politics, they can correct some of the anomalies found among the political leaders .

Areas the Church and the State Can Partner for the Overall Good of Citizens

The Bible encourages Christians to work hand in hand with the constituted authorities. Thus, there is the need for the church to be diligent in encouraging consciousness on the part of the government. One of the outstanding areas that requires a collective efforts from the church and the government to jointly insert itself as formidable social actors with enormous responsibility in charting a new course is the Nigerian/Igbo youths. Kalu (2004) and Ononogbu (2008) have both pointed out the relevance of joint efforts in the context of bringing about social change in the society. With particular reference to the youth, Okwueze (1998) observes that the first form of wisdom literature consists of practical advice to young people on how they may obtain a successful and good life. Hence, the church has a basis for working with young people and impacting them positively. This includes the challenge of building a future where poverty and despair for the majority of the youth population are productive and resourceful. A situation where the youths would apply their resources (ideas and wealth) to produce utility and satisfy human want. The creation of utility necessitates profit to accumulate capital and to make a business productive enough to provide jobs. Thus, the entrepreneur engages in the vocation of Christian faith and church to be a more faithful disciple as an entrepreneur.

In view of this, there is a compelling need to develop a model entrepreneurial and resourceful human elements to tackle the numerous financial challenges facing the people. In the land of plenty, in the land blessed with enormous human and material resources, the youth should not be faced with the challenge of poverty in the land of plenty. In order to achieve the targets that have been set out in this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

(a) Being that access to finance is key to the success of any entrepreneurial venture, the church and the government should collaborate to prod the on-going reforms in the banking sector. This includes the recapitalization of commercial banks and the formation of micro-credit finance banks that are run by individuals and private organizations to replace community banks that were not functional. This should be done with the aim of reducing the bottlenecks involved in obtaining soft loans for young entrepreneurs who do not generally

have the required collateral to be credit worthy to banks who only want to make profits from their investments.

(b) Another important area where the church can influence government policy so that it can be properly streamlined for efficiency in the process of registering a business or enterprise with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in Nigeria. Currently, the process involved appear simple but for grassroots like in the Local Government Headquarters where many of these young business entrepreneurs live and operate. For them, going to the state capitals where the CAC offices are located are expensive and time consuming. The church can assist the youths in getting through this simple but apparently frightening process by helping to reduce the process and bringing the CAC offices closer to the people. Hence, many young people run business without registering them officially. If the church steps in to support them through this process, then many more people can delve into the arena of business.

(c) Currently, the electric power system in Nigeria is nothing to write home about and this is a very crucial factor for young entrepreneurs who are often unable to procure and maintain generating sets from the onset of their business life. Thus, it is recommended that the church should also try to influence government policy in this area by providing soft loans to young entrepreneurs and small scale businesses. This will ensure that the environment will be conducive for young people to nurture and pursue their business ideas.

Conclusion

Through the course of the research, it was discovered that government's policies and projects have not really empowered the youth and given them substantial means and opportunities to participate constructively in the economy. Although, the study did not specifically deal with the reasons behind this development, it is apparent that government's economic reforms did not open up the national economy such that they did not have any direct bearing on the situation of the youth in Nigeria. More so, over the years, most of the national social structures recorded some level of growth but collapsed at the long run while the youth population has continued to grow. Thus, unless something is done to enable young people become fully integrated into the mainstream of the society, they will continue to be a social burden on the nation. On the strength of these conclusions given under the conditions under which the average youth struggles to find his feet economically, the study pointed out that one viable option towards empowering the youths is for both the church and the government to step into the terrain and proffer valid support and skills acquisition/entrepreneurship training and packages to young people.

Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chukwunonso Nwokocha
Department of Religion and Human Relations,
Faculty of Arts,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
Email: bc.nwokocha@unizik.edu.ng, nwokochabenjamin@gmail.com

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