

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH, LAW AND POLITY

By Chief Wole Olanipekun

It is my firm belief that as the world turns and as time burns, human beings, whether individually or collectively, as well as their actions and inactions, are a derivative of something greater than themselves; an offshoot of a divine design; a function of some providential permutation. To this effect, I am always reluctant to reduce events that take place as mere happenstances. Two of such events unravelled October and November, 2018, respectively. By a letter dated 8th November, 2018, issued under the auspices of the Young Men Christian League of the Christ Apostolic Church, Ebute-Metta, Lagos, and signed by Elders Adekunle Oyesanya, SAN and R. Rosiji, Esq., I was invited to be the Guest Lecturer at the 20th Edition of the S.A Odunaiya Annual Memorial Lecture. I must confess that prior to this, Elder Adekunle Oyesanya, SAN, had called me on the telephone and intimated me of not only the event, but also the role I was expected to play. These two events, to my mind, are not coincidences. They both constitute what I have previously hinted at, to wit, a seraphic scheme in a larger ecclesiastic expression. Accordingly, I know that I am not here by chance. Seised of this belief, it is my greatest privilege, as well as pleasure, to stand here before you all this evening as today's Guest Lecturer. In furtherance of my belief, I am convinced that this very moment has been ordained from time immemorial, and that by being here, we are only fulfilling God's command.

Today's Lecture, as well as the nineteen previous editions, form part of an uninterrupted continuum, nay, tradition of honorary staccatos by the vanguard of the Christ Apostolic Church, that is, the Young Men Christian League, in remembrance of an individual who, while on this mortal plane, dispatched his commission with great aplomb. Pastor S.A. Odunaiya, apart from being a distinguished Nigerian, was a Christian soldier who 'marched onward to war with the cross of Jesus going before him'. A visionary of note, he quickly realised that in the battle against the nether forces, a teeming army of young men ready to give their all for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, was instrumental to ultimate victory. It was in this light that he began to encourage brothers in Christ who, by virtue of their faith, shared a common lineage, and by extension, a common vision to cause the 'foundations of hell to quiver' by always giving praise to the Lord in thought, word and deed. His encouragement to young men took on an escalated hue, and this is what has now been formalised into the Young Men Christian League of the Christ Apostolic Church. Today's lecture, thus, emerges as a celebration of both the entity that was Pastor S.A. Odunaiya, as well as the principles of faith he stood for.

In the second paragraph of the letter of invitation, I was duly informed that today's Lecture is the twentieth episode since the series began in 1999, and that the previous nineteen Guest Lecturers included the likes of the current Vice-President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, GCON, SAN; our fathers in the Lord, the highly revered Cardinal Olubunmi Okojie and Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah; the well respected Hon. Justice Olayinka Ayoola, JSC; the legal icon and luminary, Chief Afe Babalola, CON, SAN; renowned activists and legal practitioners, including the late Dr. Tunji Braithwaite and Ebum Adegboruwa; ace journalist, Ray Ekpu; as well as the late Mrs. Oluremi Oyo and Professor Remi Sonaiya. The intellectual plumage of the afore-listed

assemblage speaks for itself and suffice to say, each and every one mentioned is a heavyweight in his or her chosen field of endeavour.

The letter also apprised me that I am being given the latitude to speak on a topic of my own choosing, but the League would like me to circumscribe same along with its theme which I now paraphrase, thus: “Contemporary Judicial And Socio-Political Issues In Nigeria – The Role Christians And The Christian Church In Nigeria Can Play To Assist The Development And Progress Of The Country”. In the foregoing effect, having thought long and hard over on what topic best ventilates the crux of the theme, I settled on the “The Relationship between the Church, the Law and the Polity”.

APPROACH TO THE LECTURE

In discussing the topic, I would like to state that the *modus operandi* of this lecture is by no means a *vox solo*, that is, a sole voice or monologue whereby I am simply informing you of my views, after which I would exchange pleasantries and then return to my office. I would prefer a situation where we all recognise that today’s Lecture is also a part of the Great Commission handed down by Jesus Christ Himself in Matthew 28: 18 – 20, when He said “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”. By our being here, we all have the responsibility to contribute to this discussion which seeks to examine the relationship between the Church, the law and the polity, both from the scriptural and ecclesiastical angle and from a contemporaneous point of view, situating our discourse on Nigeria. Having picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the Young Men Christian League, I crave the audience’s kind permission to begin our deliberations with a definition of the key terms that form the fulcrum of today’s discourse.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMSIn order to sieve out, extrapolate and project a concise mission statement from the topic of discussion, it is my opinion that we should first discover, discern and distinguish the key words that constitute the *exo-skeleton* of our discussion here today. In my opinion, this will further distil and strengthen our unravelling of the topic. It is apt to first define the three key words in this lecture – church, law and polity. Taking these terms by turn, Dictionary.com defines the Church as “1. a building for public Christian worship 2. public worship of God or a religious service in such a building 3. the whole body of Christian believers; Christendom.”¹ While this definition may be deemed simplistic and elementary in nature, Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology defines the Church in a different context, to wit, “the called out ones”.² Biblically, however, the Church is defined as “The Children of Israel”³ and “The body of Christ”⁴. Realistically and/or objectively, one cannot define the church solely within the context of the New Testament, without referencing the Old Testament. In general terms, the church connotes the House of God. No wonder, the Psalmist proclaims thus:⁵ “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord”. The House of the Lord being referred to by David was/is no other than the Temple or Synagogue of his days, which has now translated to the Church of God under the New Testament. We will expatiate on this anon.

In a paper I delivered on 6th December, 2018, at the University of Medical Sciences, Ondo Town, Ondo State, I submitted, in relation to the definition of law, as follows: “The word ‘law’,

being a common place word, might appear or sound simplistic to the ordinary mind, but this is not the case. Whether as a concept, an appellation or locution, ‘law’ has attracted (and it is still attracting) diverse and unrestricted definitions from various philosophers, legal potentates and scholars and, I dare say, it has not yet lent itself to a settled definition, more particularly so that the noble profession of law thrives on arguments – robust ones for that matter. There seems to me to be as many definitions of law as there are schools of jurisprudence; and these definitions vary from one school to the other, be it the natural law school, the positivist view of law, the socialist school, the realist school, etcetera. Adherents of the natural law school see law as a product of reason made for the common good of the community. To Thomas Aquinas, a leading proponent of the natural law club; law is “nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community and promulgated”.⁶ To the positivists, the law should be detached from moral or religious considerations. A leading figure in the positivist school was John Austin (1790 – 1859), who summarised law as “the command of the uncommanded commander”. The relevance of this definition will be expatiated upon anon.

According to the Bakers Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, the definition of the word law may be derived from “The Hebrew term ‘Tora’, which, when translated to English is ‘law’. Tora is used 220 times in the Old Testament and more specifically means ‘instruction.’⁷ One is not surprised by this Evangelical Dictionary definition because law itself originated from the Bible, starting from the Ten Commandments handed over to the Israelites by God through Moses.⁸ Moses’ successor in office and calling, Joshua, enthused, in relation to law, as follows: “This book of the law shalt not depart of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make they way prosperous and then thou shalt have good success”.

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the term ‘polity’ as “1. A politically organized unit, 2a. the form or constitution of a politically organized unit, 2b: the form of government of a religious denomination”⁹. The Collins English Dictionary defines the term as “1. a politically organized unit 2a. the form or constitution of a politically organized unit 2b. the form of government of a religious denomination”¹⁰, whilst the English Oxford Living Dictionary defines it as “An organized society; a state as a political entity”.¹¹ In practical terms, the polity, within the context of this lecture, is precisely and specifically, Nigeria. Let me reiterate the point that the polity, within the context of this lecture, is the Nigerian State.

One may ask whether there is any nexus, directly or remotely, between the Church, the law and the polity, particularly taking our bearing, either from the above definitions or historical events since the creation of man. My summation is that the three institutions are interrelated and also co-exist to strengthen one another. The law is the foundation of every society or polity; an instrument of cohesion and orderliness; it is only through the law that good governance can emerge. The Church itself is regulated by law, whether ecclesiastical laws or the general laws governing the society. The origin of law, as stated earlier, is from God Himself.

Reference has earlier been made to the positivist school of jurisprudence, which summarised law as the “command of the uncommanded commander”. To my mind, the uncommanded commander is the Almighty God, the uncreated creator who created man in his own image.¹² A closer look at Exodus 20 will reveal and bring into the fore the ‘command’ nature of law, as

vividly brought out in verses three, four, five, seven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, each of which start with “Thou shall not...”. The word ‘shall’ is a command, leaving no room for discretion. In modern jurisprudence, the word ‘shall’, whenever used in any statute or legislation has always been interpreted to command a compulsion of what the legislature wants to be done. In *Ogidi v. The State* (2005) 5 NWLR (Pt. 918) 286, the Supreme Court held thus: “The use of the word shall in relevant provisions of the law, etc., is to bring to the fore the crystallisation of judicial authorities that when the legislature or any document at all employs or uses the word shall, it connotes only one thing, without any discretion, that is, what is to be done or performed is mandatory, peremptory and compulsory”

Within Psalm 119 alone, the Psalmist refers to law 25 times, while precepts is mentioned 21 times and statute is referenced 23 times. Law, statutes and precepts are also interchangeably employed, that in Psalm 119 alone, law is referred to 69 times. This is to demonstrate the underlying position of law in the society, as well as the relationship between the law given by God and that of man. In Nigeria, the grundnorm is the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, (as amended) (Constitution), although imposed on us by the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The preamble to the Constitution reads thus: “We the people of the Federal republic of Nigeria ... DO HEREBY MAKE AND GIVE TO OURSELVES the following Constitution:”. Section 1(1) of the Constitution states thus: “This Constitution is supreme and its provisions shall have binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. By sections 4, 5 and 6, legislative, executive and judicial powers are donated to the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, respectively. All political and executive offices, as well as institutions and bodies, both at State and Federal levels, are thereafter created by the Constitution. The essence of these references is to further demonstrate the fact that the Nigerian State itself is founded on law, while law was first given by God.

Being done with these preliminaries, permit me to launch into the second limb of this presentation, and since this is primarily a church programme, it is only logical that I proceed with the historical background of the Church.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Many passages in the Bible predict the beginning of the Church as we have it today. In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar needed an interpretation to a dream he had and to this effect, issued a Royal Proclamation. Under the anointing of God, Daniel was able to interpret the King’s dream, thus: “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”¹³ Many a scholar has attributed the body of Christ, as we know it, to the fulfilment of Daniel’s interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.¹⁴ In the Book of Matthew,¹⁵ John the Baptist taught that this kingdom was “at hand”. More to the point, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in Matthew 16:18 – 19, proclaimed thus: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give

you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

It is poignant, at this stage, to take note of the futuristic language deployed in the above passages. Accordingly, it is my submission that while the prognostic tenor of Jesus’ proclamation regarding His church might seem to exclude ‘Temples’ and ‘Synagogues’ which were already in existence, Jesus Himself had earlier proclaimed that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it!¹⁶ This is evidenced by the fact that Jesus was already found in the temple at the age of 12,¹⁷ and later on, chased out the traders who had turned His Father’s house into a “den of robbers”.¹⁸ In the Book of Luke, it is stated thus: “He went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath Day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the Book of the Prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the Book, He found the place where it was written “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”.

In 2 Chronicles 7:1, it is written that after Solomon’s prayers, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offerings and sacrifices he offered; and in verse 2, it is stated thus “And the Priests could not enter into the House of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord’s House.” The point being made is that whether we talk of the Synagogue, the Temple or the Church, each of them is the Lord’s House.

Let me explain further. In the Book of Malachi, God first complained that He was robbed by the whole nation, and, thereafter, commanded that “Bring ye all the tithes into the store house, that there may be meat in mine House, prove me now herewith, sayeth the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”.¹⁹ In the next verse, God promised to rebuke the devourer for the sakes of those who brought/bring their tithes into the store house. The store – house being referred to in Malachi is the Temple and we all aware that the modern church evokes this portion of the Bible in its ceaseless campaign for payment of tithes by members. Also, in the 2 Chronicles chapters 3, 4 and 5, it is recorded that king Solomon invested so much materials and resources into the building of the House of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto his father, David.

It can safely be submitted that the tradition of consecration and anointing of Priests in the Church today started from Leviticus 8:8, where Aaron was first consecrated and anointed by Moses on the instruction of God. The robes being adorned by a good number of priests all over the world today are also in the similitude of the robes of Aaron as described in the same Book of Leviticus. Let us also remind ourselves that the biblical Book of Leviticus, derived from the name Levites, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, who God specifically called out for the duty of priesthood.

Be that as it may, I am not unaware of the futuristic tense employed by Jesus in Mathew 16, thus: “... on this rock I will build my church”. I am also not unfamiliar with such futuristic tenses employed in several passages of the New Testament. These tenses deployed in reference to the Church take on a current and present inclination. In support of this contention, I refer to the first Epistle of St Paul to Timothy, particularly chapter 3:15, where Apostle Paul proclaimed thus:

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”

Also, in St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians,²⁰ he authoritatively proclaimed, regarding the supremacy of God, that: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

My position is that while the House of the Lord, interchangeably referred to the Synagogue or Temple in the Old Testament was no doubt in existence thousands of years before Christ came in human flesh, the Church of God or the body of Christ which we now have today, as a successor to either the Temple or Synagogue of old, had its establishment foretold, also in the Old Testament. Thus, its birth was neither accidental nor happenstance. No wonder Apostle Peter, while delivering the first sermon or homily on the Day of Pentecost, declared thus: “But this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel.. and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh... And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour or smoke... ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; ... whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be held of it. For David speaketh concerning him I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand that I should not be moved... therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit in His throne; He seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption”.

However, there is a marked difference between the Church, as we have it today, and the temple or Synagogue as it existed in the Old Testament; and what makes the demarcation and distinction is the blood of the atonement, the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for mankind at the Cross of Calvary. To this extent, a remarkable change in the mode of worship occurred, more particularly so that God no longer expects any offering in terms of bulls, bullocks, fattened sheep, etc., from us, as the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed once and for all as an everlasting sacrifice and covenant. For example, in 2 Chronicles 7:5, it is written that King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep while dedicating the House of God. Today, every Christian has been set free and all he needs do is to partake in the Holy Eucharist as ordained by Christ Himself. Christian soldiers also need not march on to war carrying the Ark of God which only contained the two tablets which Moses put therein at Horeb, but plead the blood of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²¹ The Easter Anthem usually rendered in the Anglican Communion during Easter captures it all. The first two verses go thus:

“Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: so let us celebrate the feast. Not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness: but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Given the foregoing purposive background of the Church, it should come as no surprise to anyone that further to the emergence of the Church in the Book of Acts chapter 2, it has continuously grown, and it is still growing in leaps and bounds. Several reasons account for its

expansion, notable amongst which is that the Disciples and Apostles of Jesus embarked on the mandate of the Great Commission within and without the State of Israel. Whilst Peter ministered to the Jews in Palestine, Paul (a convert from Judaism) focused on evangelizing the Gentile world (non-Jews). Thomas headed to India, and Mark, to Egypt, etc. Paul's missionary journeys, coupled with his thirteen epistles, largely and substantially contributed to the growth of the Church as we have it today.²² The early church's survival of virulent persecution in the hands of Roman Emperors like Nero, Trajan, etc.,²³ was followed by the conversion of Constantine the Great who issued the Edict of Liberation (Edictum Mediolanense) in Milan in 313 AD, liberating Christians and recognizing Christianity as a free religion (religio licita).

Europe eventually leveraged on the fundamental legal status accorded the Christian faith, and this led to the frontiers of Christianity being increasingly expanded. As a result of the foregoing, churches with nationalistic flavours such as the German Lutheran Church and the Church of England (Anglican Church) emerged²⁴. The Gregorian Calendar, which was introduced in Europe by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, has guided the global dating system till date. Time and history are determined by the time of Jesus Christ – BC (Before Christ) and AD (After Christ)²⁵. Interestingly, the eschatological and apocalyptic contents of the Bible continue to explain and shape developments in world activities. Emergence of entire nations are traceable to biblical genealogies and the future of nations are determined by biblical prophecies.

MENTION OF A FEW COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD WHOSE CONSTITUTIONS ARE GROUNDED ON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

It suffices to state at this juncture that the preamble to any Constitution embodies the very essence of the constitution. The preamble captures the aims qua objectives, which informed the formulation of the constitution, and in quiddity, provides the guideline to the constitution. What this connotes is that the drafters of most of the constitutions fashioned the provisions of their respective constitutions after the tenets/principles of the Bible qua Christian faith. The reference to God in several preambles to different constitutions of the world is not surprising, as Christianity is regarded as the world's largest religion. The Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs puts Christian demographics as follows: "Christianity is the world's largest religion, comprising a third of the global population with some 2.3 billion adherents. It is the predominant religion in Europe, the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Australia. While the rise of secularism in recent decades has led to a drop in Christian numbers in the developed world, particularly Europe, growth in the developing world has outweighed these losses. Roman Catholics account for over half of all Christians worldwide, and the Roman Catholic Church is the dominant form of Christianity in Latin America, Western and Central Europe, and most of Central Africa. It is also the majority religion in the Philippines. Protestantism has about 600 million believers and is the main branch of Christianity in northern Europe, North America, and southern Africa. Eastern Orthodoxy is practiced by around 300 million adherents, dominating the religious landscape of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Russia." It is apposite, at this point, to reel out some of the constitutions of some countries of the world to buttress this truism.

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania states thus:

"We, the people of Albania, proud and aware of our history, with responsibility for the future, and with FAITH IN GOD and/or other universal values, with determination to build a social and democratic state based on the rule of law, and to guarantee the fundamental human rights and

freedoms,... with a deep conviction that justice, peace and harmony and cooperation among nations are among the highest values of humanity, we establish this Constitution...”

The preamble to the Constitution of Argentina provides as follows: “We the representatives of the Argentine nation gathered in General Constituent Assembly by the will and election of the Provinces which compose it, in fulfilment of pre-existing pacts, in order to form a national union...invoking the PROTECTION OF GOD, SOURCE OF ALL REASON AND JUSTICE: do ordain, decree, and establish this Constitution for the Argentine Nation.”

As for the people of Australia, their Constitution recognises the ROMAN CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC RELIGION. Section 2 of their Constitution provides as follows: “The Federal Government supports the ROMAN CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC RELIGION”

The founding fathers of the United States of America went out of their way to acknowledge God in the Declaration of Independence:²⁶

“The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God...”

“All Men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...”

“Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions...”

“With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence...”

The motto of the United States of America is ‘In God We Trust’; while all presidents of the country have always sworn on the Holy Bible at inauguration. Again, the essence of the foregoing references is to demonstrate how the Christian faith or the Church and/or the Bible influenced and still influence both the foundation and structure of the States, as well as their respective constitutions and laws.

EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

Western missionaries took up the evangelist mandate of Jesus Christ and, taking advantage of the British colonial domination of Africa, brought the Gospel to parts of Africa and other parts of the world. Missionary societies like the London Missionary Society were formed to carry out the propagation of the Gospel. The London Missionary Society was initially formed to train and send missionaries to colonies like Nigeria. This metamorphosed into the Church Missionary Society (CMS), which was founded at Aldersgate Street, London, on 12th April, 1799. Most of the founders were members of the Clapham Sect, a group of activist evangelical Christians. They included Henry Thornton MP and William Wilberforce MP, the founders of CMS, who were committed to three great enterprises: abolition of the slave trade, social reform at home and world evangelisation.²⁷ Their work was complemented by the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG), enabling the Gospel to arrive at India, Ghana, etc.²⁸

Debates abound as to whether the motives, modus operandi and effects of the missionary endeavours in Africa have been successful. It has been noted that although the missionaries may not have set out to change the world (but just to preach the gospel), in reality, they eventually changed the course of the societies of the world. Starting from the Apostles’ evangelization of Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Christianity became rooted in most parts of the world. This was aided by Martin Luther’s reformation of the errors and excesses of the Roman Catholic

Church, which reformative exercise kick-started the Enlightenment, Renaissance and Industrial Revolutions in Europe and America.²⁹

ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

Christianity was first introduced into Nigeria between 1472 and 1621 when the Kings of Portugal launched pioneering Christian missions to Benin and Warri Kingdoms, respectively.³⁰ Later, the CMS, in 1841 sent a pilot missionary band to explore the River Niger and its possibilities for missions. This team was led by Rev. J.F. Schon but among it was Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who was later to become the first Black Bishop to be consecrated at Canterbury Cathedral in July, 1864.³¹ It was he who later led the translation of the Bible from English Language to Yoruba and Nupe Languages, and also contributed in no small measure to the translation to Ibo Language. The formal arrival of missionaries to Nigerian shores was led by the Black Methodist Missionary, Thomas Birch Freeman, who arrived Badagry from Freetown, Sierra Leone, in September, 1842. This was followed closely by Rev. Henry Townsend of the CMS in December, 1842. Both men celebrated the first Christmas under an Agia Tree in Badagry that year. Due to hostilities to missionaries by the indigenous and pagan people of Badagry, the missionaries relocated to Abeokuta in 1845,³² where the Anglican Mission took off effectively. However, the missions had planted seeds in Badagry and Lokoja where they had established schools and agricultural farms. The first storey building in Nigeria, built in 1845 by Rev. C.A. Gollmer and it still stands at Badagry in testimony of the earliest Anglican endeavour in Nigeria.³³ Other missions followed: Scottish Presbyterian (1842), Southern Baptist Mission (1850), Roman Catholic Mission (1861), Sudan Interior Mission (1893), United Missionary Society (1915), Seventh day Adventist (1914), Qua Iboe Church (1932), etc.

The methodology the missionaries deployed in proliferating their message included proclamation of the Gospel to the natives, building churches in every community as centres of worship following the English model, establishment of schools, dispensaries (later hospitals), leprosaria, orphanages, skills acquisition centres to produce in African communities, etc. The promoters of this intervention included William Wilberforce, who spearheaded the abolition of Slave Trade, and Mary Slessor, who fought successfully against the cultural practice of killing twins in the Calabar area, etc.³⁴ The educational system during the missionary era produced the elites who developed Nigeria and other parts of Christian Africa in various professions. Missionary activities were often mixed with colonialist activities, both of which, admittedly transformed the general landscape of Africa.

So far, we have been able to trace the biblical roots of the Church's establishment. Not only that, we have also been able to outline the tedious teething process Christianity had to undergo before it could eventually berth in Nigeria. The point must be made, and emphatically so as well, that the berth of Christianity in Nigeria brought about civilisation in diverse forms and actually paved the way for the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914. Be it also noted that the name Nigeria, though coined from River Niger, was not given to Nigeria by Nigerians, but was suggested to Lord Lugard by his mistress, Lady Flora Shaw.³⁵ In other words, Christianity created the platform for the Nigerian State; and properly situated on the flip side, had there not been the Church or had the Church not been established in Nigeria, there would not have been any Nigerian country as we have it today.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND THE LAW

Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists to grace the earth, situates Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden approximately 4000 years before the birth of Christ.³⁶ Others have postulated that Abraham was called by God at approximately 2100 Before Christ (BC); the Ten Commandments were given to Moses about 1445 BC; Samson became a Judge at about 1090 BC; David became King of Israel around 1005 BC; Prophet Elijah began his ministry about 870 BC; the Temple of God was destroyed by the Babylonians around 586 BC; and that sometime around 37 BC, Herod was made King of Judea.³⁷ By this timeline, Adam and Eve, the primogenitors of the human race, had taken up residence in the Garden of Eden about 4000 years before the birth of Christ.

Importantly, the Bible tells us that Adam lived for 930 years.³⁸ Whether these 930 years already started counting before the forbidden fruit was consumed is not clear, but what is embedded in the annals of time for all eternity is that when the fruit was consumed, God Himself descended in order to give both Adam and Eve a fair hearing;³⁹ He asked “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” This is the first recorded incidence of the pillar of fair hearing known in jurisprudential circles as *audi alteram partem* – hear the other side.⁴⁰ In *R. v. Cambridge*,⁴¹ Fortesque J., relied on the precedent set by God Himself, when he held, regarding a matter before him, that: “I remember to have heard it observed by a very learned man upon such an occasion, that even God himself did not pass sentence upon Adam (and Eve) before (they) were called upon to make (their) defence. Adam, says God, where are thou? Has thou eaten of the tree that thou should not eat? And the same question was put to eve also.” See also *Fawehinmi v. LPDC*,⁴² where Kayode Eso, JSC, enthused as follows: “Even God Himself did not pass sentence upon Adam before he was called upon to make his defence”

It is illuminating to note that even though God is omniscient and omnipresent, He did not hesitate in providing Adam and Eve an opportunity to be heard before admonishing them and issuing punishment. Pertinent, as well, is the fact that clothed in His omniscience, the Almighty God descended into Eden in order to admonish Adam and Eve. This divine trait dots the entire spectrum of the Holy Writ, as God Himself can be seen at significant intervals issuing relevant reprimands either by Himself, or through his messengers on Earth. The Book of Exodus records how God, through the instrumentality of Moses, led the Israelites out of Egypt. Inherent in this story, however, is the triteness of God’s penchant for giving warnings/premonitions of impending crisis. In Exodus 7:2, the Lord said to Moses: “You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” Moses, did as commanded, but his warnings went unheeded and we all know how that ended. In the third month after the Israelites had left Egypt and were enroute the land promised to them by God, they settled at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive further instructions from God through Moses. It was whilst they were camped there that the Ten Commandments were handed down.⁴³ Of note, portions of the Commandments as handed down to Moses have now been codified and form an essential and intrinsic part of the constitutions of various countries of the world, in general, and enacted statutes in Nigeria, particularly.

The 4th Commandment, to the effect that “Thou shalt remember and keep the Sabbath Day holy” has, in legal parlance, assumed the status of *dies non-juridicus*, meaning that the Sabbath is a day

on which no legal proceedings may take place.⁴⁴ The 4th Commandment, which forbade the commission of murder as far back as almost 4000 years ago, has now been codified into Nigeria's body of statutes as expressed in section 319 of the Criminal Code Act. Ditto for the 8th Commandment, which prohibits stealing, which has also been reproduced in section 390 (6) of the criminal Code. The 9th Commandment, forbids giving false witness, and section 120 of the criminal Code has made an enactment in the same manner. The 10th Commandment precludes envy, and this has also been interpolated into section 383 of the Criminal Code and deemed to be conversion, a specie of stealing.

I have no doubt in my mind that various constitutions of the world, providing for the right of every man to fair hearing, which has now been described in jurisprudential circles as the inalienable right of man, is borrowed from the first court setting recorded in Genesis, where God, the omnipotent and all-knowing, sat as the Judge, with Adam, Eve and the Serpent in the dock as the accused persons. The scene and setting can never be impeached, and this has been captured by human Judges in the cases earlier cited. It is, therefore, no surprise, that like the constitutions of all civilised countries and climes in the modern world, the Nigerian Constitution, has made sufficient provisions for fair hearing in section 36 (6) and (12) of the Constitution, respectively, whether in civil or criminal matters.

I have made the case, in previous postulations of mine⁴⁵, that "... A close examination of God-given laws as recorded in the book of Exodus 18 will reveal that the very essence of those laws are focused at the attainment of social justice. In other words, the Creator of all creations set out His laws as an instrument of social engineering for the children of Israel. The nitty-gritty of the laws of God as expatiated in the fullest in the latter parts of the Book of Exodus and in substantial parts of the Book of Leviticus will convince any doubting Thomases that law was instituted by God as an instrument of social engineering. These laws deal with all subjects imaginable under the sun: Tort, Contract, Land, Matrimony, Commercial, Maritime etc. No wonder the entire Bible has been described in Joshua¹⁹ as the book of the law "which we should not allow out of our mouth, but to meditate therein day and night; that we may observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then shall our ways be prosperous and we shall have good success". To my mind, the natural law adherents, without admitting it as such, are otherwise saying that all laws are as established or given by the Creator. In a subtle way of indigenizing the natural law without actually linking it with the law of God, Professor A.A.A. Okunniga posits as follows:

"If ten men from different countries are put in different rooms and each is asked in the language he understands whether it is good to steal, majority would say no." "Thou shall not steal", it is certain or altogether elementary that the codification of the law against stealing is first found in the Bible. Ditto for the law against killing (Exodus 20:13), adultery (Exodus 20:14), and bearing of false witness (Exodus 20:16). Is it not natural that for any man born of woman to respect his father and mother, as enjoined in Exodus 20:12? Anyone who fails to do this is incurring the wrath of the heavens and earth on himself".

In a paper titled 'The Supreme Court vs. Ten Commandments', a fascinating treatise where the author digested and dissected the activities and decisions of the USA Supreme Courts viz a viz the biblical Ten Commandments, it has been submitted as follows:

“If one were to ask where the American concepts of right and wrong came from, the most common answer would undoubtedly be the Bible. If you pressed for more specifics, the answer in most instances would be the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. Ask any historian to name the source of the legal concepts underlying the criminal laws of Western civilization, and a substantial majority would say either the Law of Moses or the Ten Commandments. The Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, William Rehnquist, declared that “The secular application of the Ten Commandments is clearly seen in its adoption as the fundamental legal code of Western Civilization and the Common Law of the United States”.

Americans regard murder as heinous. They debate motives for killing, issues of premeditation, and forensic evidence that either points to guilt or innocence. Then, with eyes agog, they stare for hours at the legal manoeuvrings in the murder trials like those of O. J. Simpsons and Scott Petersons, and they all become a great jury, convicting or acquitting as it please them. Again, Americans are shown endless episodes of television shows like Law and Order, in which the hard-charging prosecuting attorney talks each week about making a deal with the accused for “man one” or “man two” (for first- or second-degree manslaughter). Most civilized people have innate respect for human life, but where do we get our notions that killing another human being is wrong? The answer is very simple: from the Sixth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13 KJV).⁴⁶

Again, these profound postulations bear eloquent testimony of the influence of the Bible and the laws of God on the laws of nations as well as their application through judicial decisions. They further demonstrate the relationship and interface between the Church and the polity

THE BIBLE, SOME PROPHETS OF OLD AND KINGS

As we proceed from the Book of Exodus to the other Books in the Bible, a noticeable trend evinces itself whereby, now made aware of the Lord’s Commandments, possible breaches of same are anticipated, prophesied and warned against by the prophets of God. In making this submission, I take my bearing from Saul, who was the first King of Israel. The Lord God had handed ‘instructions’ vide Samuel the Prophet for King Saul to raise the banner of war against the Amalekites in retribution for their obstruction of the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt. In executing this ‘instruction’, Saul exercised his discretion and varied the ‘instruction’ of God by keeping the best of the Amalekite flock, as well as sparing the life of the Amalekite King. The Lord spoke to Samuel and sent him to Saul, thus:⁴⁷
“Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.”
“Tell me,” Saul replied.

Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?”
“But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle

from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”

Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord.”² But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!”

After Saul, came King David, the man after God’s own heart. However, when David coveted Uriah the Hittite’s wife and got her with child, proceeding therefrom to post him to the battle front so that he could be killed, the Lord sent Prophet Nathan to King David, with the following message. “Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’”

As between Prophet Elijah and King Ahab of Israel, it is on record that King Ahab did more evil in the sight of the Lord than all the Kings before him⁴⁸ as he and Canaanite wife, Jezebel, combined to inaugurate and commission the worship of the Canaanite god, baal, over the God of Israel. Correspondingly, Ahab’s Kingdom, as well as his time as King, was one that was characterised by radical apostasy. Furious at the insubordination, God raised up Elijah to confront Ahab and he quickly becomes Ahab’s greatest nemesis, and we see why in 1 Kings 18, with the famous story of Elijah challenging 450 prophets of baal to see whose God was the best. He invites the people to give allegiance to the true God, being the God who answers by fire. In a dramatic demonstration of power, God consumes Elijah’s sacrifice with fire from heaven, while completely embarrassing the prophets of baal. The people fell on their faces and declared that Yahweh is the one true God. After this, Elijah confronts Ahab’s injustice and announces the downfall of his House.⁴⁹ Ahab dies and his house is left desolate when the northern tribes are later taken into exile.⁵⁰ In his confrontations with Ahab, it’s clear that Elijah is a prophet of the true God and the word of the Lord is powerfully at work in him. Elijah, notably, ascended to heaven on a chariot of fire and was succeeded by Elisha, his mentee and disciple. Thus, the centrality of the prophetic word continues with Elisha, and this is captured in a large textual stretch covering fourteen chapters (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 9).

This system of prophetic middlemen became the norm and this was further characterised by the divine interventions carried out by Prophet Isaiah during the reign of King Hezekiah; and Prophet Huldah, during the reign of King Josiah. If the relationships between the prophets of God and the Kings are interpreted under the scope of modern realities, it may be safely argued that God, through the prophets acted to check and balance the regimes of the individual Kings, especially when they went astray. The Bible itself says that: “For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King”

This means that the Holy Writ situates the three arms of government in the Lord. This notwithstanding, the same Lord still sent the prophets of old to the Kings, who, on Earth, as at then, combined executive, legislative and judicial positions together. Each of Kings Saul, David and Ahab was an executive King, that is, the Head of State, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Israel, the Chief Justice of the State, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. As for King David, he was even a prophet, and a man after God’s heart. Yet, Prophets Samuel, Nathan and Elijah were not scared or afraid of going to them, under the authority of the Almighty God, to say that “Thus sayeth the Lord...”.

Reading through Acts of the Apostles, from chapter 21 through to 27, one would see the excruciating trial of Paul the Apostle and how he faced his tormentors and traducers, whether the Jews and Roman Governors, Kings and Emperors, with bravery and equanimity. In Acts 22, he preached about Christ who was crucified and risen, as the Lord of all. In Acts 23:2, Ananias, the High Priest of Judaism, commanded Paul to be smitten on the mouth; but it is recorded in verse 3, thus “Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law and commandest me to be smitten contrary the law”. In Acts 24, Paul appeared before Governor Felix and his wife, Drusillia, but refused to give Felix money (bribe), despite Felix’ expectation. In chapter 25, he stoically appeared before Festus, but this time around, elected, as a Roman citizen, not to submit himself to trial under Festus, but to go to Caesar. Between Festus and King Agrippa, Paul, again, preached about Christ in Acts 26, before he was finally transferred to face trial before Caesar. In chapter 26 verses 27 to 29, the following dialogue transpired between Paul and King Agrippa:

“(27) King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. (28) Then Agrippa said unto to Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. (29) And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bounds.”

Juxtaposing the above references from the Bible with the Church of God in Nigeria today, including the various shepherds of the Church, a pertinent question stares us in the face, to wit, what is the Church doing within the present Nigerian polity in terms of speaking truth to power irrespective of status creed, religion, tribe, zone or political affiliation? What is the Church, which is the harbinger of education and civilisation, doing in the present state of education decline in the country? Has the Church raised its voice against the inhumanity of man to his fellow man; against misgovernance at any level, be it Local, State or Federal? Is the Church supporting the oppressors against the oppressed or the rulers against the downtrodden? Does the Church in Nigeria have a replica or member in the mould of Prophets Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Apostle Peter or Paul? Is the Church, in every sincerity and with every

boldness, preaching and pronouncing Christ who was crucified and risen? If Christ comes today, what will the Church say it has done or it is doing, saying or contributing to the state of Nigeria? Is the Church part of the myriad of problems facing Nigeria or is the Church a problem to itself? Gentlemen, I leave all of us as Christians to answer these and several other incidental questions according to the dictates of our collective conscience

In the Book of Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus Christ sent strong messages to seven Churches, that is, the Church in Ephesus⁵¹, the Church in Smyrna,⁵² the Church in Pergamos⁵³; the Church in Tathyra⁵⁴ The Church in Sardis;⁵⁵ The Church in Philadelphia,⁵⁶ and the Church in Laodicea.⁵⁷ To each of them, he espoused its strengths and weaknesses, beauty and woes. Is the Church in Nigeria taking cognisance of the warnings or heeding them, or actually preparing for the second coming of Christ, more particularly within the entity called Nigeria? May we pray, as recorded in Revelation 3:10 that the Lord Jesus Christ will keep the Church of Nigeria from the hour of temptation which shall come upon the world to try them that dwell upon the Earth.

IS THERE A UNITED CHURCH IN NIGERIA?

The Church of God is founded on the Bible. The central theme or rhythm is “One church, one faith, one Lord”. The Bible does not tell us that either Peter or Paul belonged to a Roman Catholic Church, as we know it today. In other words, there was only one Church established on the day of Pentecost; and till today, there is only one Church of God or body of Christ. True members of this Church are here on Earth as saints militant, all striving to be translated to become saints triumphant. Christ Himself is the same yesterday, today and to the ages.⁵⁸

Apostles Peter and Paul preached the same Christ, the Son of God and keyed into the same Church, with one faith, although their gifts and talents were different. Paul said, concerning Peter, thus: “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;”

As for Peter, he appreciated the ministry of Paul under the auspices of the Lord Jesus when he wrote, thus: “And account that the long suffering of our lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which hard some things are to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

Deducible from the foregoing is that as between Peter and Paul, both of them preached the same Lord, the same Gospel, the same faith and keyed into the same conviction. Paul warned the Church about the nuances and dangers of not only the environment of his time, but what the situation would be until the second coming of Christ, that the Church would be wrestling against powers and principalities, both from within and without the Church itself.

In Nigeria of today, there are so many Christian denominations. So much so, that their numbers are almost contending with the population of some nations of the world. Unfortunately, it now appears to me as if some of these denominations think and believe that they are independent of the body of Christ. Christians in Nigeria are naturally expected, irrespective of their

denominations, to be under the banner of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an association that was hitherto very strong, dynamic, proactive, vibrant, united, forthright and profound in confronting powers and authorities with the truth as enshrined in the Holy Writ, even during the days of military dictatorship. It is sad and saddening that CAN of today is very much disunited and, I dare say, disoriented. No wonder the voice of the Church is slowly phasing out and fading away, and is becoming very irrelevant in the affairs of our country. It is apt to remind the Church, as represented by this gathering today, of the beautiful wordings of the equally sonorous hymn composed by John Oxenham, the four stanzas of which go thus:

In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

In Christ shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

Join hands, disciples of the faith,
whate'er your race may be.
All children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west;
in him meet south and north.
All Christly souls are one in him
throughout the whole wide earth.⁵⁹

This also takes me to the first two Commandments as recorded in Exodus 20:3-6, to wit, “Thou shall have no other gods before me; thou shall not make unto thee any graven image”. It is also written, “Hear ye o Israel, the Lord our God is one God”.⁶⁰ Aligning these passages with John Oxenham’s hymn, I admonish all Christians in Nigeria to appreciate the fact that within the Nigerian polity of today, they have no choice than to come together as one entity, irrespective of the artificial denominations which currently demarcate them. Christians must speak with one voice; they must use the instrumentality of the laws of God which have been substantially copied into our corpus to ask and demand for a Nigeria where peace and justice reign; a Nigeria where the security of every citizen is guaranteed; a Nigeria where our today should ordinarily be better than our yesterday, while our tomorrow should be more prosperous than our today.

It is the duty of the Church of Christ to regularly intervene, in a very categorical and constructive manner, in the affairs of our nation, whether in terms of good education, delivery of dividends of democracy, improvement of our economy, provision of infrastructure, free and fair elections, justice according to law and due process, the right of every Nigeria to freedom of faith of his choice, qualitative healthcare delivery, security of lives, limbs and properties, equitable distribution of political offices across board, etc. The Church must always be conscious of the

admonition of God as recorded in the Book of Proverbs chapter 22:9 that “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” To this end, it is the biblical mandate of God to the Church to encourage the enthronement of good governance in the country at all levels or tiers of government at all times.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH TO USE THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF LAW TO CHALLENGE BAD POLICIES

Clerics all over the world do have an added advantage over fellow citizens to speak out, either to their congregations or to governments, powers and authorities. The first sermon delivered by Peter was to diverse people from different parts of the world.⁶¹ It is the duty of clerics to use their respective pulpits to evangelise, protect and defend the Church, advance the spread of the Gospel and growth of Christianity, preach one Church, one faith and one Lord, demand for good governance at all levels of government, fight against ills plaguing the society, etc.

In addition to the foregoing, the Church is under a duty, as a corporate citizen and institution, to employ the instrumentality of law to challenge any action or inaction of government, decision, policy, directive, law or legislation that infringes or breaches the right or interests of the Church in any subject or property, either proprietary or otherwise. It has been stated earlier in this lecture that it was the Church in Nigeria that introduced education to the country by establishing and building primary and secondary schools, and it is a truism that not less than 90% of the founding fathers of Nigeria passed through Christian or mission schools, whether at primary or secondary school levels. Permit me to refresh our collective memory that the first teacher training institution in Nigeria, the CMS Training School, was founded in 1854 at Abeokuta, but later moved to Lagos, and eventually to Oyo, as St. Andrews College. The College has since been abolished, giving way to Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, also owned by the Anglican Church.

In like manner, the first secondary school in Nigeria, CMS Grammar School, Lagos, was also established by the Church in 1859, long before the colonial government established its first secondary school, Kings College, Lagos, in 1909. In our very eyes, all these schools have been taken over and confiscated by various governments across the country, and if truth must be told, this was the genesis of the gradual decline and decay of our education system. Kudos must be given to the Catholic Church (Diocese of Lagos), under the apostolic leadership of Archbishop A.O Okogie, who then challenged the unconstitutional act of Lagos State Government by compulsorily taking over Catholic schools in Lagos and abolishing some of their policies.

The unrelenting and untiring cleric instituted several actions against the Lagos State Government between 1981 and 1983 to ventilate the Catholic Church’s displeasure and objection to the government policy, and the cases substantially succeeded.⁶² As a result of the lukewarm attitude of the Church to speak with one voice as at that time, against the decisions of various governments in the country to confiscate and appropriate various church’s educational institutions, the State Governments, across board, followed one another and took over nearly all the said institutions. Both the Church and the country are worse for it today. In contemporary Nigeria, the Church sets the pace at establishing private universities; and it is hoped that we would not wake up to news that these budding and promising institutions have been compulsorily taken over by the government.

Flowing from the foregoing, as well as the theme of this lecture is the imperative of the church to be aware and conscious of its right to exploit the law, to protect its interest as well as the corporate interest of its members, and also demand for justice according to law in the governance of the country, irrespective of the tier of government involved.

CAN THE CHURCH PONDER ANEW ON:

Matthew 5:14-15, where Jesus said, concerning the Church, thus: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel but on a candle stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house”. This is the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ for the Church. The Church in Nigeria cannot and should not act contrary to that mandate. It is also a mission. Therefore, the light of the Church must not be allowed to be put under a bushel, either through the Church itself or by outsiders.

1 Peter 2:9, where it is written, concerning the Church, thus: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”. Is the Church conscious of its royal priesthood? Is the Church aware of its holiness and peculiarity of its members? Is the Church shewing forth the praises of Jesus or that of man or transient powers?

Ephesians 6:12-13, where the Apostle Paul forewarned as follows:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole Armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”.⁶³ The Church in Nigeria should, more than ever before, take this admonition more seriously; fervently praying and watching and, at the same time, employing the word of God and the instrumentality of law to properly equip and defend itself, its members and even others outside the fold, whenever it is necessary.

CONCLUSION

In this lecture, I have striven to draw a correlation between the Church, the law and the polity, using this gathering as a springboard to forge a renaissance for the Church of God in Nigeria. It is written that ‘where two or three are gathered in my name there I am with them’.⁶⁴ I am persuaded that we are here under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, the comforter, enabler, wisdom-giver, senior partner, ally, friend and director, who proceeds from the Father and the Son and who is “the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth in him, and shall be in you”.⁶⁵ Let me also confess and appreciate the same Holy Spirit for the stimulation and enablement to reason, put together and assemble the thoughts and the presentation of this lecture. For it is He who gives us more understanding than our teachers, as well as the ancients.

In the letter of invitation extended to me to deliver this lecture, it is stated thus: “Your choice as Speaker for this landmark 20th edition was the result of well-considered deliberations amongst members of the League who have followed your professional achievements and noble activities as well as your tireless efforts over the years in confronting every form of injustice and incompetence in our polity and acknowledge your giant strides in the enthronement of the rule of law in this country. For the 20th edition, we are considering a topic that revolves around

contemporary judicial and socio-political issues in Nigeria and the role Christians and the Christian church in Nigeria can play to assist in the development and progress of the country. We will therefore give you the latitude to choose a topic that best suits your thoughts on this theme.”

Based on the foregoing mandate, I prayerfully picked the topic of this lecture. Undoubtedly, Nigeria is facing very tough times, and I dare say that the challenges before and ahead of us are gargantuan. The youths are unemployed in their droves, and they are becoming restless – almost uncontrollably; while the rate of heinous crimes is increasing exponentially and geometrically. The economy is not reassuring, while the organogram of governance is not situated on a fairly equitable and acceptable pedestal. The Church itself is not living up to its bidding, to put it very mildly. Despite the fact that Nigeria can boast as one of the countries with the highest number of churches in the world, where citizens spend more hours than their contemporaries globally in the church or on mountain tops, or by the river sides, praying and keeping vigil, without commensurable industry, work or sign of remorse, forgetting that faith, without works, is dead, being alone; and that faith is best revealed by good and justifiable works.

The Church must cultivate, covet and exchange love, otherwise described as charity by Apostle Paul, both amongst its members, irrespective of denominations, as well as among fellow citizens. Praying or speaking in tongues or prophesying or ‘wroughting’ miracles without charity is vanity, and profiteth the Church nothing and is like “a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal”ⁱ The Church can also use the instrumentality of the law, whether of God or the State, to improve the polity or prepare for the second coming of Christ. Not later than now, the Church must resolve to put aside the acute strife and monumental disharmony amongst its members, across board, whether intra or inter-denominations. Peter enjoins us to “love the brotherhood”.ⁱⁱ Nigeria of today is in dire need of a Church that can and should speak with a united voice both for the protection of the Church itself and her members, as well as the enhancement and upliftment of the nation. This is my humble take on this topic; with the hope that the presentation will revive the good memories and inviolable soul of Pastor S.A. Odunaiya.

Olanipekun delivered the lecture at the 20th edition of the Pastor S.A. Odunaiya Memorial Lecture, held On Monday, 21st January, 2019, at the Christ Apostolic Church, No. 83, Lagos Street, Ebute-Metta, Lagos State.