

## Chapter Ten

### Mission in a Troubled World: Challenging the Church in Africa to Respond

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This chapter starts with the assumption that the world is filled with trouble and that Christians are not exempt from the typical troubles others in the world face. It demonstrates that the people in the Bible experienced many of the same kinds of problems that Africans face today. The chapter uses theological arguments and Biblical examples to show five responses that Christian leaders must use in preparing Christians to respond to trouble.

**Key Words:** mission, trouble, Africa, leadership, challenge

#### Introduction

“Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). These insightful words were spoken to Job by Eliphaz, one of Job’s rather unhelpful sympathizers. Though Eliphaz had some confused theology (Job 42:7), he got this statement right. There is plenty of trouble in the world that extends to all the people of the earth. For reasons best known to himself, God has chosen not to protect his servants from the normal difficulties and problems of life.

This is abundantly clear in the Old Testament:

- Abraham had an armed robbery problem. His family was attacked and kidnapped.
- Sarah, Rachael, Hannah and Elizabeth had pregnancy problems. They were all barren for a rather long while.
- Joseph had interpersonal conflict problems. He was betrayed by his own brothers.
- Moses had legal problems. He had to run for his life and lived in exile for 40 years.
- Naomi and Ruth had family problems. Both lost their husbands and became widows.

- David had governance problems. He was temporarily driven from power by his son.
- Jeremiah had travel problems. He was forced to travel to Egypt against his will.

These men and women represent some of the best saints in the Old Testament. One would think that God would appreciate these faithful people so much that he would have protected them from the common problems of life, but that is not the way God operates.

What about the Church? Jesus certainly must have had a special place in his heart for his own followers. If he could heal people of sickness, raise the dead and solve other problems miraculously, he certainly has the power to protect his people from the troubling problems of life. Unfortunately, we see that the followers of Jesus and the young church that was planted by his followers also suffered many kinds of problems.

- The Christian widows lost their food rations that had been provided by the Jews.
- The young church lost members, Stephen to stoning and James to beheading.
- The church was so threatened after Stephen's death, they had to flee from Jerusalem.
- The church in Corinth suffered internal strife and leadership struggles.
- The leadership of the church in Ephesus were arrested and beaten.
- The churches addressed by John experienced afflictions, poverty, and persecution.

What these facts tell us is that neither individual followers of Jesus nor the church as a whole are exempt from the common problems and troubles of life.

In addition to the problems they faced as a minority religion in the Roman world, the Church experienced all the problems the communities in which they lived in experienced. God did not protect his people from the normal troubles of life. What does that mean?

- The saints in Jerusalem experienced a drought.
- Jesus' disciples endured a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee.
- Paul lost his possessions in the shipwrecks he suffered like unbelievers.
- Believers in Jerusalem suffered the massacre led by Titus between AD 68–70.

This truth is further illustrated when one looks at church history. Although there are some remarkable testimonies of supernatural protection of certain Christians and groups, most of the time, the followers of Jesus have died in natural disasters, epidemics, accidents, wars and plagues at about the same rate as unbelievers. There is no guarantee of absolute protection for the Christian believer from the common problems of life.<sup>428</sup>

## **Contemporary Troubles in Africa**

Obviously, the contemporary church in Africa and especially Nigeria has not been exempted from the normal difficulties of life. What are some of the general problems that the African Church has experienced and specifically, what has the Nigerian Church experienced?

### ***Natural Disasters***

Fortunately, Nigeria and much of Africa are not vulnerable to many of the natural disasters other parts of the world suffer, such as blizzards, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. However, Africa does experience destructive storms. On Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012, there was a headline in the *Daily Trust* that said “Ice Rain Destroys 400 Houses in Jos.” Apparently, the pieces of ice that fell during a hail storm were so big they destroyed windscreens of vehicles and actually broke down hundreds of houses.<sup>429</sup> A large percentage of Nigeria is prone to flooding. Therefore, every year some part of Nigeria is ravaged by floods.<sup>430</sup> Unfortunately, many of Nigeria’s major disasters are caused by human

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<sup>428</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 for the list of problems Paul faced.

<sup>429</sup> Lami Sadiq, “Ice Rain Destroys 400 Houses in Jos.” *Daily Trust*, 4 May 2012, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201205040273.html> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>430</sup> Elijah Ige Ohimain, Sylvester Chibueze Izah, and Dimie Otobotekere, “Selective Impacts of the 2012 Water Floods on the Vegetation and Wildlife of Wilberforce Island, Nigeria,” in *International Journal of Environmental Monitoring and Analysis* 2:2 (2014): 73-85 Published online March 20, 2014; <http://article.sciencepublishinggroup.com/pdf/10.11648.j.ijema.20140202.13.pdf> [Accessed 22/10/2016]. According to these authors “nearly all Nigeria” is subject to flooding and 20 percent of Nigeria suffered flooding in 2012.

beings. We often create more trouble for ourselves than Mother Nature does, including the following.

### ***Environmental Degradation***

One of the great assets of Nigeria is an abundant supply of oil. However, one of the down sides of the oil industry is environmental pollution. For 50 years, hundreds of massive flares have been burning natural gas because it was too difficult to capture and sell. Nigeria flares the second largest amount of gas in the world.<sup>431</sup> This does not only waste valuable natural resources, but also pollutes the air which, in turn, poisons the rivers and the soil. The villages in the Nigeria Delta have complained for years about fish kills, undrinkable water, low producing farms and health problems they view as a result of oil-industry pollution.

The rest of Nigeria is not exempt from pollution either. Many of the rivers are so polluted that it is unsafe to eat the fish in them. Lack of understanding environmental issues fails to stop littering the environment with waste including plastic bags. Lead poisoning from gold mining in Zamfara State has killed 400 children in a two-year period and led to a 40 percent mortality rate of children under the age of five.<sup>432</sup> The bottom line is that environmental pollution causes many problems for all Nigerians, whether they are believers or unbelievers.

### ***Destructive Accidents***

Roads accidents in Nigeria claim hundreds of lives every year. In fact, road accidents are the leading cause of the death of children, especially in Africa, which has the highest road accident and mortality rate in the world.<sup>433</sup> Nigeria's air safety record is also poor as well, which has

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<sup>431</sup> Andrew Walker, "Nigeria's Oil Profits, 'Up in Smoke'" *BBC News*, 13 January 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7820384.stm> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>432</sup> "Lead Poisoning Crisis in Zamfara State, Northern Nigeria," Doctors without Borders, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news-stories/briefing-document/lead-poisoning-crisis-zamfara-state-northern-nigeria> [Accessed 8/05/2012].

<sup>433</sup> Eniola Akinkuotu, "Road Accident, Leading Cause of Death Among Children — WHO," *General NBF Topics*, 19 August 2011. <http://www.nigerianbestforum.com/generaltopics/?p=103836> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

resulted in the deaths of hundreds of passengers. Collapsing buildings due to poor construction has wasted hundreds of lives.<sup>434</sup> Unfortunately, Nigeria has had too many accidents of pipelines or petrol tankers exploding with thousands of victims, primarily of those scavenging for petrol. These include over 250 deaths in Adeja, Delta State in 2000<sup>435</sup> and over 200 in Ilado, Lagos State in 2006.<sup>436</sup> Unfortunately, many of these were not really “accidents” because they were caused by people vandalizing the pipelines. The lack of maintenance culture, the willingness to take chances and the eagerness to get ahead at all costs encourage preventable accidents that take thousands of lives every year.

### ***Health Threats***

Tropical diseases still kill hundreds of thousands of Nigerians every year. Malaria alone snuffs out the lives of 200,000 people every year in Nigeria<sup>437</sup> which is 23 percent of the world’s total malaria deaths.<sup>438</sup> Though progress has been made on polio, we continue to see hundreds of children crippled by this disease crawling in our streets. No cure for Sickle Cell Anaemia has been found so it persists as a serious problem in

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<sup>434</sup> For a good overview of the problems of buildings collapsing with a chart of collapsed buildings in Nigeria from 1976 to 2006, see Kingsley O. Dimuna, “Incessant Incidents of Building Collapse in Nigeria: A Challenge to Stakeholders,” *Global Journal of Researches in Engineering* Vol.10 Issue 4, September 2010. [http://globaljournals.org/GJRE\\_Volume10/9-Incessant-Incidents-of-Building-Collapse-in-Nigeria.pdf](http://globaljournals.org/GJRE_Volume10/9-Incessant-Incidents-of-Building-Collapse-in-Nigeria.pdf) [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>435</sup> Trevor Johnson, “More than 250 Feared Dead in Nigerian Pipeline Explosion,” *World Socialist Website*, 14 July 2000, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/jul2000/nig-j14.shtml> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>436</sup> “Nigerian Pipeline Blast Kills up to 200,” *USA Today*, 5 December 2006. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-05-12-nigeria\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-05-12-nigeria_x.htm) [Accessed 22/10/2016]. This article also contains a list of 17 explosions that took place in Nigeria between 1998 and 2003 killing a total of 1082 people.

<sup>437</sup> “Malaria Kills 200,000 People In Nigeria Annually - Programme Coordinator,” *All Africa*, 4 May 2012; <http://allafrica.com/stories/201205050080.html> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>438</sup> “Nigeria has the Highest Malaria Cases in the World – Health Minister,” *The Nigeria Voice*, 8 May 2012; <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/89445/1/nigeria-has-the-highest-malaria-cases-in-the-world.html> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

Africa. For many years, Nigeria has had and still has one of the highest maternal mortality in the world, ranking only behind India, a country with eight times the population of Nigeria.<sup>439</sup> The deadly Lassa fever has recently experienced a revival in 19 of Nigeria's states.<sup>440</sup> Of course, the biggest threat in Nigeria and Africa as a whole now is the sexually transmitted HIV virus that leads to AIDS and kills millions of people in Africa every year. Though some progress has been made in reducing the HIV rate in Nigeria, hundreds of people still die daily in Nigeria from AIDS.

These astronomical figures demonstrate that there are many health threats in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. And, unfortunately, these health threats are not restricted to just unbelievers.

### ***Criminal Activity***

Most people living in Africa have been victims of burglary and petty thievery. Unfortunately, many if not most people living in Nigeria have either experienced or will experience an armed robbery during their lifetimes. Kidnapping began in the Niger Delta by those trying to focus attention on their socio-political causes but because it has proved to be profitable, it has expanded beyond the expatriate community to include all Nigerians and has expanded beyond the Niger Delta to include most of Nigeria.

### ***Corruption and Government Excesses***

One cannot talk about the troubles of Nigeria without talking about corruption. In the last ten years, four of Nigeria governors have been

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<sup>439</sup> Joseph Nnamdi Mojekwu and Uche Ibekwe, "Maternal Mortality in Nigeria: Examination of Intervention Methods," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 20 [Special Issue – October 2012, page 136; [http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_2\\_No\\_20\\_Special\\_Issue\\_October\\_2012/13.pdf](http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_20_Special_Issue_October_2012/13.pdf) [Accessed 22/10/2016].

<sup>440</sup> See "Nigeria: Lassa Fever outbreak (Situation as of 22 March, 2012)." World Health Organization, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EPR-Nigeria-Lassa-Fever-Outbreak-20120322.pdf> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

sentenced to prison.<sup>441</sup> The fuel subsidy debacle of January 2012 forced the national assembly to investigate the issue and they discovered that over 6 billion US dollars had been misappropriated from the fuel subsidy budget.<sup>442</sup> It has been revealed that out of the 141,790 registered pensioners, only 70,657 were authentic which means that 71,133 or more than half the people on the police pension payroll were ghost retirees.<sup>443</sup> These are high profile examples of corruption, but corruption is not limited to the big people. It also filters down to every part of society. Mid-level civil servants have their way of cheating the system. Some policemen demand their appreciation on the street and office clerks lose files until they are also appreciated. In addition to the criminal stealing that many politicians and government officials do, the perception in Nigeria is that modern day politicians have found ways to empty the national treasury legally through inflated salaries and allowances and contracts to their friends. Corruption affects everyone. It sometimes affects Christians more because their refusal to participate in dishonest deals sometimes leads to suffering even more.

### ***Ethnic and Religious Violence***

During the last two decades, Nigeria has experienced two serious episodes of violence. First, indigenes from the Niger Delta, unhappy that they were not getting a fair share of the oil revenue from their area, carried out a low-level insurgency for several years that included blowing up oil company facilities, attacking the police and military and kidnapping foreign oil workers. Also, starting in 2009, an extremist Islamic group *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People

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<sup>441</sup> A few years ago former Governor James Ibori of Delta State pled guilty to stealing over 50 million pounds sterling and was sentenced to 13 years in prison in the UK. Mark Tran, "Former Nigeria State Governor James Ibori Receives 13-year Sentence," *The Guardian*, 17 April 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/apr/17/nigeria-governor-james-ibori-sentenced> [Accessed on 22/10/2016].

<sup>442</sup> "Nigeria Fuel Subsidy Report 'Reveals \$6bn Fraud'" BBC News, 24 April 2012; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17823959> [Accessed 23/10/2016].

<sup>443</sup> Yushua Shuaib, "Pension Scam and the Faces of Corrupt Officers," *Vanguard*, 21 April 2012. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/04/pension-scam-and-the-faces-of-corrupt-officers/> [Accessed 22/10/2016].

Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), popularly known as Boko Haram started attacking many venues including government agencies, like army, police, immigration and prison facilities. They have also attacked educational institutions, media houses, churches and popular social centres where youth gather, like video viewing centres and establishments used for selling and consuming alcoholic drinks. They have even attacked mosques, Muslim businesses and individual Muslims who do not agree with their ideology. Whether it is related or not, the herder-farmer conflict that sparked off a few years ago is a growing threat to rural and urban communities, especially in the Middle Belt. Thus, there is no question the people of Nigeria live in a troubled world. Pastors and church workers must take seriously their responsibilities to address the troubles in society.

### **Mission in a Trouble World**

What should be the response of the Church and particularly church leaders to these ongoing problems? As good Christians, we always address our problems first through prayer and the church in Africa has been praying. However, is there more that we should be doing than just praying? Should the Church not be concerned about and engaged in solving the social, ethnic, economic, environmental and religious problems?

Jesus said to his disciples "you are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and "you are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). These metaphors suggest that the followers of Jesus are not to isolate themselves from the other people but are to be engaged in a mission to make positive input into the society of which they are a part.

What do we mean by "mission"? To be more precise, what exactly is the mission of Jesus' followers in this world? Perhaps, the most succinct summary of that mission is found in the Lord's Prayer where he taught his disciples to pray "your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). In this prayer of a little over 50 words, Jesus used 15 percent of those words to talk about establishing his kingdom on the earth. If the Lord's Prayer is a guide, the mission of God's people is to implement God's kingdom and will on the earth as they are in heaven. Since God's will is perfectly executed in his heavenly kingdom, having God's will implemented in every part of his earthly kingdom is obviously



God's goal for this earth. And God's goal for this earth becomes our mission.

God originally created a kingdom on this earth that unfortunately fell victim to the intrigues of the evil one. By rejecting God's authority, the world fell victim to all the pain and suffering of that rebellion. God is not happy about the distorted condition of the world he created. God had created human beings to be his representatives and caretakers on the earth. Therefore, establishing God's kingdom on earth means that human beings must be engaged in re-establishing God's will and God's way of doing things in every part of society. This includes restoring principles like integrity, excellence, respect for authority, respect for life, hard work, and the fear of God. Vincent Anigbogu, Director General of the Institute for National Transformation in Lagos says that Christians are the "carriers of these principles."<sup>444</sup> We are the ones who understand these things and we are the ones who are to find ways to rebuild God's kingdom by restoring his truth and principles to every part of society.

If this is true, then mission cannot be limited to just what we have traditionally called the spiritual part of human nature. Our mission is clearly illustrated by Jesus' own mission. Matthew 4:23 gives a good summary of Jesus' early ministry: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Jesus was involved in preaching and teaching about the kingdom in the various synagogues of Galilee. However, he was also involved in healing diseases and sicknesses among the people outside the synagogues. Sickness and disease are aberration to God's kingdom. Our bodies were not created to be sick. Thus, Jesus took every opportunity he had to reverse the conditions of the sick, the weak and the handicapped.

It is also instructive that when it was time for Jesus to send out his disciples into their field exercises, he sent them out "to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Lk 9:2), that is to do exactly what Jesus had been doing. This mandate illustrates the two kinds of ministries in which Jesus engaged. The preaching and teaching were designed to help the listeners understand God's perspective on all things. The healing of the sick is a summary activity representing the calling of Jesus'

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<sup>444</sup> Vincent Onigbogu interviewed by Danny McCain 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

followers to reverse Satan's negative influences on this earth and to restore things back to the way God originally created them to be.

Therefore, our mission as Christians is not only to evangelize and plant churches but to move outside the walls of those churches so we can positively change this world to reflect the principles and truths of every discipline and every part of society God created. René Padilla summarized what he calls "integral mission" this way:

Its (integral mission) purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and to witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, both on the individual level and on the community level.<sup>445</sup>

If this is a correct view of mission, then one of the most important responsibilities of God's people is to examine and attempt to correct the problems in life that cause God's creation to groan in agony (Rom. 8:22).

## **The Challenge for the African Church**

If we accept the argument that our mission requires us to address the problems of life, then the challenge is: How do we do it? I will suggest five challenges the African church must accept in order to address the problems of the continent.

### ***The Challenge of Theological Reflection***

The true followers of Jesus view everything in life through a theological lens which means that they attempt to view things as God views them. Although God may occasionally reveal something to someone personally, that revelation is for that individual's personal use and not for the world at large. The normal way we get God's perspective on any topic is from the truths revealed in the Bible. That involves at least three important steps.

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<sup>445</sup> C. René Padilla, "What is Integral Mission?" Del Camino Network for Integral Mission, page 6, [http://www.dmr.org/images/pdf%20dokumenter/C.\\_Ren%C3%A9\\_Padilla\\_-\\_What\\_is\\_integral\\_mission.pdf](http://www.dmr.org/images/pdf%20dokumenter/C._Ren%C3%A9_Padilla_-_What_is_integral_mission.pdf) [Accessed on 22/10/2016].

### ***Exegetical Examination***

We Christians believe that the Bible is an infallible and authoritative guide on everything it addresses. Of course, the Bible is not a complete textbook on all topics in the world but it includes principles and precepts about many issues and it also contains positive and negative examples of the way those issues were addressed.

Exegesis is the process of studying a passage or topic of the Bible to determine what the original author meant to say and how the original readers would have interpreted these statements. Very simply, exegesis extracts from a passage the communication intended by the original writer.<sup>446</sup> This is done through examining the words that were used, the grammatical constructions with which the words were arranged, the context that would have given meaning to the communication, the responses of the recipients and everything else that would provide information about the meaning of the original communication. Fortunately, there are abundant passages of scripture that deal with the problems of Biblical times. There are literally dozens of examples of godly people in the Bible experiencing one form of trouble or another. Studying the responses of people, both positive and negative, gives insight into how God's people responded to those problems. In addition, there are hundreds of teachings about the troubles of life found in commands, proverbs, exhortations, and other Biblical statements. It is the duty of the student of the Bible to find each of these and use the normal exegetical principles to extract from those passages what was taught at that time.

### ***Theological Summation***

Once we have extracted the raw information from the Biblical texts, we must summarize and synthesize all of those teachings into simple coherent statements that others can understand. Therefore, in preparing to address the various problems that face the contemporary church, the first step is to examine the Bible to see what it says about these issues and similar problems. This is the theological process and it lays a solid foundation for the next step in theological reflection.

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<sup>446</sup> Danny McCain and Craig Keener, *Understanding and Applying the Scriptures* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2013), 3.

### *Contemporary Application*

After one has properly interpreted the Bible and summarized those teachings in some type of theological proposition, the next step is to apply that information to the contemporary world. Application is taking the principles derived from Biblical interpretation and making them relevant to the contemporary situation.<sup>447</sup> Most of the time, the interpretation and the application of the Bible will be exactly the same. For example, when the Paul writes in Philippians 4:4, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” This statement means the same thing in America, Africa and Russia as it meant to the Philippians who first received these words almost 2000 years ago. However, there are teachings that were shaped by the culture of that day and therefore may be applied differently in a different culture. For example, Paul says four times “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:14). However, seldom am I ever greeted with a holy kiss in Africa! Most African Christians believe they have fulfilled the principle of the passage by shaking hands or using some other culturally appropriate physical form of greeting.

I believe the appropriate application is best reached through a consensus of church leadership. Though there were other things going on during the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), it provides a good example of how the Church solved the contemporary problem of whether or not circumcision should be required for Gentile believers.

- Christian leaders met together.
- All sides of the position were presented.
- The church leaders reached a consensus.
- The church leaders put their decisions in writing.
- The written summaries of their decisions were distributed to those affected.

I am convinced that a similar approach should be taken today to resolve African’s perennial problems. A cross-section of church leaders should meet together to consider one or more of the many social problems in Africa such as violence. They should have access to Biblical exegesis of relevant scriptures which various scholars have done. All legitimate positions related to application should be considered. A consensus should

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<sup>447</sup> McCain and Keener, 4.

be reached which is documented in writing. These written documents should be distributed to those affected.

Starting in 1995, the church in Nigeria experimented successfully with this strategy. In 1997, after two years of preparation which involved various scholars doing exegesis on various issues, a conference was held in Abuja known as the “Congress on Christian Ethics in Nigeria” (COCEN). The focus of that conference was to address ethical issues in various sectors of society. During the conference various positions were suggested to the solving of ethical problems that were identified. A consensus was eventually reached on ten specific statements related to ethical issues in Nigeria. These were written and published and distributed to those affected. This became known as the “Nigeria Covenant.”<sup>448</sup> This model of Christian leaders meeting together to take a particular Christian position on social issues is a model that should continue to be used in Africa to address other troubles the Church faces.

### ***The Challenge of Grassroots Education***

Once church leaders have understood the issues and have formulated a response, they must create an appropriate plan to re-educate their constituents about these issues. This is essentially what the early church did when they sent Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. They were to “*confirm by way of mouth what we have written*” (Acts 15:27). In other words, they were to communicate very clearly the specific applications that had been articulated at the Jerusalem Council.

We cannot assume that ordinary Christians will automatically respond to situations the way the followers of Jesus are supposed to respond. Paul had to teach the church what to do about such basic matters as a man having sexual relations with his step mother (1 Cor. 5:1) and what to do about two brothers who were going to court against each other (1 Cor. 6:1). If we do not teach our people what to do in such difficult circumstances, they may fall back to their pre-Christian traditional worldviews related to such things.

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<sup>448</sup> Later a grassroots’ movement grew out of this project, known as *Covenant Keepers*. This group developed a Study Guide to the Nigerian Christian Covenant which contained 22 lessons related to the content of the Nigeria Covenant.

Another attempt was made in 2006 in Nigeria to address a major social issue. This response actually grew out of Aso Rock Villa Chapel and included church and political leaders from all over Africa. This was an attempt to address the Christian duty to promote honourable and efficient governance. It culminated in the Africa Forum on Religion and Governance (AFREG). A large meeting was held that included representatives from all over Africa to work out a consensus on what Christians should believe and practice related to governance. One of the outcomes of that conference was the creation of the *Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance*.<sup>449</sup> This was a four-paragraph statement outlining what the Christian community believed about both the governed and those who govern them. Later, teaching materials were developed based upon that creed called the *Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance Study Guide*.<sup>450</sup> In addition, a training program was implemented to ensure that these truths that had been agreed upon by the leaders would reach down to the grassroots. Hundreds of pastors were exposed to this material and were able to pass it along to their members. The process did not stop with just a nice theological statement about governance. The group persevered until they found a way to get this information down to the grassroots.<sup>451</sup>

If we are to respond properly to the many kinds of problems that the African church is facing, we must do several things.

- We must convert our theological documents into teaching material.
- We must collect and utilize materials that have already been developed in Nigeria.
- We need to seek for and find similar materials that have been developed in other parts of the world and make our materials available to them.

Exegesis and theologizing and even formulating good applications are not an end in themselves. Those materials must be taught to the laypeople

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<sup>449</sup> Published in the form of a brochure by Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

<sup>450</sup> Published in the form of a booklet by Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

<sup>451</sup> The implementation of the Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance was reasonably well done during the first election cycle after it was produced. It has been less successful in subsequent election cycles.

in the churches. When theologians, pastors and educators work together, they will be able to accomplish these goals.

### ***The Challenge of Personal Demonstration***

An educational proverb says “We teach some by what we say; we teach more by what we do; but we teach most by what we are.”<sup>452</sup> This suggests that the best way to teach the principles of life is to model them through our actions and attitudes. Peter declared, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:12). One of the major reasons Jesus came to this earth was to provide a model of how we ought to live. Paul makes a rather bold statement in 1 Corinthians 11:1, where he said: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” Paul, in following Jesus provided a model to his disciples and his readers of how to evangelize, teach, pray and worship, suffer, work and how to do many other things.

Africa has both positive and negative examples of leadership. Africa is the continent of the big man—that person who sees his position as a means of making himself more comfortable and respected. Africa has her share of leaders who are characterized by greed, arrogance and self-promotion. These are people who take money from the poor to demonstrate that the prosperity they preach really works. On the other hand, Africa also has those leaders who are characterized by humility and selflessness and those willing to deny themselves to promote God’s kingdom. It is this latter group that will be tools in the hands of God to address the problems of Africa. The church in Africa is waiting for a generation of Christian leaders who will not say “this is what you should do” but simply “follow me.”

### ***The Challenge of Prophetic Declaration***

One of the primary duties of the Old Testament prophets was to declare God’s word to the people and their leaders. One of their major responsibilities was to denounce pride and greed and other sins that weakened society and the nation. Hear these prophetic utterances:

- Woe to those who call evil good and good evil (Isa. 5:20).

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<sup>452</sup> The original source of this educational proverb is unknown. I first heard it orally from Dr. Steve Herron in a sermon or a class lecture.

- Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees (Isa. 10:1).
- Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labour (Isa. 22:13).
- Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! (Mic. 2:1).
- Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! (Hab. 2:6).

If the church is going to address the many problems facing Africa today, she must speak to more than just those within the four walls of our churches. The Church must make her voice heard to those who make the decisions that will solve those problems.

- We need prophets who will correct those leaders who advocate violence or who are even quiet about violence.
- We need prophets who will condemn corruption, specifically in the public sector.
- We need prophets who will denounce businessmen who fail to pay a working wage to their employees and also unions whose strike actions hurt innocent people.
- We need prophets who will correct the abusers and polluters of God's earth.
- We need prophets who will rebuke and correct Christian leaders who reflect pride in their lifestyles and who preach heresy from their pulpits.

The Church today not only needs good exegesis, good theology and good examples but she needs leaders to fearlessly proclaim God's will for contemporary society. To be a prophet, you have to have something to say; you have to be in a position to be heard; you have to speak with clarity and conviction. God is looking for those prophets who will identify Africa's problems and then fearlessly proclaim solutions for them.

### ***The Challenge of Social Saturation***

One of the major tools of Christianity has always been proclamation. When Jesus was training his disciples, he sent them out to "proclaim the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:2). The disciples learned this lesson well. Unfortunately, we Christians have so stressed the proclamation portion



of the gospel that we have often forgotten one of Jesus' earlier emphases, perhaps the greatest emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount—the principle of saturation. As we noted at the beginning, Jesus said to his followers, “you are the salt of the earth,” and “you are the light of the world.” What do those metaphors mean?

First, they mean that Christians are not to withdraw from the mainstream people and institutions of the world. Salt is something that penetrates and saturates the food it flavours. Light functions perfectly well in a dark place and actually drives darkness away. Paul clearly said that if a pagan invited a believer to go to his house for a meal, he should not hesitate to accept that invitation (1 Cor. 10:27). Christians must saturate the public space.

Second, these metaphors mean there is no legitimate part of the society that is off limits to the believer. Salt penetrates everything it touches. We should see that as an analogy of the way the lives of believers should impact every part of society. Christians should be involved in education, medicine, media, governance, entertainment and the media. If Christians are not there to offer their perspective on these things, those disciplines will be dominated by unbelievers and their influence will weaken and darken the whole society.

Third, the salt and light illustrations suggest Christians should be vocal and aggressive in promoting their values. Jesus stressed this when he said, “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light” (Lk 8:16). God has given us the principles of truth and righteousness not just for us to use within the church but to be a positive and vocal influence in the society.

Paul was arrested in Philippi and publicly beaten and imprisoned. The next day, his captors sent word to the jailor to release him. However, Paul said to those who came to release him, “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out” (Acts 16:37). Paul had just experienced an injustice in society. He understood that God is interested in justice. Therefore, when Paul was correcting a case of injustice, he was proclaiming and demonstrating the justice of God in that situation.

Fourth, salt and light imply that when we are living in and influencing the society, we are indeed fulfilling the mandate to proclaim the kingdom of God. Though this is the natural instincts of Africans, one of the things

the African church must understand at this time is that there is little difference between the sacred and the secular. The whole world was created by God. The whole world is owned by God. Therefore, when we are occupying various parts of the world and when we are helping to restore various parts of the world to what God had created them to be, we are helping to bring God's kingdom to the earth as it is in heaven.

Fifth, the salt metaphor implies improving something. The light metaphor implies driving out something that is dark or bad. This means that Christians are to go into society to improve it. The society should always be better when Christians are present.

In April 2012, I interviewed John Enelemah, head of Apostles in the Marketplace in Lagos. In addition to being a pastor, he works for Capital Alliance Nigeria, an investment firm. This firm occupies one of the tall buildings in Victoria Island. There are dozens of people who work in the building, including lawyers, accountants, and consultants of all kinds. No church meets in that building. However, this is the testimony of John Enelamah:

In this office I am not sure of the quality of everybody's faith in God but I can tell you that if there are people who do not have faith, they pretend to have faith because even though the gospel is not preached here, the Christians are so strong in their faith that they have defined the atmosphere. It is a climate of integrity; it is a climate of fairness and justice.<sup>453</sup>

This is a real demonstration of having so saturated the marketplace that the light of the gospel has driven out the darkness. This is what God has called us to do. And this is one of the ways that we are going to solve the problems in Africa.

To solve the problems of our society, God is calling the followers of Jesus to occupy the moral high ground.

- Christians should work harder than non-Christians.
- Christians should be more honest and transparent than non-Christians.
- Christians should take better care of their employees than non-Christians.

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<sup>453</sup> John Enelemah, interviewed by Danny McCain on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012 in Victoria Island, Lagos.

- Christians should be characterized by excellence more often than non-Christians.
- Christians should be more conscientious about time than non-Christians.
- Christians should maintain a cleaner environment than non-Christians.
- Christians should manufacture better products than non-Christians.

If we are going to address the problems and troubles of society, we must leave the four walls of the church and go into the world and let our light shine very brightly before wo/men so that they will see our good works and glorify our father in heaven (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12).

## **Conclusion**

The Bible is quite clear that experiencing the normal problems of this world is not necessarily a mark of God's displeasure. Problems are merely the indications that we are living in the real world. However, the reality and certainty of problems should not encourage us to passively accept them. God created a perfect world without problems but the enemy of God is the one who comes to "steal, kill and destroy" (Jn 10:10). Therefore, when we are working to stop those things that kill and destroy and when we are labouring to restore our world to its original perfect condition, we are building God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. When we are doing that, we are fulfilling our mission to a troubled world.

