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THE APPLICATION OF FAITH PRINCIPLES TO NEWSPAPER COLUMNS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Positive development is an intrinsic desire by every man and every society. However, it is cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of constant bickering, hatred, mutual suspicion and undue competition. These negative traits currently abound in the larger Nigerian society and they have restricted sustainable development in the country. Religion is a huge contributor to the prevalent negative traits. The fundamental differences in the two dominant religions in the country are brought to bear on our daily existence, similarly the doctrinal differences among the groups or sects within each religion also have negative effects on the interaction among adherents.

Abstract

This paper examines the critical role of religion in the development of a nation. It identifies the delicate position of newspaper columnists in the development of a nation. Using the foundations provided by the Agenda Setting theory, the paper identifies the similarity in values and principles between Christianity and Islam. It argues that the essence of the two Abrahamic faiths is to promote national peace and development. The paper examines the application of faith principles by two faith-based newspaper columnists in two national newspapers Trust and Guardian. The method employed for the study is Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings show that some faith-based columnists allow their ethnic, religious

and political sentiments to dictate the narratives employed in their commentaries. It calls on Nigerian columnists to dwell more on the similarities rather than the differences among the various faiths and ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Peace, Religion, Critical Discourse Analysis, Development, Columnists.*

The mass media have added another dimension to the religious and development dynamics as media workers now seek to protect the interests of their religious group at the detriment of national interest and development. Columnists are some of the most influential media workers because they have the licence to interpret events and share same with their readers thus gaining the affection or displeasure of the readers. Their personalities and individual biases especially religion, are often carried into their correlation of events.

Although Nigeria is officially a secular nation, Nigerians are arguably among the most religious people on earth. A cursory look around would show that almost 80% of Nigerians lay claim to either Christianity or Islam. It is good to stress that both religions preach peace and love and they are historically linked to the same person. He is the biblical Abraham or the Koranic Ibrahim. Nigerian columnists have the potential to boost or stifle the development of the country through their interpretation of issues affecting the country. If they promote and facilitate peace in their writings, they would create the atmosphere for development but if they promote inter-religious and inter-ethnic bickering, they would create hostility, anger, suspicion among other negative feelings which are impossible grounds for positive development.

Statement of Problem

Columnists are important contributors to the editorial content of newspapers. Most Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims and both religions preach peace, tolerance, love, faith among other virtues. It is however problematic that these values and principles inherent in both faiths are not reflected in the writings of most columnists. Because Nigerian newspaper columnists are either Christians or Muslims, it is expected that they should apply the principles inherent in their faiths which extol love,

peace, unity, and respect among others, when addressing national issues that have to do with conflict.

This is more so as newspaper columnists are opinion leaders who influence readers that subscribe to both faiths. It is for this reason that this papers examines their writings for the common principles upon which Islam and Christianity are based. We cannot have development when adherents of the dominant faiths are diametrically opposed to each other.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the paper is to examine the extent to which Nigerian columnists follow the principles of their faiths when writing their columns. The following are the specific objectives:

1. To examine the narratives employed by faith-based Nigerian columnists on national issues.
2. To examine the attitude of Christian columnists towards Islam.
3. To examine the attitude of Moslem columnists towards Christianity.

Limitations to the study

This proposed study, like others, cannot claim infallibility. It is limited in the choice of method. The detailed nature of Critical Discourse Analysis makes it difficult to draw a huge sample size in representation of the total population. It is difficult to analyse every narrative employed by every religious columnist in every newspaper in Nigeria, therefore, some newspapers and many religious columnists with beneficial ideas in their narratives could miss out of the sample.

Another inherent limitation of this study is its focus on religious columnists. This is against the background that most newspaper columnists in Nigeria are either Christians or Muslims. Although they may not expressly write about religion, their narratives on the recurring clashes in the middle-belt region may contribute positively or negatively on religious tolerance and peace building in the region and Nigeria as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

This work is grounded on the foundations of Agenda Setting Theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

This theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/73 (Lane, 2001). It explains the powerful nature of the media as well as the resultant influence of the media over the users. The summation of the theory is that the media possesses “the ability to tell us what issues are important” (University of Twente, 2014). The media-defined “important issues” are then discussed by the media users until such a time when the media comes up with new agenda. The use of Agenda Setting as a theoretical foundation in political communication can be traced to the concerned of Walter Lippman. As early as 1922, Walter Lippman, a newspaper columnist thought deeply about the effects projected by the media on the minds of the public (University of Twente, 2014). While Lippman “was concerned that the media had the power to present images to the public McCombs and Shaw investigated presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976” (University of Twente, 2014). This present effort hinges on these precedents by using the agenda setting theory as a theoretical base for the examination of the influence of the faith of Nigerian newspaper columnists in their narratives on national issues.

The Agenda Setting theory takes into cognizance the power of individual differences unlike the Hypodermic Needle Theory which claims that people act as they are programmed to do by the media. The Agenda Setting Theory says that the media can give the public topics to think about, but it cannot tell the public what to think about the topics. However, the reaction of the public to the topic (agenda) given by the each medium would depend on the social experiences of the audience as well as the history and reputation of the media organization that is reporting the information (setting the agenda). Therefore, one would expect the various narratives and discourses by the columnists to generate further discourses among the readers in the process of impacting on the polity. The resulting impact would therefore be a product of the receptions, perceptions and discourses at different levels rather than a product of the desire and effort of any individual columnist or group of columnists.

Media owners and professional journalist are closer to the elite class which Eric Louw calls the insiders. This closeness gives them the professional freedom and license to determine the topics of public discourse as well as the narratives on them thus making them “symbolic elites”. This elite position

provides them with the skills and power required for the manufacturing of “public knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, values morals and ideologies” (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013, p. 442). However, that power should be used for the collective good of the society. It should be used to promote peace and development so that men could happily serve God and live in peace with one another based on tolerance and understanding of one another.

Empirical Review

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life. It is intrinsic in the choices and decisions we make in our daily existence. The causes of conflict and the factors that promote it are multidimensional. They “are inherent in our families, organisations and the society at large. The problem of conflict resolution has less to do with removing conflict per se, but evolving an appropriate option for nipping it in the bud before it degenerates into a crisis” (Adams & Iwu, 2015, p. 439). For this reason, conflict prevention, management and transformation are continuous and unending processes in conflict resolution. Columnists must therefore constantly seek to put out fire and ease ethnic and religious tensions before they escalate into crises. There is great earthly and heavenly reward for this because “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

The political and economic elites have transformed the media from the conscience of the society to canons in their arsenal of political and economic warfare. Media organizations now “operate from the parochial prism of ethnicity and religion, thus compounding the dilemma of cultivating the national ethos that can be a promoter of peace” (Nwozor, 2014, p. 156). Columnists must interact with traditional institutions to facilitate the renaissance of communal values like love and good neighbourliness.

Good governance is the artery of democracy and sustainable development cannot be achieved without promotion of the well-being of people in a political or geographic entity. Failure to ensure the well-being of people is an indication of bad governance and it is one of the causes of insurrections. The insurrections “constitute obstacles to sustainable peace and development in Nigeria” (Essoh, 2018, pp. 15-16). It therefore becomes imperative for columnists reiterate the importance of good governance.

Responsible commentary in columns has inherent health benefits to the people while irresponsible commentary could lead to armed conflict and

depression especially among male heads of households (Taru, et al., 2018, p. 27).

Although the media have made efforts to promote “peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups in Plateau State” (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012, p. 122), it must be noted that the current pattern of reporting by media organizations in Nigeria can either promote peace or create crises “depending on how the issues are framed and reported” (Suntai & Ishaku, 2017, p. 60). Columnists should therefore help their readers understand issues and curb their violence tendencies (Suntai & Ishaku, 2017, p. 60). This implies that if religious columnists also embrace peace in their narratives, they would set the agenda for peace for their readers and congregations.

It is important to note that “Religion and morality are not synonymous, but two different concepts. Morality does not depend upon religion” (Kanu & Ndubisi, 2017, p. 8). They are however related. For us to facilitate national unity and development, “religious education should be morally and rationally grounded” (Kanu & Ndubisi, 2017, p. 10).

The amount of violence meted out by Muslims and Christians on one another is a contradiction of the fundamental principles of both religions. African traditional religious worshipers are seemingly more peaceful than Christians and Muslims. This can be attributed to the fact that African Traditional Religion “is not competing with other religions... Religious violence has hampered the religions’ role in galvanising resources for nation building in the country (Danjibo & Okolie-Osemene, 2018, p. 189). Nigerian columnists should therefore, preach peaceful co-existence as well as religious tolerance. It is good to state that religious values are “actually in favour of peace. In fact, many religious actors form interreligious networks to directly engage in peace activities” (Basedau, 2017, p. 6). However, politicization of religion and the failure of the state lead to tension in Nigeria (Abiodun, 2016, p. 31).

The media in its reportage of conflict phenomenon in Nigeria like most other conflict prone society is culpable in stoking conflicts and making reconciliation difficult for conflict parties. This indicates that the media and media practitioners have failed to cover and report events ethically.

The media needs to play key roles in peace building in Nigeria. The ability and potential to promote peace in Nigeria is perennially inherent in the Nigerian media. However, there is a need to merge media ethics and peace journalism in the process of conflict reporting in Nigeria. This, hopefully, “will help the

media in turbulent systems avoid the pitfalls of propaganda which is likely to escalate conflict in the society” (Akpan, Ering, & Olofu-Adeoye, 2013, p. 2286). The media often throw caution to the wind in their quest to be the first to carry a newsbreak. They would do better to seek “to be the first to report or leak information, rather than being the first to leak or report facts, accurately, for public good and public safety” (Pate & Dauda, p. 224). Newspaper columnists can also do well by eschewing prejudicial stereotypes about groups and individuals and reporting representing issues out of contexts. Columnists “use their privileged position and privileged information to mobilize the citizens towards their preferred balance of power (Onifade, 2016, pp. 89-90) which could be in favour of their ethnic, religious, or social group.

Methodology

The method of study is Critical Discourse Analysis. The weekly entries of two columnists (one from Media Trust Limited and another from Guardian newspaper) from January to December 2018 were considered.

Population and Sample of the Study

There were fifty-two (52) entries from Muhammed Ndagi within the period while there were twenty-five (25) entries from Etim Ekong within the same period under review. This gives us a cumulative population of seventy-seven (77) entries. All the editorial pieces written by both columnists cannot be analysed due to the nature of the methodology adopted for the study. To this end, two national newspapers were selected for the study. They are *Trust* newspaper from the northern part of Nigeria and *Guardian* newspaper from the south. One faith-based columnist was selected from each paper and two editorial pieces were selected from the writings of each columnists. The four editorial contributions were purposively selected for because they critically treated issues of national development from the perspective of faith and ethnicity. This means that they can be easily understood by adherents of other faiths because the content of the pieces are not esoteric. It is important to stress that faith and ethnicity are divisive concepts in human relations.

Analysis of Muhammed Ndagi's *Philosofaith*

Two pieces were selected from Muhammed Ndagi's column *Philosofaith*. The entries were selected based their slight departure from the regular pattern of the column. The column usually discusses Islamic principles from a

philosophical perspective. However, the columnists veers out occasionally to critique the actions of the political, religious, economic and intellectual elites.

T. Y. Danjuma's unfortunate idioms

Muhammed Ndagi's first piece under examination here is titled "T.Y. Danjuma's Unfortunate Idioms". The piece discusses the reaction of former Defence Minister, General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma to the killing of Nigerians in Taraba and Benue states by bandits. The retired general had accused the Nigerian military of colluding with the bandits and consequently called on the people to take up arms and defend themselves from the bandits since the government could not protect them. The title of the piece reflects the position of the author on the issue under discourse. He regards the position of the elder statesman as "unfortunate".

The open outburst at a public function in Jalingo last week Saturday March 24, 2018 by Lieutenant General Theophilus Yakubu (TY) Danjuma (retired) was very un-statesmanlike of a former General Officer Commanding (GOC) 3 Division of the Nigerian Army, a former Chief of Army Staff and a former Minister of Defence. Most Nigerians find General Danjuma's reckless allegation against the military worrisome because it borders on national security. The seeditious lyrics in his call for self-defence are equally too serious to be ignored.

In the opening paragraph which is reproduced above, the author uses a number of uncomplimentary words and phrases to qualify the retired General and his message. To have an open outburst at a public function is unflattering of anybody least of all an elder statesman. In the same sentence, the author concludes that the action of General Danjuma is unstatesmanlike. He dismisses the allegations as reckless and seeditious. Mohammed Ndagi fails to acknowledge the realities surrounding the daily existence of the people Traba state at that time. He also did not acknowledge the failure of the Nigerian military and the Nigerian police to protect the lives and properties of the people if the state.

Speaking at the maiden convocation ceremony of the Taraba State University, Jalingo, General Danjuma urged Nigerians to defend themselves against killers in the country because the armed forces collude with the bandits. Danjuma chose to mention bandits in place of herdsmen, possibly to

demonstrate his knowledge of paronomasia. Talking with tongue in cheek ... in the presence of young university students.

In the extract above, the author accused the elder statesman of playing on words for his use of the word “bandit” to qualify the killers instead of following the bandwagon of classifying them as “Fulani Herdsmen”. The writer ought to give credit to display of military/security knowledge by the retired general in his choice of words rather than castigate him for doing the right thing. The author also questions the platform used for the dissemination of the message (a university’s convocation ceremony) because it could radicalize the impressionable undergraduates at the event. However, it must be said that the killers do not discriminate in their killings. Young, old, male, female, educated and illiterates were killed in varying proportions. The former minister was also accused by the author of speaking with “tongue in cheek”. This is a mild way of calling the old man a liar. This is improper in African cultures.

Nigeria’s Defence Minister, Mansur Dan Ali, said the call by TY Danjuma on the people of Taraba State to take up arms and defend themselves is an invitation to anarchy. Mansur said “The Nigerian Armed Forces is well organized and highly professional in discharging its constitutional mandate”. He thus urged anyone who has any evidence of wrongdoings or dereliction of duty against the troops to tender such for necessary action

In a bid to reduce the gravity of the General Danjuma’s allegations, the author reiterated the position of the current Minister for Defence, General Mansur Dan Ali (Retired) that his former boss’ call was an open invitation to anarchy. He alluded to the lack of evidence against the complicity of the army in the killings since the current minister has called on anyone with any evidence of wrongdoings by Nigerian troops to step forward and present same to the authorities for appropriate action. This allusion to the lack of evidence is quite misleading because no professional army would leave traces of grave illegalities in its wake. Anyone who attempts to record such atrocities would be brutalized and the evidences would be destroyed. The lack of evidence does not exonerate the army from its failure to protect the lives and properties of the people.

The prime message in General Danjuma’s implied idioms is the insinuation that the killings in Taraba and other riverine states in the middle belt region of the country failed to cease because the military has taken side with

suspected killer herdsmen. Further interpretation of T Y Danjuma's hypothesis would simply infer that suicide attacks and abduction of school girls by insurgents have not stopped in some north eastern states of Nigeria because, according to TY Danjuma, "the military provides cover for the insurgents".

In the extract above, the author compares the killings in Taraba state to those in Plateau and Benue states as well as the suicide attacks and abductions taking place in the some other states in the north-east geo-political zone. This is a clear attempt to reduce the merits of the concerns of the General Danjuma and his people. It is important to stress that no two cases are the same. The situation in Borno state is akin to a war, while the killings in the middle-belt are ethnic with economic motives. However, it must be said that the Nigerian military and the police have not done enough to protect the lives of these people irrespective of their locations, ethnicity or commercial interests. A proactive military would gather adequate intelligence and nip these threats in the bud before they see the light of day.

The Wukari-born army General turned theorist was in some way speaking inferred idioms. An idiom is one of the many literary devices referred to as figurative expressions. Figurative expressions could come in various forms including simile (called tashbih in Arabic), metaphor (majaz in Arabic) and circumlocution (itnab in Arabic). These and other stylistic techniques such as homonyms (jinas in Arabic), oxymoron (tibaq in Arabic), metonymy (kinayah in Arabic) and paronomasia (tauriyyah in Arabic) all combine to form the subject matter of Arabic rhetoric. An idiom, in specific terms, is an expression that has figurative meaning which is unrelated to the meaning of the phrase or sentence articulated

The author plays the ethnic and religious card in the extract above. He attempts to establish the emotional ties which binds General Danjuma to the issue, thus suggesting that the elder statesman cannot be objective in the discourse. He identified Wukari as the hometown of the former Chief of Army Staff. It is also good to note that Wukari has more Christian indigenes and residents and Taraba has more Christians than Muslims. The author also reveals his own religious bias through his exhibition of his knowledge of Arabic literature and stylistics.

Indeed, T Y Danjuma's igniting statements were his own circuitous way of expressing his hatred in idioms for President Muhammadu Buhari and his

administration. Others including two former Heads of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo and General Ibrahim Babangida have their peculiar ways of disclosing their ill feelings against President Buhari. While Obasanjo as a professional letter-writer would write open letters, Babangida would choose to issue a statement designed to be refuted afterwards.

The political preference of the author Moahammed Ndagi comes to the fore in the extract above. He alludes to a gang up of former leading players in Nigerian politics against the current president of Nigeria. He sums of the trio of General T. Y. Danjuma, President Olusegun Obasanjo and former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida as distractors of the Muhammadu Buhari administration. He argues that General Danjuma indirectly expressed his hatred for President Muhammadu Buhari in his speech at the convocation held at Taraba State University. This is short of calling the old man a coward. He also suggests that Generals Obsanjo and Babangida lack the bravery to confront President Buhari on issues of national importance, rather they resort to writing open letters and issuing refutable public statements on national issues respectively. One of the insinuations deductible from the narrative is that the current administration is doing a great job and the former leaders are out to sabotage the efforts of the present government.

The discontent currently being voiced by these army Generals could be out of their failure to intimidate President Buhari to play their respective but self-serving scripts. Their individual comments, given their respective approaches, must have sprout from motives other than constructive criticisms. They each, I guess, have access to President Buhari by which they could draw his attention to certain things they find detrimental to the collective interest of Nigerians. General Danjuma is currently the Executive Chairman, Presidential Committee on North-East Initiative (PCNI). Well, as Nigeria's President, Buhari isn't the first to come under damning condemnations from former leaders or statesmen. When General Babangida was serving as Military President, Obasanjo maintained that IBB was so distrustful that if he said 'Good Morning', you had to look out (of the window) to know whether it was actually morning or evening.

From the extract above, the columnist portrays Generals Danjuma, Obasanjo and Babangida as selfish bullies and raging bulls in a china shop. He suggests that they have selfish motives for criticising the policies of the present government. Although the primary person of interest in the column is General

T.Y. Danjuma, the columnist dragged in two former presidents Generals Obasanjo and Babangida. The author rightly thinks that the three generals should have direct access to President Muhammadu Buhari and should raise their concerns on national issues with him personally instead of using public fora. However, the author has not taken into cognisance the possibility of President Buhari ignoring the advice or dismissing the concerns of his former colleagues. If the retired leaders keep their concerns private, Nigerians would be quick to accuse them of complicity and elite gang up at the detriment of the masses. It is on record that president Obasanjo had told his Special Advisers that he had a right to reject their counsels and also advise or guide them in the conduct of their official duties. This shows that these leaders are not be open to alternate ideas.

The columnist also attempts to ridicule the former leaders by bringing up a statement credited to General Obasanjo on General Babangida. While the ability of Babangida to keep his words may be questioned, it is important to note that Obasanjo has never shirked from holding his successors to account on national issues. That they have collectively demanded a better deal for the people of Nigeria should be commended and not condemned. Besides, these men have known each other for over fifty years and having divergent opinions on national issues should not be seen as hatred.

In spite of General Danjuma's past military records and public perception (which he is attempting to ruin), it is important for relevant security agencies to interrogate him over those un-elderly remarks. While some writers have referred to him as "master of the gaffe", others are calling for the examination of his medulla oblongata, considering his advancement in age. T Y Danjuma's recent idioms define him better as dcnomaniacor polemomaniac. May Allah (SWT) make our end on this earth a good one, amin.

The extract above shows that General Danjuma was an accomplished military officer. The author however, thinks General Danjuma's nationalist credentials and reputation can be undone by his call for his people to arm themselves against those who attack them. The columnist calls on security agencies to interrogate the elder statesman for making what the author considers un-elderly remarks. He also questions the state of mind of the senior citizen calling for an examination of his brain.

Short-changing Arewa applicants in the N-Power programme

The second selection from Muhammed Ndagi examines the shortcomings of the federal government's empowerment scheme which is titled "N-Power". The programme is aimed at alleviating the economic challenges of young unemployed graduates. It offers them the opportunity work in the education, health or agricultural sectors with a monthly stipend. However, there have been allegations of corruption in the process. The title of the piece shows the geographical allegiance of the columnist. It shows that the writer believes the people of his region (Northern Nigeria) have been short-changed in the scheme.

It would be recalled that allegations of irregularities trailed the first batch of 200,000 volunteers of N-Power recruited in 2016. The most critical of the accusations was the one which claimed that most of the names that appeared on the list of N-Power intakes for some states and Local Government Areas (LGAs) did not reflect the demographic traits of such areas. An obvious example of this was the case of Abadan LGA in Borno state where it was reported that over 90 percent of candidates taken from the area had names that did not resemble those of the indigenes of Abadan LGA.

The extract above represents the opinion of some people that the *N-Power* scheme is fraught with irregularities and corrupt practices. The columnist considers the inclusion of names of candidates with ancestors from other states on the list as the most critical anomaly in the *N-Power* scheme. This position of Professor Ndagi indicates that he believes that people of other ethnic groups living in Borno should go to their ancestral states if they must benefit from the empowerment scheme. This is without consideration to the fact that many of them were born in Borno state and only visit their "states of origin" once in a year. The fact that Borno state is an educationally less developed state (Musari, 2016). If the state is educationally less developed, then the formally educated ones are likely to be absorbed into the state's workforce. With the politicization of human capital development in Nigeria, the educated non-indigenes in the state would be left out of government employment. Interestingly, these non-indigenes contribute to the economy of the state in other ways.

As one of the LGAs that severely suffered Boko Haram attacks in Borno state, indigenes of the area became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) either in Maiduguri or neighbouring Niger Republic at the time the online recruitment

in to the N-Power scheme was carried out. Surprisingly, names like Adebayo, Oyebisi, Onilola and Okechukwu appeared on the N-Power list for Abadan LGA. The question asked by many at that time was: “If the indigenes of Abadan LGA were IDPs outside their birthplaces, how come did non-indigenes stay back to fill forms online from Abadan where internet services were then non-existent?”

The columnist hit the bull’s eye in the extract above. He alleges that Nigerians of Yoruba and Igbo extraction dominate the *N-Power* list in Abadan Local Government Area. The empowerment scheme is meant for citizens of Nigeria irrespective of their location or state of origin. It is important to draw the similarity between the N-Power scheme and the National Youth Service Corps scheme. A random visit to any primary or secondary school in the north would reveal an overwhelming presence of corps members from the southern region on the teaching staff. In some schools, the corps members on ground are greater in number than the teachers fully employed by the governments in the schools. The same trend is not obtainable in primary and secondary schools in the southern part of the country. If the indigenes of the state are not qualified to fill the teaching vacancies in the state’s teaching service, then they cannot fill the *N-Power* slots in the state.

Agaie, as an emirate and as a LGA; is a typical Nupe community in north central Nigeria with a culture similar to what obtains among Hausa populations of northern Nigeria. The recent list of the second batch of beneficiaries displayed at the National Orientation Agency office in Agaie is a classic example of “name padding” in the N-Power scheme. It is amazing that the list of 400 names for Agaie LGA is full of identities of persons from the south-east, south-south and south-west regions of Nigeria as if Nupe natives from Agaie LGA never applied for mobilization in to the N-Power scheme. I know of tens of applicants from this area who applied but were not enlisted. The extract above echoes the sentiment raised in the preceding paragraph. The author admits that the culture of the Nupe is similar to that of the Hausa people. If they are similar, then the influx of non-indigenes is inevitable.

Predictably but sadly, the list of intakes for LGAs in the southern states of the country are unlikely to be doctored to consist of names that depict northern identity such as Garba, Asmau, Kolo, Tsigu, Hadiza, Abdullahi, Gana and Zainab. While names such as Kenneth, Chioma and Olufemi appeared on the N-Power list of their indigenous LGAs, the same names are also smuggled to

come up where they do not demographically belong; displacing other names from their respective natural environments.

In the extract above, Professor Ndagi regrets the likely absence of northern names on the *N-Power* list of southern Nigerian states. He alleged that the southern names have been smuggled to the north where they do not demographically belong to displace other names from their natural habitats. As a former secondary school teacher and a current university professor, the columnist should know that there is a dearth of qualified teachers especially in the northern region. It is for this reason that all the states in the region are classified as “Educationally Less-Developed States” and consequently giving preferential treatment in school enrolment at all levels. On the other hand, over eighty percent of the states in southern Nigeria are considered educationally advanced.

Analysis of Etim Ekong’s Discourse on Development

The second columnist whose works are examined by this study is Etim Ekong who is a Christian clergyman. Two of his pieces are selected for their focus on social and political issues. The discourses employed in them are examined below.

Role of Social Ministry in the Church

The article emphasizes the importance of social satisfaction in the quest for life hereafter. It suggests that social needs are as important as religious needs and people are likely to worship God if their social needs are taken care of.

The truth that there is one God and also equality in God’s economy of creation cannot be over-emphasised ... Social Ministry should, therefore, be given a priority attention in Christian churches. Feeding the poor, the beggars, people of all faiths, members and non- members in churches after services could be a ministry to be undertaken by the Church. In this way, the Church can serve as a place for devotional prayers and worship, as well as a centre that meets Christian religious and social needs.

The extract above is the opening paragraph of the article. It emphasizes that God is one and human beings are created equally. It suggests that spirituality is not enough and Christians should engage in social ministrations through the provision of food and other social amenities to the poor irrespective of their faiths or denominations. This is a prelude to drawing them closer to minister

to their religious needs. When but social and religious needs are met at a particular place, there is a tendency to always return to that centre in future. Aside visiting the sick, the Church should not grow weary of opening medical centres, orphanages and other charities. Another area that calls for concern in the Church is how to address systemic injustices of human society. This could be done by way of personal example and the Church as a body having a voice when need arises. Our evangelical zeal should be harnessed to a passion for social outreach. This will make the Church's mission to be holistic.

The author recommends that churches should maintain their current efforts at visiting hospitals and homes to pray for those who are physically ailing. He also acknowledges the effort of some churches at providing medical and charitable services to those in need especially orphans. He then urged them not to rest on their oars. He identified social injustice as a fundamental problem which has led many away from God's path and into wicked deeds. It is on record that there are more awaiting trial inmates than convicted criminals in our prisons. Many of those inmates have spent more than the punitive duration of their alleged offences awaiting trial. Many are also innocent of the crimes they are tried for. Such innocent people have the tendency to lose faith in the justice system and consequently turn to crime on a full scale when they obtain their release. It is therefore a duty for Christians to tackle the decay in the justice system and cushion the negative effects of the flaws in the justice system on the people.

Faith and works must go together for effective Christian ministry. We need to protect one another's interest, fighting for common good of the entire humanity. In Ephesians 6:11-18, Christians are asked to put on the whole armour of God. This equally is in recognition of the evils in the world. We may not need the worldly sword, but if we see ourselves as one, we can fight against all forces of oppressions and all things that tend to take away human dignity.

The extract above shows the importance of works in faith. Faith is never enough; it needs to be backed by deeds. In our deed, we must fight and be seen to be fighting for the common good of mankind irrespective of religion, ethnicity, social status or ideology. This is the path to effective Christian ministry. The author stresses the importance of unity among believers in the fight against the forces of evil. Unity is a prerequisite for victory in the battle

between good and evil. He backs up his claim with a biblical injunction from the book of Ephesians.

It is pertinent to give “two notable examples of those who combined evangelical zeal with social outreach” (Meadows, 2010). Hugh Price Hughes (1847-1902) related Christian faith to its social context in a fusion of the holiness movement with radical discipleship and the “Non-conformist conscience.” He was a Co-founder of the National Council of Free Churches whose aims were: (a) Tackling social evils like alcoholism, gambling and violence; and (b) deepening the spiritual life of churches, as the source and goal of this work. Hughes was also a founder of the Forward Movement, which planted 40 “city missions” or centres of evangelistic and social outreach in the most deprived areas of inner city life.

The author identified two people who successfully merged evangelical zeal with social outreach. The achievements of Hugh Price Hughes were outlined by the columnist in the extract above. The achievements of the evangelist remain outstanding even though he died over a century ago. The activities which he engaged in are still fundamental in contemporary Christendom. If they are tough tasks in today’s technology-driven world, then they must have been impossible tasks in the nineteenth century when Hugh Price Hughes lived.

Meadows also show how Donald Soper (1903-1998) became a leading exponent of “social evangelism,” which uses political action as a means of holding Government accountable to the gospel. He was seen to be theologically liberal and politically social. Soper was founder of the Order of Christian Witness, which held campaigns in urban centres, often concluding with a call to the cause of radical discipleship.

The extract above is dedicated to Donald Soper, the second exponent of social evangelism whose model of operation was to use political action to make the government accountable to the gospel and ultimately the people. The accomplishments of Donald Soper shows that religion can be a tool political and social engineering if it is liberalized.

We can, therefore, say that ministry is not narrowed down to an activity of making individuals new creatures, of providing them with blessed assurance, but involves making believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognise injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside (cf. Matt. 11:2-5). Social ministry, if used

wisely, could be a tool for effective evangelistic mission. Aside meeting people's physical needs, it could open door to sharing the good news of the kingdom. It has a role in a Church's overall community service. Through this medium, Christians can "express their faith and love for God and man by serving those in need" (Rothra, 2015). It is indeed needs-meeting ministry. The extract above is the concluding paragraph of the article. It drives home the essence of the article. While acknowledging the importance spiritual rebirth, the writer explained that spiritual rebirth would be an exercise in futility if the Christians are insensitive to the needs of others. Spiritual rebirth should also open their eyes to the suffering, injustice and oppression permeating the land. If Christians become empathetic with the suffering of people irrespective of religion or denomination, and move to solve some of their problems, they would be seen to be involved in social ministry and this has the capacity to spread the fire of evangelism. If we cannot show love to humans whom we can see, then we cannot claim to love God whom we cannot see.

A leader after God's own heart

This piece dwells on the issue of national political leadership. It suggests that leadership is a divine concept which must be attained through divine intervention.

Our focus will be on 1 Samuel 16:12b -13. "And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him; for this is the one..." What we have to note in this Text is that a leader after God's own heart is a one, whose election or appointment into office is acceptable to God. Such leader is not elected or appointed based on human wisdom. Saul was tall and handsome; he was an impressive looking man. Samuel might have been trying to find someone who looked like Saul to be Israel's next king.

The extract above is a biblical evidence that God plays a role in the selection of leaders for His people. This suggests that when men exclude God from the election, selection or appointment of their leaders, they are likely to have bad leaders. The author believes that human wisdom is not enough in the selection of a leader. However, from human experience, we can safely conclude that the most advanced societies have successfully separated the state from religion. Most of them are officially non-religious but they have greatly expanded the boundaries of human development. Countries like,

Sweden, Norway, Canada, Finland and China are some of those who have advanced without being overtly religious. On the other hand, overtly religious countries like Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, and Afghanistan, are battling with the scourge of underdevelopment.

We can then safely say that a leader after God's heart is one who respects humanity and seeks to make life better for the least of his/her people and not necessarily the most prayerful.

Samuel looked at Eliab and said, "Surely, the Lord's anointed is before Him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:6-7).

The extract above shows the difference between human and divine perspectives on leadership. Samuel, a legendary prophet, in his human nature felt he had seen the chosen one in Eliab but God told him that he (Samuel) was wrong in his assessment because the heart of Eliab was not right for the task at hand. This situation is applicable to us in Nigeria most times, we elect and appoint people to offices based on appearance alone and not what they could offer to the development needs of our people. Looks can indeed be very deceptive.

A leader after God's own heart must be a leader filled with the Holy Spirit. He must be a leader with a tenderness of spirit. This is the type of leader we need in Nigeria today; a leader that is not tribalistic or a religious bigot. Such leader must be courageous and full of wisdom. He must be faithful, even in small things. He must live his or her life to please God and not human beings. He must not be hard and self-serving. He must not be a pretender (hypocrite).

The columnist gave some qualities which a good leader must possess. A good leader must be tender at heart or compassionate. A good leader in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like Nigeria must eschew tribalism and religious bigotry. This is important because over the years successive leaders across different levels often surround themselves primarily with people from their ethnic and religious groups. Except for the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, no civilian president has appointed people from opposition parties into their governments. A true leader must therefore be able to rise above ethnic, religious, ideological and party sentiments in the quest to serve the people.

A good leader must be faithful at all times; little promises must be kept at all times. The leader must put the people first and himself or herself last. It is good to note that Nigeria lacks selfless people in positions of authority. Most of our political leaders emerge from public office richer than they went in there. They maximize the opportunity to amass fortunes for themselves while the people become poorer by the day.

God commanded King Saul to destroy the Amalekites and everything they owned – nothing was to be spared. Saul was greedy. He disobeyed God by sparing Agag, King of the Amalekites, and took for himself the best of their livestock. A leader who is greedy is not fit to rule his people. But a leader after God's own heart commits himself or herself to obeying the commands of God. When Samuel confronted Saul about his disobedience, he offered the lame excuse that he intended to sacrifice the livestock to the Lord. Sometimes, we commit sins and then think we can blindfold God with our gifts. "To obey is better than sacrifice..." (1Samuel 15:22-23). This led to Saul's rejection.

The extract above suggests that a good leader must be obedient at all times. He/she must obey the constitution and the people at all times. It must be said that most leaders in developing countries do not obey the constitution and they do not respect the people. They use their leadership positions to trample upon the freedom of the people. In their greed, they amass wealth and turn around to give expensive gifts to some religious leaders and go to pray Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina. They believe that their sins would be forgiven if they carry out some random acts of kindness.

When Saul was rejected, David was anointed to be the new king. ..God saw the heart of this young man, and knew that His people needed a leader with a tender Spirit.

David, by God's providence might have become a warrior, but gentleness was his defining trait. This is the type of leader we need in our Nation, irrespective of religious inclination.

The extract above emphasizes the importance of a gentle and tender heart in political leadership. The haughtiness of Saul led to his rejection by God and the people. David was then anointed in place of Saul for his tenderness of heart. The columnist calls for the emergence of leaders like David for the Nigerian project. This call is without prejudice to the religious or ethnic background of the leader. It suggests that the columnist, Etim Ekong, is not a

religious fanatic even though he is a Christian clergyman. He has displayed understanding and tolerance for other religious groups in his writing.

Our leaders should stop misuse of power and authority given to them. Whatever position we hold, God is watching us. One day, we shall give an account. And one day, we shall leave that office. If you are a leader, what legacy will you leave behind? Posterity will use this to judge you. Are you a leader after God's own heart?

The extract above is the concluding paragraph of the article. The columnist charge Nigerian leaders to stop the abuse of the power and authority bequeathed to them by the people. He reminds them that they would give account of their stewardship to God and the people. Since most of them are either Christians or Muslims, they believe in life after death and they would give account to God even if they die in office. For those who do not believe in life after death, they would leave their highly protected offices one day and they would either return to live among their people or run into them periodically across the world.

Whichever scenario plays out, the question is "how do we want to be remembered when we are no more?" This question is applicable to all of us whether we are political, economic, intellectual, cultural, traditional, or opinion leaders.

Conclusion

The general deduction from the analysis of the narratives employed by Mohammed Ndagi is that he is opposed to the person of General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma and the ideals which he represents. The analysis lacked the faith principles of love, understanding, empathy, respect and compassion. The choice of expressions also shows that the columnist thinks little of other tribes or faiths. It is important to note that none of the positions taken by the columnist was backed by evidence from the holy book of Islam (which is the faith of the columnist). Interestingly, the generic title of his column is "Philosofaith" which indicates that he merges philosophy and religion in his writings.

His discourse on the on the N-Power scheme also shows that the professor of linguistics is a sectional advocate. His analysis fails to veil his contempt for southern Nigerians irrespective of their contributions to the development of northern Nigeria. The principles of faith, like tolerance, cooperation,

communalism and others were not applied by Professor Ndagi in the two entries under review.

From the analysis of the narratives employed by Etim Ekong in his pieces, there is a projection of love for all irrespective of religious or ideological leaning. The author applied reflected faith principles in his promotion of social ministry. Love, tolerance, compassion, forgiveness among other principles are evident in his writing. He also called for the emergence of God-fearing leaders in Nigeria irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliation.

It must be noted that positive national development would be difficult to achieve if more columnists employ the approach used by Mohammed Ndagi. This is because there would be more name-calling and finger-pointing and precious time would be lost trading blame instead of working together for our collective benefits.

Recommendations

Columnists should eschew sectionalism and embrace patriotism. They should appreciate the potential powers which they wield over their readers and wake up to the responsibilities which are inherent in the powers. There is a need for periodic training of columnists and other media workers “in the area of development communication” (Nwabueze, 2005, p. 7).

Columnists should dwell on the similarities between Christianity and Islam instead of the differences. They should also understand that power comes with responsibilities and they are going to give account of their stewardships in the life hereafter as contained in their respective holy books.

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