

AN APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD IN NIGERIA

Osamolu Titilayo Fehintolu and Atuluku John

Abstract

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the Pentecostal Churches that is growing fast in Nigeria. It was founded by the Late Pastor Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi in 1952. He was succeeded by Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye; a former Lecturer at the University of Lagos after the demise of the founder in 1981. The Church has witnessed tremendous growth and expansion within Nigeria, Africa, Asia, United States of America and Europe etc in the last three decades. The primary goal of the Church, right from the time of its inception, has been the propagation of the gospel. She has also been concerned with the wellbeing of her members. However her concerns in recent times have gone beyond the narrow confines of the wellbeing of her members to embrace the larger society. To meet up with her concern for the larger society, RCCG has created agencies and arms involved in various aspects of development needs spanning various sectors, such as education, health, housing, care for the poor, conscience formation, as well as other social and political needs of Nigeria. This paper therefore highlighted some of the contributions of the Church which has transformed the Religious, Educational, Political, Infrastructural and Economic sectors in Nigerian Society. The paper also discusses the rapid multiplication of RCCG and highlighted the problems associated with this rapid multiplication and the church's contemporary measures to address these problems. For this research, the historical research method and field research method were used.

Key Words: The Church, National Development.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the fastest growing Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria in the 21st century. The objective of this paper therefore is to examine the contributions of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to National development within the years of its existence in the country.

In this paper, the term Pentecostal Church shall be used interchangeably with the term New Religious Movement. The Pentecostal Churches have been defined by various scholars of Religion. For example, Burgess (2008) opined thus "Pentecostalism is an umbrella term for African Movements and Churches which stress the experience of the Spirit". Ojo (2010) said that "the Churches share common phenomena through literature, crusades, camp meeting and rely on the "new birth" and the power of the Holy Spirit". Owoye (2011) believes that Pentecostal Churches are Churches that emphasize the working of the Spirit in the Church, especially with ecstatic phenomena like prophecy and speaking in tongues, healing and exorcism. RCCG shares all the above features as a Pentecostal Church.

There is a phenomenon going on in the world in recent times that has caught the attention of scholars: the amazing growth of the Pentecostal movement worldwide. The factors responsible for the Pentecostal movements that makes it more astonishing is that so many movements especially in Christianity had arisen in the past and they gradually fizzled out, but the Pentecostal movement which started like the proverbial mustard seed which Jesus said is the smallest of all grains, but when it grows up it becomes a big and mighty tree that provides protection for the way faring man and the birds of the firmament nest in it (Mt. 13:3-32), has continued to grow despite oppositions and persecution faced. It is in view of this fact that this paper attempts to examine the rapid growth of RCCG and her contributions to National development within the years of its existence in the country.

Definition of Terms

The Church: The Church has had a dynamic image. In Latin, the early Fathers of the Church referred to it as the *Ecclesia* ‘the called out ones’. From this perspective it is understood why the Church is spoken of as ‘the elect’, ‘the saints’ and that is why Jesus asked Peter to ‘build my Church’ (Mt 16:18). In the early Church, they were referred to as ‘the people of God’ or ‘the Church of God’. St Paul speaks of the Church as the fullness of Christ and of fellowship (Ephesians 3:19). He also speaks of the Church as a mystery and sacrament of salvation (Eph 3:4). The Church therefore is understood here as the whole body of Christian believers or any division of this body in professing the same creed and acknowledging the same ecclesiastical authority. For the purpose of this study, the Church whose contribution to national development is examined is the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

National Development: Development has been defined in various ways depending on the aspects from which people view it. The various aspects of the development of a nation state include political development, social development, economic development, industrial development, and human resource development. There are various aspects to what constitutes development, however common to all these are a positive change in human wellbeing. It is understood as a long-term improvement in the standard of living, as felt and judged to be by most of the people in the country. In the past, discussions and commentaries on development easily tended to be developed by economists who saw it primarily from the perspective of economic growth. In that context, so long as the monetary value of goods and services (Gross Domestic Product) increased yearly, there was development. From the foregoing, it is obvious that there could be an economic growth, but not development, that is, if the majority of the people did not benefit from it (Nwajiuba (1999). Development thus goes beyond the narrow lines of economic and material advancement. It is all encompassing. To this extent, national development according to Onimhawo and Ottuh (2006) implies economic growth, scientific and technological growth, socio-economic transformation and better still, distributive justice. To them, development is a process of social change for the better.

Research Methodology

The method adopted to collect relevant data for this research is the historical and field research method. The historical approach becomes necessary as this paper examines the contributions of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to the social, economic, political and religious development of Nigeria. Historical methodology gives us the opportunity to contextualize the beliefs, practices, objects and symbolic forms in their social context noting their changes and transformation over the years (Adogbo, 2003). According to Olayiwola (2007), Historical research is a method of reconstructing past events based on systematic and objective information or data derived from valid and reliable sources. It involves understanding past events or occurrences. It is concerned with critical description and analysis of past events mainly for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the present. Field research involved the use of observation which was both participatory and non-participatory, interviews and informal discussion.

Theoretical Framework

Religion has to do with its function in the society; hence the sociological theory of Emile Durkheim is relevant in this work. He said “A man does not recognize himself, he feels himself transformed and consequently he transforms the environments which surround him” (Adogbo, (2003). Dzurgba(2009) also asserted that “Durkheim showed how religious beliefs and practices had shaped the course of human civilizations and social life”. Thus, he referred to his social theory of religion as functionalism”. The theoretical framework of Edmund Husserl on phenomenology as a “descriptive science” which seeks to unfold the archaeological realities of the objects, beliefs and practices under study without presuppositions” (Adogbo, (2003) is also relevant in this study. The above sociological frameworks are important in the study of the contributions of the RCCG to National Development in Nigeria. This is evident in the fact that the RCCG has positively affected the Social life of many people in

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Nigeria in particular and the impact of the Church is also felt on the lives of many people in other countries of the world.

The Contributions of RCCG to National Development in Nigeria

According to Ojo (2010) “Charismatic organizations are nevertheless significant because they are concentrated in a highly articulated and highly prestigious group of people. In addition, they are led by the educated elite, which though small in number, exert considerable influence in the society” This statement is a true reflection of the contributions of the RCCG to National Development in Nigeria. The RCCG has become a Church to be reckoned with among the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria in the 21st century. This section of shall examine the religious, political and socio-economic impact of the church to National development.

The Church and Educational Development

The Church has made great contributions in the area of education in Nigeria. There are many mission schools, nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions that produce quality graduates to serve the nation. This is about the greatest contribution of the Church to development, because the greatest engine to growth and development of any economy is human capital development. According to Omotoye (2006), one of the major strategies of conversion by the Christian missionaries since 19th century was the introduction of Western education in Nigeria. The Mainline churches like the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and the Roman Catholic established Primary, Secondary and of recent Universities in the different parts of the country. The Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria are not left out in making their impact felt in this regard. The Redeemer’s University was established at the International headquarters of the Church at Mowe, Lagos-Ibadan express way in 2003. Many Nigerians who have been yearning for admission into Federal and State Universities without any success are opportune in this regard. The Church has also established Primary and Secondary schools in the nooks and crannies of the country. Some of these schools are located in almost all the states of the Federation and the Federal capital territory, Abuja. As of 2012, eighty-nine Nursery and Primary schools and eighteen Secondary schools were established in the nooks and crannies of the country by RCCG. (Omotoye, 2012).

Apart from the Secular education provided by the church, a significant effort has also been made in the growth and development of Theological Education in Nigeria. Theological education is to equip the Christians in the word of God. The Church established the Redeemed Christian Bible College(RCBC) in 1980 at Ebute-Metta, Lagos before it was transferred to its permanent site at Lagos-Ibadan Express road. The RCBC has become an International school with campuses in other countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom, Israel, Zambia, Kenya, Cote D Ivoire and South Africa etc. (Ayeku 2008). In other words, the activities of the Church are not limited to Nigeria alone.

The Church and Religious Development

One of the focal interests of the RCCG is the propagation of the gospel. Jesus Christ the founder of Christianity commanded His disciples in Matthew 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Pastor E.A. Adeboye introduced the Holy Ghost Congress in Lagos 1986. It is an annual event that is attended from different states of the country and Federal capital territory Abuja. In fact, worshippers attend the programme from Europe, America and other parts of the world. It used to be a week-long event. There is also a monthly Holy Ghost service programme at the International headquarters of the church at Lagos – Ibadan express way (Omotoye ,2012).

According to reports many miracles are recorded at each event monthly and annually. It is interesting to note that many worshippers at the monthly and annual programmes are from the Mainline, Aladura, and other Pentecostal Churches. Our investigation has revealed that people are attracted because

of divine healing. The worshippers are encouraged to run away from sins and have faith in the healing power of Jesus Christ.

One important result of evangelism through healing is the conversion of people of other faiths to Christianity. In fact, majority of the people in RCCG were converted from other religions or other denominations. (Ojo,2012) opines that evangelism “constitutes a work of redemption to loosen humans from the grip of evil spirits, witches, and forces of darkness, enemies, and bad luck, repeated failures which are ever present and prevalent in the African worldview”. Nigeria is a developing country where there is poverty, hunger, un-employment and insecurity. So, in order to overcome some of these social challenges the church is a place of refuge and protection (Omotoye ,2012).

Evangelism is seen as the focal point of the Pentecostal Church. Owoye (2002) quoted W.F.Kumuyi that “Soul Winning is the greatest work you can be involved in. It is the most rewarding enterprise you can undertake. It’s a work that gives joy in this life and brings reward in the world to come”. Apart from the monthly and annual programmes at the International headquarters, Mowe, Ogun State, each parish is encouraged to embark on evangelism. In doing this, the members of the church are to go and preach to people in their environment. Tracts and Magazines are distributed to people they meet on the roads. Revivals and Crusades are also organized in each parish. At times, it may last for three or four days in a week.

Different methods are adopted in drawing the attention of people to such revivals through the printing of hand-bills, radio announcements and postals pasted at strategic places and personal invitation of people. The Church is a member of the Christian Association of Nigeria(CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria(PFN). Pastor Adeboye was once the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (Ayeku, 2008). His charisma has assisted the church in its evangelism within and outside the country. He has assisted in commissioning and praying for many Church founders. He prayed for Bishop David Oyedepo in 1982, Bishop Mike Okonkwo and Pastor Charles Achonwa, the founder and leader of Doulos Ministries, Lagos in 1990. The above Ministers have contributed significantly to the propagation and extension of the gospel in Nigeria (Omotoye 2012).

The Church and Economic Development

In the area of economic development, the Church in many parts of Nigeria has established human development centres and programmes for the acquisition of skills for poverty eradication in the society. The RCCG is involved in alleviating of poverty of its members in particular and Nigerians in general through some economic empowerment. These economic structures are called “the tree of life for the economic healing of the nation” (Ayeku 2008). The above quotation is the motto of the Zion Needs Management, the body in charge of the economic ventures of the church. The Church believes that their members in various businesses must prosper and be fruitful. Business teachings like “Leading a Business for Christ”, “Entrepreneurial Skill Development”, “Turning Failure to Success”, “Building and Managing Resources for Christ” exist in the Church. The Business venture is also into consultancy and business outfits.

Pastor Adeboye also established the Jubilee Development Foundation in 2002, in order to enlighten and mobilize its members for economic empowerment and development. The Church also established Jubilee Co-operative Society, so as to enhance the economic power of the members of the Church. The Church is also in partnership with at least four Community Banks, namely: Haggai Community Bank, New Life Community Bank, Ore-Ofe Community Bank, and Sunrise Community Bank. These Banks are located within the premises of the Redemption camp at Mowe. Other Commercial Banks within the Church camp are ECOBANK, UBA, Stanbic IBTC Bank and Guarantee Trust Bank etc. These Banks are encouraged to give soft loans to the members of the church, most especially those who are small scale business men and women.

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Political Involvement of RCCG in Nigerian Politics

It is observed that the Church leadership is apolitical in partisan politics of the country. However, the Nigerian political leaders (both Christians and Muslims) are seen visiting and seeking the blessings and prayers of Pastor Adeboye. The former President Olusegun Obasanjo was a regular visitor to the Camp, most especially when the Holy Ghost programme is held. After the Presidential election in 1999, Obasanjo invited some Pastors to the Presidential Villa in Abuja for prayers. The invitation was extended to Pastor Adeboye, and which he honoured.

In preparation for the 2011 General elections, Muhammad Buhari, a Muslim also visited Adeboye at the camp. He was accompanied by his Vice-Presidential candidate, Pastor Tunde Bakare with the aim of soliciting for his cooperation and prayers. In fact, President Jonathan Goodluck kept a vigil at the Camp in 2010, so as to seek the blessing and prayer of Pastor Adeboye. The camp has become a regular prayer venue for seeking political victory for Nigerian politicians. It is necessary to note that, he has not made any policy statement on partisan involvement in politics, however, he is always praying for the stability and peace in the country and he always encourage his members to register and exercise their franchise during elections.

Effective Use of Media

The RCCG is one of the Pentecostal Churches that is effectively making use of the media in the propagation of the gospel through the print and electronic in Nigeria. Ojo (2010) said “the relative novelty of its message, increased media attention on its strategy, and the proliferation of a large number of new churches advertising themselves widely in the print and electronic media in a very competitive religious landscape.” Pastor Adeboye is a prolific writer. He has a regular column in the Sunday Tribune, Sunday Guardian and some other Daily Newspapers, Journals and Magazines. The Church has two Television stations currently namely; Dove Media and Redeemed Television Ministry (RTM). Further more, the Church has Daily Devotional called Open Heaven, and other manuals such as; Sunday School Manuals, House Fellowship and Digging Deep manuals, Redemption Testimonies and over hundred books written by the General Over-seer, Pastor E.A Adeboye.

Public Awareness

The Federal Government of Nigeria and Lagos State Government are aware of the charisma of Pastor Adeboye. In this regard he is seen as a man that could assist in the education and effective implementation of some programmes like the eradication of polio, payment of taxes and eradication of Ebola virus and HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country, in view of this, the Government always seeks for his support. For example, the church has a committee known as the Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee (RAPAC). The assignment of the group is to assist the patients medically, pray and meet the needs of the people. The financial needs of the committee are met by the church and appeal is usually made to some International donors like the Red Cross Society, Family Health International and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The committee has a responsibility to encourage the youths to shun sex and say no to pre-marital sex. Regular seminars, symposia, banners and tracts are printed to assist the committee in achieving its programmes.

In the words of Omotoye (2012), Pastor Adeboye is regularly brought on Lagos State Television (LTV) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) emphasizing the importance of HIV test. He therefore encourages all to go for the test. I believe that the Government is using the medium to enlighten and educate the general public on the essence of AIDS test.

Apart from the above, the Church is also assisting in educating Christians in Government on the need for “keep fit” exercise. The workers are regularly involved in this programme during the annual Ministers Conference of the church during which Pastor Adeboye always lead his workers and ministers

on a 8 kilometers trek within the camp. This development has become a regular exercise in the Redemption camp. There is also a programme called Sports festival as part of the interest of the church in the development of Football in particular.

The Government of Lagos state is generating a big sum of its internally generated revenues from taxes, so as to meet the provision of infrastructural facilities for the people. Pastor Adeboye is also assisting the government by appealing to the residents of Lagos to pay their taxes as at when due to the government through recorded radio and television jingles.

The RCCG is a good employer of labour in Nigeria. Looking at the number of thousands of young graduates who are serving as Pastors in RCCG in Nigeria and abroad, there is no doubt that the church is a source of employer to the un-employed youth. In other words, this has reduced un-employment, crimes and youth restiveness in the country.

The Church and Peace

According to Ezenweke and Kanu (2012) the word peace remains a recurring decimal in the Church. Soon after the resurrection, the first blessing that Christ gave his Church was that of peace: —"Peace be with you"(John 14:27). The Redeemed Christian Church of God has in consonance with this event, preached and sought peace all over the world, and especially in the family which is the basis of national and world peace, in the community, in the country and the world at large.

The Church and Morality

The Church is the bearer of the moral conscience of the society. It is the bearer of moral vision and moral force by bringing into the public arena the revealed truth of Christ (Uwalaka 22). It sets standards and preaches the essence of sound morality; through the light which comes to her from the gospel she continues to provide the principles for the correct organization of social life. The virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work, modesty, humility are all beacons of morality preached by the Church. If the Church is able to mould the character of the society, then a good society will emerge which is significant for achieving genuine development. To achieve this, the members of the Church must distance themselves from characters and behaviours that are scandalous and embarrassing (Ezenweke and Kanu 4).

The Church, Social Justice and Humanitarian Service

Social justice and human equality are necessary ingredients for any meaningful development. The Redeemed Christian Church of God as an agent of progress has issued many documents to guide world leaders towards the promotion of social justice. As an expert in humanity, the Church offers by her social doctrine, a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directives for action. In places ravaged by war, hunger, disease and famine, the Church is seen giving a helping hand to victims. There are millions of Church-owned and run orphanages, rehabilitation homes, youth centres and old people's homes.

The Rapid Multiplication of The Redeemed Christian Church Of God

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is reported to be the fastest growing church in terms of church planting, (Ojo, 2010). The present General Overseer of the church, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye is credited for most of the reforms going on in the church. Those reforms introduced by him have been one of the key factors that helped the church to grow rapidly. The first of this reform is the model parish established by him. The model parish system was a departure from the classical Redeemed church which is very "conservative" while the model parishes tend to be a bit liberal especially in accommodating different categories of people.(*The News Magazine* 2002). Those in the highest stratum of the society need to be converted to Christ, Governors, Commissioners and big executives. Adeboye's approach was

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the establishment of the “Christ The Redeemer’s Friend Universal.” This group is made up of those who hold National Certificate in Education, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor of Arts, Masters of Arts/Science, PhDs and Professors. The concept is that the educated Christians elite will not be timid to preach to big shots in the society and then can reason with them on the same frequency. Another factor which aids the rapid expansion of the church is rapid evangelization. This, the church was able to achieve through a programme called “Go-a-fishing.” Every Easter Monday, Boxing Day and few days to Christmas is usually spent by the members to preach the Good News of God’s kingdom. Most often after this programme, a church will be planted in that area. However, it should be noted that it is not only in these two important days that they preach to win converts; they do so virtually on daily basis. (Adesanya, 2011)

Also, the annual “Holy Ghost Congress” organized at the popular Redemption Camp along Lagos-Ibadan expressway normally records millions of worshippers. This new innovation also makes the church not only popular, but also the fastest growing church in Nigeria. The proper administration of the church is also a contributing factor to its rapid expansion. With several thousands of Pastors, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is growing faster. The church really knows how to mobilize its Pastors to plant hundreds of churches in one month.

Environmental Problems Associated With the Rapid Multiplication of Redeemed Christian Church of God

Redeemed Christian Church of God is most likely to be the largest and fastest growing church in Nigeria. However, it is not everything about the church that is being regarded as a success. Unfortunately, many of the parishes at its inception usually made use of hotels, abandoned structures and little available spaces. For example, such development was noticed at Ikere in Ekiti State. The new parish that was established immediately after “Go-a-fishing” moved to an abandoned storey building owned by one Chief Obateru. These structures had been there for a long time, the use which could pose a serious danger for the worshippers peradventure it collapses suddenly. Besides, it is a common sight to see the church pitching its tent at the second or first floor of a residential building and this result to noise pollution.(Adesanya, 2011). All these are just few examples out of many that one sees both at rural and urban areas. Talking about the redemption camp, the location one could say is good and the motive too is also superb. This is because through the programme, many have been healed, delivered from captivity and souls were won to the kingdom of God. But the major problems which have become prominent are the constant traffic jam usually experienced during their programmes. (Monthly Holy Ghost Services, Convention and December Congress). This is noted to constitute environmental problems.

The Church’s’ Contemporary Measures to Address These Problems

Certainly, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is beginning to take environmental responsibilities seriously. The General Overseer of the church, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo announced in October 2009 Holy Ghost Service that preparation will be put in place to reduce the traffic in the year congress (Dec. 14th – 20th 2009). New roads, he promised, would be constructed along Ikorodu for the free flow of vehicles from Lagos to Ibadan. This was done and the congress, as promised, did not create traffic congestion. There was free movement of vehicles from Lagos and other parts of the states in Nigeria. Also, there have been a number of encouragements recently as newly established parishes were given fund to kick off. So, instead of making use of cinema houses, hotels and abandoned structures, funds are being provided for new parishes to buy a land and build their own church. Thirdly, technologies to mitigate or remove noise are being applied in some big parishes of the church mostly in urban areas. Measures are also been taken through Environmental Protection Agency to manage waste in the Redemption Camp during and after the Holy Ghost services, conventions and congresses. However, the above notwithstanding, the church, government and other denominations still have a distinctive contribution to make in environmental sustainability.

Conclusions

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the Pentecostal Churches that has contributed to the religious, political and socio-economic growth of Nigeria. The RCCG has become a Church to be reckoned with among the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria in the 21st century. The Church is reported to be the fastest growing church in terms of Church planting (Ojo, 2010). The present General Overseer of the church, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo is credited for most of the reforms going on in the church. Those reforms introduced by him have been one of the key factors that helped the church to grow rapidly. Also, the charisma of Pastor E. A. Adebayo is an issue that is assisting in the growth of the church. His educational attainment, new innovations and emphasis on divine healing have drawn many people from the Mainline, Aladura and Pentecostal Churches to the RCCG. The impact of the Church in Nigeria cut across different sectors ranging from; Education, Religion, Politics, Economy, Health and Public awareness etc. There is no doubt that the church has contributed immensely to National Development in Nigeria.

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