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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN QUEST FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA

“let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another: let him turn away from evil and do good, let him seek peace and pursue it”.

(ROM. 14:19, 1PETER 3:11)

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Abstract

The New Testament does not give systematic definition of the church but offers a broad spectrum of images that try to introduce us to the reality of the church, both earthly and transcendent, and invite us to embrace reality. Among the most striking images are the church as the people of God as the body of Christ as the temple of the Holy Spirit, where the holiness of God dwells on earth as a communion (nature and mission of the church, 19-24). One of the major distinctive features of the church is its being a sign of peace and reconciliation. In its liturgy the church remembers and represent how God reconciled the world through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the bible is an act of memory of what God has already done for us in Christ's life, death and resurrection. This research using biblical historical method to find and the place of peace in human endeavor and to find out the window on the eschatological hope, that has been promised to us of the bringing together of all things. in the variegated ways this study focuses on the major role of the church on peace and reconciliation. They call us to share this peace with each other and to carry it into the world. Despite our shortcomings and failure as human beings, God's peace can be experienced in the life of individuals, in family, in partnerships, and in community. Peace and church unity. The various images by means of which the New Testament describes church, the (body as temple etc.) unambiguously show that the church cannot be one. This is the reason why divisions within the Christian Community have been perceived as early as the Apostolic times, to be a factor distorting the very character of the church as a sign of peace and reconciliation. This study is focused on the biblical history to find solution of peace using historical research methods.

Introduction

Through the verities and riches of our liturgies, we can discern a thread emphasizing that what was experience in our daily church life ought to be partial, yet real anticipation of the eschatological bring together of all things implemented by God. Thus, liturgically speaking Christian unit is not an optional luxury but a direct implication of peace of God communicated to the church, striving after a new paradigm combining justice and peace, the churches are

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invited to do justice to this interrelatedness of peace and unity, as witnessed in their liturgical practice, through a dynamic of spiritual ecumenism of repentance and conversion of the heart. This dynamic is meant to strengthen/deepen the openness of the churches to the Holy Spirit's gift of reconciliation. As a place in which the Holy Spirit dwells and acts, the church is prophetic in its nature. It has the special vocation of discerning and proclaiming God intention for the world and pointing to how this intention unfolds in concrete action. Accordingly, the churches are called to speak out against injustice, to advocate peace, to show solidarity with the oppressed and to accompany victims. Refusing to condone violence, and following a way of nonviolence indicate how Christians are to respond to a violent world. Jesus met his own violent death with nonviolence, and his way remains the model for Christians to follow in overcoming violence. To be a prophetic sign of peace in a violent world require commitment, courage, and consistency. These are virtues that the churches have not always displaced. Here we must as Christians confess our sins if we are to be credible vessels of the prophetic message entrusted to us. Churches have at times allied themselves so closely with violent policies that they have legitimized them. When the churches have embraced the banner of nationalism or ethnicity and have blessed the oppression and extermination of "enemies" as they have wandered away from their vocation. When they have adopted beliefs that legitimize violence as a way of cleansing the world or as a purported instrument of the wrath of God, they have betrayed their true nature. When they have turned away from suffering, either to seek or protect own prosperity or not to get "involved", they are like those who left the wounded man in this ditch (Luke 10:31 -32). And the very disunity within the churches themselves on center world elements such as the sacraments has undermined the churches' credibility.

Five Detail Definition of Church
The Universal Church

Definition: The Universal Church derives definition from the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. The key verse of this 1 Cor. 12: 13, "by one Spirit we are all baptized into the body". We see from this passage that the church is like physical manifestation of Christ, i.e. his body. Other passage which use the same imagery are Rom. 12:4-5: 1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 27, baptism is automatically a member of the body of Christ.

Definition: Church (or Ekklesia)

Looking at an English dictionary under letter "C", somewhere between "chocolate" and "cider", and you'll find the word "church" is an English term that has many different definitions. In that dictionary, you will probably find five or six different definition for "church". Many of those words are related, which makes this process even harder. What process is that? I'm talking about defining the word "church" as it's used the New Testament. In other words, I'm trying to answer this question: When we read the New Testament and come across the word "Church", what does this word mean? Unfortunately, because of the many definitions of the modern term "church" the meaning of the word when we read it in the New Testament is often muddled. Some of that ambiguity has arisen because the English term "church" did not originate from the Greek term ekklesia that it translates in the New Testament.

The Bible Definition of Church: The Biblical View of Church

If you were to ask people what they think of when they hear the word Church, you would get many differing get many differing responses. Some responses may be accurate and

some may not be accurate. However, most people are surprised dare surprised to learn what is the Bible definition of church and what is the Biblical view of the Church.

The Common Definition of Church

Church is commonly defined as a building used for the public worship (1). However, many people refer to a church as an organization. Examples are the Catholic Church, the Church of England, and the Southern Baptist Church amongst many other. The Bible Definition of Church; The word church in the Bible comes from a Greek word ecclesia, which means a called-out company or assembly. Whatever it is used in the Bible it refers to people. It can be a mob (Acts 19:30-41), the children of Israel (Acts 7:38), and the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 5:25, 32). We see the word church used three different ways: First, as the body of Christ, the church is often defined as a local assembly of group believers (1 Corinthians 1: 2. 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:13). Finally, it is defined as the universal group of all people who have trusted Christ through the ages (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23-27).

Body of Christ

Body of Christ – The Definition

The Body of Christ is a common, yet complex term used in the Christian faith, some may initially think we are talking about the physical body of Christ, as in His human form on earth. But the term 'Body of Christ' actually refers to the members of His church, throughout history. Who or what is the body of Christ? The body of Christ is the Church, made up of all those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Each Christian, then is a part of the body of Christ. The first biblical reference to this body was made by Jesus during the last supper, Mark 14:22 says, 'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying "Take it, this is my body". This symbolic act is the beginning of the communion service which Christians accept as a remembrance that they are a part of the body of Jesus Christ, due to Jesus' death on the cross.

New Testament Definition of the Church

The word "church" as rendered in the New Testament comes from the Greek term ekklesia which is formed from two Greek words meaning "an assembly" and "and "to callout" called out ones "In summary, the New Testament church is a body of believers who have been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). This group of believers or "the body of Christ" began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost through the work of the Holy Spirit and will continue to be formed until the day of Pentecost through the work of the Holy Spirit and will continue to be formed until the day of rapture of the church. What is the church? Is the church a building? Is it the place where believers gather to worship? Or is the church the people – the believers who follow Christ? How we see understand and perceive the church is quite important in determining how we live out our faith

Jesus and Peace

Introduction

Peace is a period of harmony between different social groups that is characterized by lack of violence or conflict behaviors, and the freedom from fear of violence. Commonly understood as the absence of hostility and retribution, peace also suggests sincere attempts at

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reconciliation, the existence of healthy or newly headed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of quality, and a working political order that serves the true interest of all. Jesus does, however, promise a peace that will quiet your heart. Knowing that Jesus came into this world to heal damaged relationships with God brings peace to a troubled soul. Knowing that Jesus came to open wide the doors to heaven brings true peace to confess and searching minds. Knowing that Jesus is waiting to welcome you to his eternal home where there will be no more “noise” makes all the noises of life a little easier to deal with. Although the noise of life makes it difficult to have peace, this is exactly what Jesus promises, “Peace I leave with you my peace I give you, I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27). Jesus’ peace most likely won’t quiet a screaming child. Jesus’ peace doesn’t guarantee a slick commute in the morning.

Religious Beliefs and Peace

Religious beliefs often seek to identify and address the basic problems of human life, including the conflicts between, among and within persons and societies. Many Christians call Jesus of Nazareth the “Prince of Peace”, and see him as a “Messiah” (which, transliterate, means Anointed One), the “Christ” who manifest as the son of God on Earth to establish God’s Kingdom of Peace, wherein people, societies and all the Creation who are to be healed of evil. Buddhists believe that peace can be attained once all suffering ends. They regard all suffering as stemming from craving (in the extreme, greed), aversion (fears), or delusions. To eliminate such suffering and achieve personal peace, followers in the path of the Buddha adhere to a set of teachings called the Four Noble Truth – central tenet in Buddhist Philosophy.

Jesus and Peace

1. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12: 18.
2. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9
3. Let him turn away from evil and do good let him seek peace and pursue it. 1 Peter 3: 11
4. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14
5. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy. Proverbs 12: 20.
6. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4: 7.
7. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Romans 14; 19.

Christians are to be Peacemakers

The purpose of this “Christ vs Christianity” column is to show how many churches and individuals who profess the name of Christ teach and practice things that are directly contrary to what Jesus Christ actually taught. If you would judge Jesus Christ by some of those who profess to follow Him, you might think that Jesus would be an advocate of individuals’ expression of disdain and even hatred toward their enemies and of nations’ reliance on battle-hardened military might.

Conclusion

One of the central themes of the Sermon on the Mount is Christ's expectation that His followers be characterized by peace not violence or war, Jesus' peace won't make all your problems and all the world's conflicts fade away. But it thus actually what Jesus stood for – or would stand for today? The Sermon on the Mount (found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7) is one of the most detailed teaching of Jesus Christ recorded in the New Testament. In this vital sermon, Jesus Christ laid out the central facets of the way of the life. He taught His followers.

What is Peace? (Romans 14:19, 1Peter 3:11)

Peace can be said to be an occurrence of harmony characterized by the lack of violence, conflict behaviors and the freedom from fear of violence, commonly understood as the absence of hostility and retribution, peace also suggests sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, property in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality and a working political order the serves the true interest. Peace comes form able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are. Where there is no justice there can be no secure peace. The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes from within the souls of men, but above all you should understand that there can never be peace between nations until there is first known that true peace which is within the souls of men.

Nigeria Contemporary Situation

Nigeria, today is a nation in crisis. It is a dying nation. Its citizenry is distressed and traumatized. The poor health of the nation is evident in all areas of its national life. In the economic and industrial sector, the production base has virtually been wiped out with oil left as wasting, exhaustible non-renewable sources as a major productive sector. We are dependable on other nations for most of our essential commodities and raw materials. The nation has become the economic slave of Western creditors. In the educational sector, the standard of education has fallen consequent to poor maintenance of infrastructure, inadequate facilities, and unattractive conditions of service for teachers and disruption of the system at all levels by strike. Our transportation, health and public utilities have been broken down. The average Nigeria peoples. Added to this, the nation is neck deep in all matters of evil, bribery and corruption, religious intolerance, injustice, oppression of the poor, murder, armed robbery, wanton violence, kidnapping assassination, terrorism, insurgency, suspicion and hatred among others. The picture is similar to the terms of the judges in the Old Testament where every man did what is right in his own eyes. (Judges 2 – 25).

The Church in Nigeria

The church in Nigeria its membership from every state and actually every ethnic and cultural group. A part from occasional protests, the church has not been able to influence the nations' political events and development in a positive direction. This is because we have not lived as we ought to live. We have not loved ourselves and neighbors. This is evident by the various in-fighting and court cases involving church leaders and church members like the church at Corinth, the world entered the church and all form of evil are now manifest in the household of dissensions, quarrels, divisions, immorality, pride, love of money and other carnal behaviors.

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The church in Nigeria is a sleeping church, a church on the blink. For the church to be able to be light and salt of the nation the church must experience a true revival where love and the gifts of the spirits are evident and the gospel is preached and taught. The onus is on the church leadership the ministers, the teacher of the gospel to lead the way. Some of the blessings of some of our local churches are not of God. They are not in conformity with the word of God. This other gospel is similar to the teaching of the Judaizer in Galatia and the teaching of Balaam and Jezebel which are hateful to God. (Rev. 2:14-15).

The Role of the Church and Ministers in the Nigerian Situation

Understanding

The church first responsibility is to understand Jesus, the Lord of the Gospel. In the bible we read that a people without understanding shall come to ruin. (Hos. 4:14). He must understand the message he is to share with the world. He must understand the calling and the context of his calling. Jesus knew the purpose of his mission here on earth. Paul knew his calling to the Gentiles and Kings and the Sons of Israel (Acts 9:1, 53). He knew that he was under obligation to preach the gospel to people of all cultures, races and social classes, the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the Jews and the Greeks and the Barbarians (Rom. 1:14). The ministers/teacher should understand and be informed about his environment. Like Paul, he must be informed of what is going on in the city, in the country and the church of God. Such information will assist him/her in his prayer life and in effective communication of the gospel. In Nigeria, the gospel teachers/ministers should be well informed about Nigerian environment. Its history, geography, people, politics, etc. all these will help the minister to proffer spiritual and moral solution to the many problems of the nation. i.e. increase in the wave of violence., the pauperization of the masses of the Nigeria society, the flight of the Nigerian people to other land etc. the gospel teachers/ministers must be enlightened and well read, about the Christian ideal for society (i.e. Democracy, relations between nation, industrial ethics, the law and social standards) the institution of government, the art of governance, family, the church and the world.

Communicate the Gospel

Church/ministers' second role is to effectively communicate the gospel to others under the guidance or leading of the Holy Spirit. Such as Gospel well-presented bring about a visitation of renewal and revival across the nation. The product of which will be a cultivation of a good and holy life, family devotion and closer work with God. A renewal in the life of the church will lead to a new understanding and cooperation among Christian leaders, which in turn can help mobilize the body of Christ to play a role as light of the world and salt of the earth. Besides, the revival of the holy living will reveal itself in a compassion for the lost, the poor, the rich, the destitute, the oppressed and a new sense of discipleship. We develop the mind of Christ and are filled with the spirit of compassion and care.

Use the Word to Change the World

Christians must be made to be aware of the fact that they are expected to use the word of God to transform the world of man, (Rom. 12:2) our inability to effectively use the word to transform the world has made it easy for many to conform to the pattern of this world. So,

before we can effectively mobilize the Christians for any reasonable battle, we must expose them to the undiluted word of God. The local church cannot teach the pure word of God if such a church has deliberately taken citizenship in the kingdom of man. Such a church along with its pastor and congregation will be at home in a materialistic and self-centered culture.

Effective, Consistent and Systematic Study of the Bible

The Lord Jesus Christ is the central theme of the bible. The Old Testament is full of prophecies pointing to Jesus as the Messiah “search the scripture, for in them ye think ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39). It is not possible to make Christ known without preaching the word and it is hardly possible to make the word known without preaching Christ.

It is the role of the church through her teachers/ministers to emphasize that the most important way God speaks to us today is through the Word. There is no higher authority in heaven or earth than the word of God. Heaven and earth will pass away but the word of God will not pass away (Matt. 24:35). In the quest to know all the will of God for life, the bible should always be the point of reference and the final court of appeal. It is therefore incumbent on church and her teachers/ministers to teach the word in a way that people being taught will understand (Acts 17:3) and examine the scripture daily like the Barren Christian (Acts 17:11) in their homes (Acts 5:42). The effect of the word on the life of the people and priests was obedience to the Christian faith (Acts 6:7). Men and women turned from idolatry (the worship of Diana at Ephesus), shared their possessions with others, healed in the name of Lord, witnessed and exposed evil. They gave generously, and prayed sincerely and their praise was spontaneous and strong. Like it happened with the apostle, it is still happening today. Once the people (the leaders and the led) are taught to stand for Godly and biblical principles most of the problems of deliquesce and decay which are spiritual, moral and social will give way. One of the ways of making Christians act as salt and light to arrest the decay and dispel the darkness is the study of the word of God in all churches throughout the land. In many churches, there are Sunday schools and vocation bible schools aimed at teaching the congregation to stand firm in the word of God. The implication of this is that teachers in such schools must be competent, spirit filled and well trained in the art. By doing this the gospel teachers/ministers will be adapting his theology to the realities of daily life.

Participation in Public Affairs

The church should encourage Christians in their fold to be actively concerned with and involved in the world outside the church. They should be taught that Jesus Christ came to minister to the total man-his soul and body: and that it is false pietism that divides the soul from the body. The situation where Christians in their various churches and homes pray that God should do something or move somebody else to do something, but for them it is enough to pray should change. Our prayer should be use me or send me.

The church must let their members see that he/she has their Christians responsibility to ensure that good governance and politics with their attendants and the pulpit. It must be emphasized that indulgence, among Christians. Christians must be taught the spirit of reconciliation and peacemakers in the society. They must be encouraged not to give up, but to be positive, maintain hope and be productive wherever they find themselves.

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Prayer:

Prayer is one of God's requirement for fulfilling his promise of revival in the land. In 2 Chron. 7:14 said "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land". prayer that does not stem from a life of humility before God is powerless, inefficient and more rhetoric. The gospel minister has the responsibly of teaching the people about the value of prayers. God's people must be mobilized in all churches and in all section of the country to pray for the nation. Prayer groups and prayer cells should be organized all over and, in many cases, a 24-hour prayer chain adopted. At such prayer meetings, intercession should be for the leaders and all conditions of men. We must bind the demons of Islam, violence and instability. We must pray for a force democratic government and a spiritual revival in the land. We must pray against waste, mismanagement and bad government. For our collective prayers to bear fruits, we must be in agreement on what we pray about.

Conclusion

A church that does not attend to contemporary problems of the society is a dead church. Such a church has removed herself from this world. It is therefore important that the church in Nigeria through its leaders address the decay pervading our land before the bubble bursts. We appeal to all teachers and ministers of the gospel to sanitize their entire membership to the appealing situation of the country, the contributions of some Christians to the decay and necessity to live out our Christian faith so that the social and political environment will improve. The church in Nigeria should come together as partners in the total evangelization of the land. And the quest for peace for Nigeria will be actualized and the Kingdom of God will take possession of Nigeria and her citizenry.

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