

The Church as A Pathway to National Rebirth in Nigeria: A Reflection on Matthew 5:13

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Abstract: The work studied how the Church could serve as a pathway to national rebirth with emphasis on Matt 5: 13-16. Using analytical and descriptive methods, the paper discussed the theological implications of the Church being salt and light in the context of Nigeria. The metaphorical parlance and symbolic understanding of these elements of light and salt both in the Biblical and social world is not only significant but instructive. For instance, salt is a sign of covenant while light is a sign of orderliness and progress. In other words, salt preserves while light is a guide and could also be a warning light. In the face of endemic corruption, bad leadership, lack of value for human life, materialism, greed, covetousness, worldly pleasure, instant glory through rituals among young people and the likes that are prevalent in contemporary Nigeria, one then wonders what impact Churches are making in the country. Jesus enjoined his followers to “let their light shine before others, so that they may see their good works and give glory to the father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). The work therefore emphasized areas where the Church in Nigeria can make appreciable impacts and further explained that even though our society is corrupt and full of abominable things, the Church must be the salt and the light. This it maintains could be achieved if she retained her distinctiveness, stand for and speak out the truth, protest against folly, deceit and wickedness. The paper recommended that the Church should rise to the challenge of Matt 5:13-16 in order to achieve a successful national rebirth.

Keywords: National Rebirth, Church, Light, Salt, Pathway, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the advent of Christianity, as well as some other religions of note, the Church has always been a beacon of hope, rebirth and development in any society. A great example of this assertions from the early centuries of Christianity talking about the trend from Constantine and through to the Middle Ages, the Church has brought unprecedented growth and civilization to nations and humanity. In the course of history also, has stood as an arbiter of justice, restoration, peaceful co-existence and development. History bears witness to the fact that western world owes much of its achievements, as propelled by its disposition and obedience, to the Church.

Meanwhile, it is very glaring too that in the past two centuries that the western society is moving away from its obedience and commitment to the Church, it has come to experience, in a fast speed, a decline not only in morality but also in physical developments. Even when it can be said that there are advancements in technology and medicine but the godlessness

accompany these wonderful advancements is leading the world away from sanity into insanity. It is very important for the world to know that the providential arrangements and divine touch in creation and humanity are not a mistake. Rather it is the gradual drift of the world away from that divine touch or divine influence, in the name of civilization, that is responsible for the degradation being experienced in the world today. It is high time for the world, in spite of its technological advancement, to once again look back or even return to the path of that incorporation or partnership with the touch of the divine that always comes from the Church in its activities.

It is on this note that this paper revisits the recommend of Jesus two millennia back that the Church is the salt and the light of the world, that is, the pathway to always put the world on the sweet, tasty and the right path. Doubtlessly, when the touch of the salt is lost upon any preparation, the deck is completely lost. When the touch of the light is lost, sight, direction and guide is lost and then the man is incomplete. Hence, to undervalue or underestimate the Church's intervention in the Nigerian affairs may mean a delay in the wheel of progress. It is the position of this paper therefore that the nation Nigeria cannot jettison the Church's influence on its process of rebirth and development.

The Church Explained

Church” is the translation of the Greek term *ekklesia*, and is used in the New Testament to identify the community of believers in Jesus Christ. It literally means “assembly,” “congregation,” or “meeting.” A similar term was used in the Old Testament referring to experiences such as “the day of the assembly,” “the Lord’s congregation,” or “meeting before the Lord.” Wherever it is used in the Bible it refers to people. The word Church is used three different ways: First, as the body of Christ, the Church is often defined as a local assembly or group of believers (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1-2). Second, it is defined as the body of individual living believers (1 Corinthians 15:9; 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). As a consequence of this broad background of meaning in the Greek and Old Testament worlds, the term 'Church' is used in the New Testament of a local congregation of called-out Christians, such as the 'Church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2), and also of the entire people of God, such as in the affirmation that Christ

is 'the head over all things to the Church, which is his body' (Eph. 1:22-23).¹ The nature of the church is too broad to be exhausted in the meaning of the one word *ekklesia*. Therefore, to capture its significance, the New Testament authors utilize a rich array of metaphorical descriptions like, "the people of God", "the kingdom of God", "the temple of God", "the bride of Christ", and "the body of Christ" among others.²

National Rebirth Defined

National rebirth can simply be defined as the regeneration of a battered country to improve the standard of living of the nation. It also means the renaissance, reawakening or resurgence. The initiative of national rebirth also refers to remodeling of the state which define or redefine the driving rules and principles of political pluralism, the role of the state, citizenship rights and duties, protection of fundamental human rights, including socio- economic rights and so on.³ It can be seen as a change that leads to a new period of growth and improvement in a country of given society.⁴

The Passage: Matthew 5:13-16

The expectation Jesus had for his followers was expressed most vividly in the Sermon on the Mount by the use of the salt and light metaphors, it reads:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven.

An Exposition of the Passage and What It Teaches

Salt is the translation of the Greek words: *hals*, *halos(m)* and *halas*, *halatos(n)*.⁵ The exact opposite of *halas* is *analog* "lack of salt" or "saltless" (Mark 9:50). *Halas* is the late form of *Hals* and is used metaphorically in Matt 5:13b and Mark 9:50a. Literally, salt can be defined as a dietary mineral composed primarily of sodium chloride (NaCl) that is essential for animal life, but toxic to most land plants. Salt flavor is one of the basic tastes, an important preservative and a popular food seasoning.⁶ It is a chemical compound

¹ 'Church' Retrieved from Google, https://www.google.com?gws_rd=ss/q=what+isa+church

² Paul Oyebo Jerede, "An Assessment of the Role of the Church in Poverty alleviation in Nigeria", in International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS), Vol.3 No.2 June, 2020; 130 – 143; ISSN: 2682-6135(Print), ISSN: 2682-6127(online)

³ <https://www.academia.edu> – retrieved, 11 – 02 – 2022.

⁴ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/rebirth> - retrieved, 16 – 02 – 2022.

⁵ Johannes P. Louw, & Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, (2nd ed.) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 52.

⁶ Salt-Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org. 28/05/ 2020

belonging to the larger class of salts; salt in its natural form as a crystalline *Halas* (salt) is used metaphorically of believers in Matt 5:13a and Mark 9:50b to describe the character and responsibility of believers⁷.

Everybody is familiar with salt and light. They are found in virtually every household in the world. Jesus as a boy in the Nazareth home must have watched his mother Mary use salt as a preservative in the kitchen and light the lamps when the sun went down. He knew their practical usefulness.⁸ So according to Stott, these were the images which Jesus later used to illustrate the influence he expected his disciples to exert in human society.⁹ Also, in the words of William Barclay, in the ancient world salt was highly valued as it is still valued today. The Greeks called salt divine (*theion*). He went further to say that in the time of Jesus salt was connected in people's minds with five special qualities as follows,

1. Salt was connected with purity. No doubt its glistening whiteness made the connection easy. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things, because it came from the purest of all things, the sun and the sea. Salt was indeed the most primitive of all offerings to the gods, and to the end of the day the Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. So then, if the Christian is to be the salt he must be an example of purity.
2. Salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad, and to hold putrefaction at bay.
3. Salt lends flavor to things. Food without salt is a sadly insipid and even a sickening thing. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. Christianity lends flavor to life. Salt was a necessary ingredient in any meal as a seasoning agent, it could symbolize the hospitality that helped to develop and cement friendships or relationships. As a seasoning agent, it seasons, gives flavor and makes food more palatable and enjoyable.
4. To 'be salt' means to deliberately seek to influence the people in one's life by showing them the unconditional love of Christ through good deeds.
5. Salt is distinctive. It is totally different from the food or object upon which it is put. The power of salt lies in this difference¹⁰

Light on the other hand is the translation of Greek words: *phōs* and *photos*. In biblical tradition however, light has both literal and symbolic meanings. In the literal sense, it means daylight, sunlight, brightness etc. So in the literal sense light

⁷ Anthony I. Ezeogamba, *Christianity of Christians, An Exegetical Interpretation of Matthew 5:13-16 and Its Challenges to Christians in Nigerian Context*, Anambra: Fides Media Ltd, 2019, 131-133

⁸ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (Britain Morgan & Scott, 1990), 66.

⁹ John Stott, 66.

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Scotland: St Andrew Press, 1994), 118-120.

is not just a medium of sight but also its object.¹¹ Thus, literally light brings about visibility. Its absence results in unimaginable situations. Mobility is reduced to the barest minimum in the absence of light. So, in this sense, light is indispensable to human existence in the world. In a symbolic sense, light is a symbol of happiness (Job 22:28; Psalm 97:11), protection (Job 29:3; Isa. 58:8), orderliness (Gen. 1:3; Amos 5:20), exemplary life (Matt 5:14a; Luke 2:32), salvation (Psalm 27:1; Matt. 4:16; Luke :79), prosperity, joy and good fortune (Esther 8:16; Isa 60:20). Thus, when Jesus said that the Christian must be the light of the world, there are some basic truths that cannot be overlooked namely:

- A light is first and foremost something which is meant to be seen. So then, Christianity is something which is meant to be seen. As someone has said, “there can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy”. A man’s Christianity should be perfectly visible to all men.
- A light is a guide. A light is something to make clear the way. So then a Christian must make the way clear to others, a Christian must of necessity be an example
- A light can often be a warning light. A light is often the warning which tells us to halt when there is danger ahead.
- Light has always been seen as a symbol of orderliness and absence of confusion. In that connection God is the principal source of orderliness and straightforwardness (Gen 1:3).

The Church is constituted by Christian and there is no Christianity without the Church. Hence, whatever applies to the Christian and observed by him or the Christian community serves for the society. The Nigerian Christian or Christian community is indebted to the Nigerian society as the salt and the light of the society.

The Nigerian Situation

Nigeria in recent time has been in spiral of violence as a result of structural injustice as well as bribery and corruption in almost all levels. Militancy, for instance, has become a household name in Nigeria.¹² This is to the extent that in all parts of Nigeria there are both political and religious agitators. Exploitation of worshippers by Church ministers and their cohorts is not equally new to Nigerians. Bribery and corruption among the elites is equally a known fact and become the bane of the Nigerian society. There is hardly any facet of the nation that is not bedeviled with it. As rightly observed by Sola Adeyeye, “What we have in Nigeria is what

I have described many times as a ‘corruptocracy’, a government of the corrupt and for the corrupt.”¹³ Corruption is evident in our political space, public institution, business outfits, the Judiciary, academic environment and even within the religious establishments.

Things are generally very difficult in Nigeria to the extent that nothing goes for nothing. Poverty abounds to the extent that there are countless beggars on the Nigerian streets due to the endemic corruption in the land.¹⁴ Peasants, as a result of the general hardship, sell their pieces of land and other valuables so as to sustain themselves. Some have even resulted to trading their body to raise money to feed. Some parents allow or lure their children into prostitution while some see this act by their children or ward but pretend all is fine. Celebrities now are the likes of housemates of ‘Big Brother Naija’ and not the wonderful brains of ‘Who wants to be a Millionaire’ or the brilliant inventors among our lads and lass of the Nigerian silicon valleys in the remote villages and secondary school that gather for annual competitions witnessed by our senators, ministers for development. Liars, armed and pen robbers, prostitutes, kidnappers, ritualists, murderers, cultists, and the likes are now rulers while their official counterparts (with the coveted nickname ‘politicians’) are leaders in the country. More and more children are growing up in broken homes; unemployment is on the rise. Extrajudicial killings are rampant in Nigeria. Many people no longer believe that honesty pays or guarantee success and therefore result to dishonesty to succeed. To this extent, many are no longer pricked by their conscience. The following lengthy excerpt from Jubrin Ibrahim captures the situation more succinctly,

Nigeria is in a dangerous position where too many of its citizens and collectives have concluded that things cannot continue the way they are without the country tipping over, ... There is increasing insecurity across the country and clearly the security agencies cannot, and more people are beginning to think, do not want to arrest it. Kidnapping for ransom is an acute concern across Nigeria. The North-East is witnessing a resurgence in Boko Haram activity, and thousands of people are internally displaced by banditry across rural communities in the North-West and North-Central. Criminality in rural areas further complicates the situation by undermining food security, as many farmers have been unable to go to their farms for months for fear of losing their lives. As internal displacement of Nigerians spreads, land alienation has become an acute matter of concern to people, as so many cannot return to their farms and fear they may lose their land permanently. The government has been incapable on assuring Nigerians that it cares about their predicament. The atmosphere in the country is toxic, as numerous conspiracy theories circulate without re-assuring counter-

¹¹ Conzelmann, ‘Phôs’ in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol IX (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1979), 987.

¹²Okafor Ofiebor, “Rivers of Blood, Militiamen are on the Rampage in Port Harcourt” *Newswatch*, Nigerian’s Weekly Newsmagazine (August 30, 2004) 30. See also Okafor Ofiebor “Niger Delta, Peace at Last?” *The News* 33/15 (October 19, 2009) 41-43.

¹³ S. Adeyeye in Y. Adekunle, “We Run a Corruptocracy”. *Tell*, February 2, 2009, 96.

¹⁴ Joy Olekanma, “When Beggars Go Professional” *Sunday Champion*, 23/016 (April 18, 2010), 31.

narratives from the State. Not surprisingly, true or false, Nigerians are believing the narratives circulating.¹⁵

This state of national dissatisfaction for a variety of reasons and motives has led to strident calls from virtually all segments of Nigerian society for political, constitutional and fiscal reform using various words and phrases: restructuring, true federalism, devolution of power, resource control, regionalism, self-determination and so on. Nigeria's crisis of governance is very conspicuous. Ruling elites and public institutions have not provided essential collective goods such as physical infrastructure, the rule of law, freedom of speech and gathering, and sensible political community. Democracy which is one of the utmost pathway to good governance, justice, peace and development has become one of the country's most contentious problems. This very evident in the recurring political struggles since independence and in public attitudes toward government even as Nigerians tenaciously maintain aspirations for democratic rule and dividends.¹⁶ Central authorities cannot provide stable governance, in the sense of effective legitimate rule and essential public goods. In the recent time, the youth or the generation of the young who is been looked up to as the hope of the future have turned the table down to embrace ritual killings and kidnapping in the desperate bid to be rich and enjoy life.

Economically, Nigeria has experienced a steady decline since the oil windfall peaked more than forty years ago. Slow growth in positive development and a rapidly rising population have yielded dramatic increases in poverty. Confronted by these challenges, Nigerians have repeatedly attempted to overhaul the nation's politics, resulting in cycles of civilian and military government and perennial efforts at institutional change¹⁷ but in futility. Oil which is supposed to be a blessing to the Nigerian nation turns out to be her bane. Little wonder, Chinua Achebe opines: There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.¹⁸

What that means is that Nigeria has all it takes naturally to be not only the giant of Africa but one of the most prominent nations of the world. Yet, today, the average Nigerian struggles hard to make ends meet; sees himself or herself as being poorer than he or she was a decade ago; and finds it hard to be hopeful that things will get better soon.¹⁹ All

these are products of bad administration and mismanagement of God given natural and human resources. Nigeria's human rights record remains poor and government officials at all levels continue to commit serious abuses. The members of the Force, that is, the police, the military and other defence outfits, are meant to defend the citizens and the territorial integrity of the nation cannot even be excused. One calls to mind other vices like rape, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners, human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution and forced labor, child abuse, child sexual exploitation and so many others. Evidently, Nigeria has failed profoundly as a state, a nation, and an economy.

The Church's Relevance in National Rebirth

Usually, we criticize the Nigerian society for violence, dishonesty, corruption, leadership cluelessness, immorality, injustice, governmental ineptitude, materialistic greed and so on. The question is: Where is the light and salt? If society deteriorates and its standard declines to this extent as discussed above, the question is: where is the Church? Why are the salt and light of the Church not permeating and changing our society? Is the Church no longer on mission to renew the face of the earth and save the world? Where is the Church's relevance? According to Onwuliri,

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, she 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.²⁰

This assertion on by Onwuliri on the relevance of the Church to the society is supported by past and recent histories. The exposition of Hugo Rahner on the *Church and State in Early Times*²¹ confirms it. The relevance of the Church is basically perceived by stakeholders in the Nigerian Project of national rebirth as President Jonathan Goodluck in 2013 acknowledged the need for the inevitable touch of the Church on national matters. He made a clarion call to the Church to be involved national development and attitudinal change of the citizens of the country. He said, "the church ought to be a citadel of spiritual knowledge to govern the country towards achievable and sustainable growth in Nigeria..."²² The current Vice President of the nation, Prof Yemi Osinbajo recognized the

¹⁵ Jubrin Ibrahim, Premium Times, September 18, 2020.

<https://opinion.premiumtimesng.com/2020/09/18/pathway-to-national-dialogue-and-rebirth-by-jibrin-ibrahim/>

¹⁶ Peter Lewis, et.al, "Down to Earth: Changes in Attitudes towards Democracy in Nigeria". Afro Barometer Working Paper, 20, Michigan University, August. 2002.

¹⁷ Anthony I. Ezeogamba, 53

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Taiwan: AI-United Industries & Shipping Inc., 1985), 1

¹⁹ Godwin Chukwudum Nwaobi, 'Corruption and Bribery in The Nigerian Economy', ([http://odeas/re\[ec\]prg/p/wpa/wuwpppe/0404006.html](http://odeas/re[ec]prg/p/wpa/wuwpppe/0404006.html), 2004). Retrieved on 10/5/20103

²⁰ C. E.C. Onwuliri, "The Church as an agent of progress and development" in I. Onyeocha (Ed). *The Church as agent of progress and Development, CIP Jubilee Essays* (Owerri: Imo State University press. 2008), 70-83

²¹ Hugo Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992)

²² Godday Odidi, <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/105308/national-development-the-vital-role-of-the-church.html>

same and said no less in 2015 when he addressed some Church leaders in Nigeria, according to him, “The Church has a special role to help in re-moulding the character of the people and build integrity, the Church should pursue national values and national re-orientation.”²³ Suffice it to say that it is the mission of the church to provide the kind of place where spiritual life can flourish. To this extend, it is the primary mission of the Church to; preach the gospel; teach the saved; provide a spiritual atmosphere; reproduce the characteristic of Christ; and bring joy to mankind. This is the paramount objective of the Church in the world.²⁴

Religion is considered an important aspect of society, especially in Africa where people are deeply religious. All the major faith traditions like Christianity, Islamic and African indigenous faith traditions have core principles that can motivate bonding and bridging social gaps through community service, cooperation, peace-making, pursuit of social justice and the possibility of respect and tolerance for others. Also, there is the assumption that if Christianity dominates a community and overrules the traditional laws, ethics and norms with her model principles of life, such community will be transparent in politics, policy formulation and implementation of public programmes and projects.²⁵ In other words, in a community where there is a considerable Christian influence, there should be less of social vices because Church teachings and doctrines are aimed at transforming individual lives, re-branding the society, such that there will be political stability, economic prosperity, social and moral sanity, minimized corruption and mutual cooperation among individuals and groups, including other religions. The relevance of the church is more reiterated in the words of the Second Vatican Council thus:

... since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission.²⁶

Given the crucial relevance of the Church, there multiple reasons and ways to emphasize the strategic relevance of the Church as a pathway to national rebirth. Seven major ways among others through which the Church can serve as pathway to national rebirth are hereby highlighted below:

1. *Church and State Cooperation:* In the African clime, and especially people listen more to their religious

²³ Yemi Osinbajo, reported by Bassey Udo in *Premium Times*, August 14, 2015. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/188400-osinbajo-urges-presbyterian-church-to-be-worthy-ally-in-drive-towards-national-rebirth.html>

²⁴ Paul Oyebode Jegede, “An Assessment of the Role of the Church in Poverty alleviation in Nigeria”

²⁵ Frederick Adetiba, ‘Role of the Church in nation Building’, *Premium Times*, September 1, 2013, 6

²⁶ Austin Flannery (Ed.), *Second Vatican Council, Gaudium Et Spes*, 42.

leaders than to their political leaders. They are more convinced by their religion than by any political ideology. This is a bitter truth. There is no doubt too that the Church, like the salt and light, has the power of retaining distinctness. So, the key thought in both the pictures of salt and light is distinction. The Church as Salt and as light is needed because the country is rotting and decaying day by day and sinking deeper daily into darkness. The State Nigeria needs to realise that at this present terrible condition, a partnership of progress is needed with the Church as the citizens listen more to the religious leaders than the political leaders. Political leaders should descend from their high horse to embrace the wisdom of the Church. The Church too must give no less than the Christian distinctness. For the Church, as the follower of Christ, to be true light and salt, cannot and it is not supposed to distance itself from the society or the world; ‘though not of the world, but still in the world’. The Church, that is, Christian must retain and maintain their convictions, values, standards and lifestyles and transmit these values transparently for the nation to imbibe and to move forward, for by this they, (the Church) will be known as ‘my disciples’, and their light shine for the world to see. Various voices of the Church such as the voice of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in *Our Concern for Nigeria: Catholic Bishops Speaks*,²⁷ Pastors Bakare, Adeboye, Kumuyi and the rest. The Church in this manner, if given the opportunity becomes a pathway to national rebirth.

2. *The Church as the Conscience of the Nation:* Apart from raising men to live right and impact their environments with the values and principles of the Kingdom, Church leaders who are considered as men of influence in the society ought to speak up in defense of the defenseless. These men are quick to pray for the political leaders, but they are not quick to correct and rebuke them when they err. The only time Church leaders rise in the people’s defense, is when Christians are being killed, particularly in a section of the country. We don’t get to hear them when these political leaders are stealing our common wealth with impunity, which is what is responsible for the many ills in the land. Church Leaders are to act conscience of the people and especially themselves believing what they profess and leading the life they preach.
3. *The Desired Change and Rebirth as Church’s Responsibility:* Everyone desires and talks about change and National Rebirth in Nigeria. The Church has the responsibility to lend their voice in waging

²⁷ *Our Concern for Nigeria: Catholic Bishops Speaks*, Communiqués issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) on the State of the Church and Nigerian Nation from 1963-2015, (Lagos: Gazub Prints, 2015)

war against corruption, injustice, impunity and other ills in the land. Her silence encourages the ills of the political jobbers who pretend to be doing the right thing and whose overriding concerns are to acquire political influence and build empires for themselves while the vast majority of people they govern wallowing in abject penury and are oppressed. As the popular parlance goes: the man dies in him who keeps silent in the face of evil. It is the responsibility of Church to proclaim the righteousness of God in the land, to feed the homeless, care for the poor, minister to the sick, ensure freedom for the incapacitated and incarcerated or do something in the society that would bring peace, development and joy to others. The role played by Jonah in his cry against wickedness and atrocities in Nineveh, the cry of Amos against injustices in both low and high places in Judah, that of Joel for repentance, the great reforms of Josiah the young king, the penchant of Nehemiah for rebuilding the nation after the exile, are among others in the Bible good examples worthy of emulation. Their cries and efforts at reforms of the people bring about great transformation.

4. *The Church and Witnessing to the Truth:* The Church can be a pathway to national rebirth by bearing witness to the truth and equally returning to the preaching of the gospel of truth, raw and undiluted, in and out of season, welcomed or not welcomed (Tim:4:2) When light shines upon a dark place, one sees things the way they are. So, the Church speaking the truth at all times, becomes the light and the successful pathway national rebirth. The war against wrong ideas, polluted ideologies, misconstrued values in the Nigerian political settings, judiciary, marketplaces and the likes can only be fought by proclaiming the truth. The Church has and knows the truth, if they refuse to make it shine clear, they shall be blamed no less than the exploiters, the politicians and the ‘commercialisers’. The Church has always stood as the arbiter of truth and protester against folly, deceit and wickedness. If it could be said that as the salt and light, truth is powerful when it is argued, it is even more powerful when it is exhibited.
5. *The Church and the transmission of Values:* Alongside with the above is that some of the values of the Church should be made to permeate the society. Constituting itself as a challenge to the bad ways of life, the Church brings good fortune and progress to the society. It takes nothing but the godly attitude of the Church to usher in God’s blessings to the larger community. This entails also that the Church leads by example and be an added value and not value depletion to society where it exists. The particular case of Nigeria would be a blessing if its religiosity is well harnessed. There is no household in Nigeria that is not religiously endowed. Let this

religiosity be transformed into the yeast that would swell the leaven and the cake of the nation, the salt that seasons and the light that lightens the way into great development in all spheres, be it technological, political, economic, medical and intellectual. The teachings of Jesus Christ, which include love, humility, forgiveness, contentment and charity, among others must be imbibed. This is where great developments and the greatness of a nation begin.

6. *Place of Indigenous Values and the role of The Church:* Culture, tradition and traditional heritages are germane to the existence of any nation. Just as salt preserves, and in the ancient world, the Greeks thought it contained something almost divine, and the Romans paid their soldiers with salt and a soldier who didn't carry out his duties “was not worth his salt;”²⁸ in this regard also, the Church, like and as the salt, and in the spirit of inculturation, is needed to help preserve what is good in the culture. Nigeria as well as other black climes have been too long deceived into believing that whatever is theirs is either not good at all or inferior to others, a colonial mentality. The genuine Church knows, respects, imbibes, inculcates, imbues, teaches and transmits valuable traditions and cultural heritages and does not despise them. The Church is a seasoning agent who is needed to disabuse the societal mind from this mindset, correct and inculcate the it with genuine teaching of the oneness of humanity and that the varieties of cultural and traditional heritage with the nation Nigeria are the beauty of creation, God’s gifts and the spices of life. This is one practical step and achievable reality. The appreciation of this gifts of nature will lead to greater mutual respect among different regions of the country. There is no doubt that these gifts, to a far extent and in one way or the other, have been plundered, misused and abused, but with the collaborative intervention of the Church as prudent manager of resource, the political leaders would consciously and conscientiously become prudent managers of the common good and common wealth of the Nigerian nation.
7. *Returning of Mission Institutions:* A more practical step that is particularly worth Federal Government of Nigerian (FGN)’s rethinking is the return of Mission Schools and Hospital that were coveted and forcefully taken over some decades back. This action no doubt has contributed in no small measure to intellectual moral and decay in the country. One needs no historian to relate this to us and needs no soothsayer to forecast what the future holds for the nation if the FGN continues to withhold these institutions. It will worth the FGN’s salt if a positive

²⁸ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub, 1997), 987

reconsideration is urgently affirmed more especially at a time like this when the state of education in the country is at its lowest ebb and those having the charge seem to be at a loss on what can redeem the situation. It is no gainsaying that the Christian Mission (as well as its Islamic counterpart) in Nigeria both in the past and present still retains, maintains and sustains its acumen in regard to giving great intellectual and moral foundation through formal and religious education in the country. This action, if followed, will in no small measure again influence positive development in the country. Character formation goes in tandem with intellectual formation. The Fear of God they say is the beginning of wisdom. The Church if given these tools (the seized schools) back acts as pathway to rebirth and development.

II. CONCLUSION

Returning Nigeria to the path of rebirth, righteousness and greatness will take an alliance again with the divine touch. Nigeria should learn from history. The gradual drift of the western world from the path of the divine and the gradual drift of Nigeria from the Mission foundations is leading to the bane of degradation in spheres of life today. It has taken the misappropriation of certain individuals, groups and institutions to bring Nigeria to its present predicament. Yet, it will take nothing but the return of the nation to the godly attitude and mission of the of the Church to usher in successful national rebirth for the country. The figures of salt and light pose as reminders that the admonitions and imperatives proclaimed by the passage, Matt 5:13 is inevitable for national rebirth. It is often assumed that those inner qualities can only be developed or displayed in isolation, that excluding the Church's influence or intervention, but Jesus gave a personal example of his incarnation, that is, becoming man in order to save man. The Christian or the must without doubt live in the world as salt and light to bring rebirth, be the spices of good life and development of the nation. The Master (Jesus) furthered his example of partnership and inclusive collaborative mission when he inaugurated a few humble Galileans disciples to salt the earth and light the world along with him – an ostensibly nonsensical episode at that time – yet they delivered. He never challenges or asks them to become salt or light or the earth and world. He simply says they are. In the same vein, the Church is salt and light, who is consequently either failing or fulfilling that responsibility. The Church in Nigeria today, just like the early Church have the responsibility of light and salt in their environment mindless of any conditions and mindful that through such a life, a national rebirth is inevitably imminent.