

THE CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Underdevelopment is a condition where the economy of the host nation is being expropriated by the dominating nation. It is equally a stage where the developing society must pass through before it finally gets to the developed stage. The Nigerian economy has had a truncated history from the period of its colonization, through the 'civilizing mission' of the colonialists to a peripheral zed and dependent status today. Historically, the Church – through its missionary activities – has played pivotal roles in the socio-cultural liberation and economic development of the people. Conversely, the Church equally plays colluding roles in sustaining the bourgeois' domination of the proletariat in a manner characteristic of the capitalist economic order. This paper, therefore, examines the role of the Church in sustaining the underdevelopment of the state through religious exploitation of the followers and adherents, and economic condition of the state. The paper is anchored on the Marxian political economy theory as a major tool of analysis where the leadership of the church, in connivance with the political elite, has perpetuated itself through the struggle to cling to power and dominate the followers through resources exploitation and expropriation. It was found that the Nigerian political leaders have not lived up to the critical role of delivering on people's expectation of guaranteed economic advancement of the Nigerian state; and that the political manipulation of the Church and its leadership works not only to impoverish the members but also to under-develop the Nigerian economy. The paper recommends that the church should exercise its power of spirituality to liberate itself from political grips and embrace democratic participation in decision making while vigorously and conscientiously pursuing members' wellbeing and economic prosperity of the state.

Keywords: The church, economy, underdevelopment, exploitation, political economy.

INTRODUCTION

Religion, through ages, has remained a significant and dynamic force in the history of man and society. In fact, even in the pre-colonial African communities, religion was identical to, and definitive of, the society such that every society is identified with one form of religion or the other. Accordingly, Anyanwu and Nwanaju (2010) posit that Africa as a continent seems to confirm the long lasting belief that man is deeply religious. The scenario is not significantly different in modern societies where religion has come to play pivotal role in national and global politics. Religion keeps people in check and under control. It is often strongly contended that law, acting alone, may not be able to regulate human behavior, which the realists describes as innately bad/evil capable of unrestrained manifestation. Religion therefore provides the necessary ethical support to enforce law, even without coercive force.

Even in so-called secular societies like Nigeria, the relevance of religion in the societal authoritative allocation of values cannot be overemphasized. However, Yagboyaju (2017) posits that Nigeria should be rather appropriately referred to as a multi-religious state than a secular state. In the same vein, Anyanwu and Nwanaju (2010) believe that the plurality of religion and religious beliefs found in Nigeria (which the authors categorized as moderates and extremists; fanatics and realists; simple-minded believers and complex adherents; and liberals and conservatives) all contribute to the multi-religious nature of Nigeria and complexities of its politics.

The noble role of religion in promoting not only the ideal ethical relationship between God and man but also societal peace and development has been called to question considering the levels of perceived atrocities and exploitation committed in the name of religion in Nigeria. Religion, like politics, draws its strength from its

potency to induce or bring about change in the attitudes of its adherents, either positively or negatively. Thus, Christianity, whether seen as a religion or a way of life, and the church particularly as an emblem of Christ, should be a useful vessel for the sustainable development of the Nigerian people and society.

However, Christianity in Nigeria, especially contemporary Pentecostal movements, portrays the stark reality of 'rich churches, poor people' with a bourgeois few expropriating the unsuspecting masses of the church members to enrich themselves through various means. These means range from actual conversion of tithes and offerings, monetization of prayers and miracles, glorification of sowing of seeds and gift endowments, selling of 'Holy Spirit', handkerchief and anointing oil, among others. No doubt, these acts promote members' dependency and underdevelopment of a people's economy. Therefore, the reality of the multi-dimensional level of poverty in Nigeria in sharp contrast with the affluence of the churches and pastors prompts this paper to examine the role of the church in underdevelopment of Nigeria's economy.

The Concept of Development and Underdevelopment

Economic development is aimed at the overall well-being of the citizens of a country, as they are the ultimate beneficiaries of the development of the economy of their country. Economic development is a sustainable boost in the standards of living of the people of a country. It implies an increase in the per capita income of every citizen. It also leads to the creation of more opportunities in the sectors of education, healthcare, employment and the conservation of the environment. Basically, measures of economic development include the following varieties: Gross National Product (GNP), GNP per capita, Welfare and Social Indicators.

Falodun and Nnadi (2007) define economic development as the process by which there is a long period of sustained growth in the per capita real income of a country, accompanied by fundamental changes in the structure of the economy and an overall sustained improvement in the material well-being of the people. They maintained that economic development occurs if the rate of growth of real per capita income in the country is higher than the rate of growth of population, over a long period of time. It means an expansion of health and educational services and more persons having access to them. Economic development is necessarily portrayed by an increase in life expectancy and standard of living. Similarly Oguji and Kene (2009) assert that economic development is the process of growth in total and per capita income accompanied by fundamental changes in the economy.

Most importantly, although economic growth and economic development are often interchangeably used, it is noteworthy that economic development is such a complex and multifaceted notion, considerably broader than income and economic growth. Thus, Sen (1985) sees the ultimate goal of development as enhancing human capabilities and promotion of well-being.

However, development and underdevelopment indeed are the twin concepts that have remained problematic in terms of conceptualizations in the field of political science and political economy. While the liberal mainstream scholars see underdevelopment as a stage where the developing state must pass through before it finally gets to the developed stage, underdevelopment to the Marxists is a condition where the economy of the host nation is being expropriated by the dominating nation. Underdevelopment, according to dependency theorists – A.G. Frank, Walter Rodney and Samir Amin, among others – simply refers to a situation in which the resources in the poorer states are being actively utilized to benefit the dominant states and not the poorer states in which the resources are found (Ferraro, 1991).

This exploitative relationship is made possible through the collaboration of the comprador elements (elite) who act as 'middlemen' in the poorer states. These invariably include the political, economic, cultural and religious bourgeoisie (church leaders inclusive) in the country. This relationship is found not only between the rich metropolitan countries of the North and the poor satellite countries of the South, but also within a country where the poor hinterland supplies to the rich city (center) and is exploited by it. In the global economic system, according to Frank (1990), metropolitan countries develop by expropriating the economic surpluses of the satellites and perpetuate their underdevelopment. This condition is made possible by perpetuating the underdeveloped countries' dependence (including Nigeria) on the developed states for trade, aid, investment and technology. This is how, according to Rodney (1972), Europe underdeveloped Africa and developed the underdevelopment of the poor countries of the South, including Nigeria (Frank, 1990).

It is a commonplace that Nigeria has an uncontrollable sense of dependence on the economically and industrially developed countries, which not only conditions her economic development but also constrict her economic policies and decisions. Pierre Jailee (1960), in his analysis of the Third World economic crisis, insists that the Third World is growing more and more dependent on the developed capitalist countries which depend less and less on the Third World (cited in Nwana, 2007). The Nigerian economy has endured a trajectory of economic instability occasioned by an extensive stretch of unsustainable development plan and policy discontinuation, which is compounded by minimal or virtual absence of substantial changes in the structure of the economy. This disequilibrium condition cannot but breed underdevelopment of the dependent countries, of which Nigeria is one. The above situation is very typical of Nigeria's economic condition which explains her low level of socio-economic development. The obvious indices of Nigeria's underdevelopment include her low per capita income, lack of adequate and affordable healthcare, poor transportation and communication network, increased unemployment and poverty rate, poor living standard, low quality of food intake in terms of dietary standard, lack of potable water supply, environmental pollution, among others (Diara&Onah, 2014).

Religion, Christianity and Imperialism

Christianity is one of the major religion (or way of life, as some may like to call it) which spread in Africa with the expansion of colonialism, mostly in the 18th-19th century. Christians are the followers of Christ who they generally believe to be the son of God and therefore, God the Son in the Holy Trinity. Rahner (2004:200) believes that "Christianity, as the historical and yet universal religion of all nations, is only fully itself when it is in actual fact the universal church, that is, when it has a tangible and historical reality among all nations and civilizations". Christianity, like imperialism and globalization, has the tendency to expand its horizon and influence. In fact, that is the prime call of every Christian to 'go into the world and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19).

However, unlike imperialism and globalization, Christianity detests economic exploitation, domination and dependency. This is because the ideal Christianity preaches, as its key element, detachment from the world and worldly riches and places emphasis on the dignity of human labour. Elements of domination and dependence that sometimes accompany Christianity are reflections of imperialism and globalization which Christianity, having derailed from the principal call in contemporary times, propagates. Hence, historically, the Christian missionaries politicized their 'pure religion' by supporting the imperialists against the local African people, including Nigeria. According to Rao (2006) the Christian missionaries softened up the Africans for the takeover, then called upon their metropolitan governments to come in and helped them to impose a regime and ideology of White supremacy. And today, Christianity, under different church denominations, remains a viable instrument to promote Western values and ideas.

In the same vein, taking a cue from Frank's dependency theory, it becomes difficult to discountenance the impact of colonialism (of which Christianity is a major 'partner') on Nigeria's underdevelopment. Some scholars therefore consider Christianity an arm of imperialism because its tenets are being used to justify the actions of the colonialists. Falola (2001) maintains that there were some missionaries who believed that the agenda of colonialism in Africa was similar to that of Christianity. Indeed, Jan H. Boer of the Sudan United Mission, quoted by Falola, maintains that:

Colonialism is a form of imperialism based on a divine mandate and designed to bring liberation- spiritual, cultural, economic and political- by sharing the blessings of the Christ-inspired civilization of the West with a people suffering under satanic oppression, ignorance and disease... (Falola, 2001:33).

This, invariably, is the root of dependence on spiritual solutions to physical problems – including the provisions of potable water, motor able roads, health care system and stable electricity, among others which ordinarily, human beings, using their creativity and ingenuity, should deal with – having seen them as satanic oppressions from which the state must be liberated. Rather than protesting to the government to intervene in the provision of social infrastructures, the 'opium of the masses' (religion) has conditioned the people to pray to God for its provisions. Specifically, a typical Christian will prefer covering the damaged and accident-prone road with the blood of Jesus to participating in a protest or demonstration to impress it on the government to repair the road.

The point that is being emphasized here is that Christianity in itself has no character of bringing nations or

cultures in order to subdue them and make them dependent on any superstructure. But that domination and dependence that sometimes emerge from Christianity, especially with regard to cultures, are tools/mechanisms of imperialism which the West injects into Christianity as missionary activities continue. Such influence of imperialism which is made manifest in contemporary globalization are seen in many cultural alienations which spread through Christianity in Nigeria. It is safe to assert therefore that Christianity emerged in Nigeria as a force of imperialism and continues today under the guise of globalization. Thus, Obiefuna and Ezeoba (2010) posits that Christianity sustains western imperialism through the continuous suppression of traditional medicine, songs, musical instrument, indigenous dressing, names, languages and cultures indigenous to Nigeria which Christian doctrines readily equates with anything ungodly, unclean or fetish.

Theoretical Framework

As a descriptive tool of analysis, this paper is anchored on Marxian political economy theory to explain Nigeria's economic underdevelopment, and particularly, how the state's bourgeois class has utilized the institution of the church to perpetrate the underdevelopment of the people and its economy.

The central question to political economy approach, according to Karl Marx, is who appropriates the resources of the state and the implications of such on the state. This approach is important in the study of political and economic phenomenon as it observes the relations between the classes in the society. According to Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, generally regarded as the proponents of this theoretical explanation, political economy espouses the diametrically opposed interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As a critique of capitalism, 'class' is a central concept in political economy which is not only repressive but also exploitative. That is, the society, say Nigeria, is characterized by classes of the rich and poor, the capitalists and masses or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Thus, Momoh and Hundeyin (2015) further explore the relationship characteristic of these classes when he posits that:

The peasants, having been expropriated and dispossessed of their means of production and existence prior to the capitalist epoch and reinforced by capitalism, have been transformed into proletariat, and have no choice than to sell their labour-power to the bourgeoisie who are the owners of the means of production under the capitalist mode of production (p. 41).

Hence, having gained control of the state's machinery, the bourgeoisie further use same to appropriate the state's resources and redistribute asymmetrically so much so that while the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer (Ojo, 2007). Such oppressive arrangement will naturally lead, not only to dependency and underdevelopment, but also clashes of classes in which one tries to supplant the other.

This theory is considered relevant to analyze Nigeria's neocolonial and neo-capitalist economic system in which the minority ruling class – otherwise called the bourgeoisie or 'one-per centers' – appropriates the state's resources and its institutions. These institutions include the school, police and church which aid the bourgeois in controlling the means of production, distribution and exchange as well as almost all of the wealth. This theory is anchored on the perpetual struggle between the social classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – which Karl Marx considered a problem with capitalism because wealth and power eventually flow upward to a few instead of downward to the masses (worker). While labourers are focused on basic survival, capitalists are concerned with acquiring more and more resources.

Specifically in Nigeria, the institutions of the state have been consistent in promoting the bourgeois' agenda and protecting it against the proletariat's anger, while perpetuating the domineering influence of the bourgeois and the dependence of the proletariat. Some of these will be discussed, relative to the church, in subsequent section. It is accordingly believed that only with the elimination of the control of private ownership of means of production, and replacing same with public/common ownership, will the economy experienced true and genuine development. Some of these Pentecostal churches in Nigeria operate as a one-man business or family enterprise where the founder and members of his immediate family alone dominate and control the public patrimony of the church. The church is at their command and members only 'worship' them as the 'anointed' one that must not be touched. This manifest imbalance and gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' in Nigeria deepen with widespread implications for socio-economic and political development.

A Critical Analysis of the Role of the Church in Underdevelopment of Nigerian Economy

The Bible (the Holy book of the Christians) alludes to the fact that Christianity is a religion modeled after the life and teachings of Christ, who, being the only begotten Son of God, humbled Himself unto death, even death on the cross to save and redeem humanity from eternal destruction (John 3:16; Phil. 2:8). In fact, “Christian” was only used in ancient Antioch to describe the followers/disciples of Christ whose life and living reflected His. Thus, Christianity, Yagboyaju (2014, cited in Yagboyaju, 2017) noted, was a religion of the lowly, the poor and the oppressed. This presupposition can be justified considering the circumstances surrounding the birth and life of Jesus Christ. It could be said that He (Jesus) was born poor, having been born in a manger, and His ministry dedicated to fighting the exploitation of the poor and downtrodden in the society.

The Church therefore, being the body of Christ, should exemplify the true virtues and ideals of Jesus Christ, as was seen in the ministries of the early apostles. However, the Church appears to have become the richest enterprise or industry in Nigeria today as many of the shepherds (pastors, bishops, prophets and others) have become talented in exploiting the people materially and financially through commercialization of religion for personal and economic gains. In the wake of this reality, many hitherto jobless men have called themselves to partake in the gospel as ‘church proprietors’ as a means of escaping poverty and joblessness.

Accordingly, it should be noted that this religious commercialization has enormous implications for making the church ‘of the world’ with more fundamental root in deepening public immorality and political corruption in Nigeria. Specifically, like shepherds to the sheep, the intensive spread of Pentecostalism through the mass media and new media as well as public evangelism, empowers the church leaders to brainwash their followers to do or act according to their leaders’ instructions, even when such directive is illogical or obviously contrary to any sound doctrine. Thus, in accordance with the divine mandate of these powerful ‘men of God’, the ability to brainwash the members seems perfected as some adherents strongly believe that the ‘anointed’ leaders are not to be questioned or disobeyed. This makes it possible for some Pentecostal churches’ leaders in Nigeria to speak directly to the spiritual and material needs of their members, promising them, among other things, life-changing miracles, divine transformations and breakthroughs.

It is also important to emphasize that just as ordinary citizens and members are made to believe that demonic forces or spiritual attacks are behind every illness, poverty and other misfortunes, the political and bureaucratic elite as well as public office seekers are also told of how these evil forces must be engaged in spiritual warfare lest they deter political victories and/or career advancement. In other words, people are encouraged to pray, rather than work, for almost everything, including that which requires only hard work and proper management. However, it is important to emphasize that in as much as the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much, faith (in prayer) must be accompanied with work, otherwise, it is dead.

Hence, as against the expectations of miraculous breakthroughs, this probable spiritual immorality, in a way, not only fuels the insatiable appetite for primitive accumulation on the part of the beneficiary of the corrupt system but also has the tendency to discourage people from imbibing the spirit of hard work since prayer is perceived to answer all things. Meanwhile, the greater the number of those who believe and embrace this kind of ‘prosperity gospel’, the more the influence of Christianity and its followers in Nigeria’s competitive multi-religious landscape (Ayoade, 2014).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that although Church leaders have always denounced bad governance, corruption and poverty through their sermons and public addresses, which have often served as calls on government to be responsive to the plight of the masses, they have often been found romanticizing with the same political class in manners suggestive of the endorsement of the very thing they had condemned. This invariably has the propensity to embolden the political elite to take such denunciation with a pinch of salt. For instance, it is observable that in the run up to the 2019 general election in Nigeria, Christian leaders such as Bishop David Oyedepo and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) leadership often condemned the ruling party – All Progressives Congress – but openly fraternized with the major opposition party (Peoples’ Democratic Party) and candidate (AtikuAbubakar). In the same vein, Pastor E.A. Adebayo was said to be rooting for the ruling APC under which a prominent pastor in his church was a vice-presidential candidate. It stands to reason, therefore, that whatever criticism, however constructive, from such leadership on any public issue/policy will not be taken seriously.

Significantly, Yagboyaju (2017) equally accentuates this position noting how the ‘flamboyant’ pastors, bishops and general overseers (GOs) of Pentecostal churches, openly and unreservedly associate with politicians and other top public officials, many of whom are notorious for abuse of offices and privileges. According to him, for example, it is on record that President Olusegun Obasanjo, despite his unconstitutional attempt to extend his tenure beyond 2007, has remained not only a regular visitor, but also a much awaited worshipper, at the annual Holy Ghost Festival of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Similarly, President Good luck Jonathan also became a prominent and regular face at many of the very important programmes of the church, apparently to seek blessing, in spite of the huge allegations of corruption and general abuse that characterized his administration.

The most surprising scenario would be the visitation of President Muhammad Buhari to the Redemption camp in the build up to his reelection bid. Evidently, this is practically the case with almost every other public office holder across the tiers of government, seeking ‘blessings’ in various churches and seeking to utilize the church instrumentality to legitimize their tenure or conjure up one with a view to perpetuating themselves in power, especially in a multi-religious entity like Nigeria. Hence, quality time that should be well spent on the serious business of governance and administration of the state is being expended on religious tours at the expense of the state. The church, notably, would not reject or chase back any of such patronages since it is supposed to be the haven to which the ‘sinners’ could run and be saved, if only they were there to be saved indeed

In addition, evidences abound as to the use of church platforms to protect and adorn the perceived oppressors of the people, even if it means invoking the wrath of the ‘Holy Ghost’ and speaking virulently against the opponents and critics of such benefactor, who had either greased the palm of the ‘man of God’ or contributed generously to the construction of church buildings or acquiring some other items for the church. More specifically, President Jonathan’s relationship with Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, one time president of CAN, is quite apt for illustration here. Not only did Oritsejafor speak openly against opponents and critics of President Jonathan because of the personal relationship between the two, it should be recalled that it was the private aircraft of Oritsejafor that was used in the illegal movement of hundreds of millions of dollars to South Africa in the notorious arms procurement scandal of 2014 (Yagboyaju, 2017).

Likewise, it is commonplace that governments at all levels in Nigeria are actively involved in funding and sponsoring Christians on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, even more than sponsoring students’ excursions, scholarships or inventions. It should be clear, however, that the sponsorship of pilgrimages by political leaders does not only work to canvass legitimate support for the perpetration of the oppressed political leaders in power, it indeed also leads to polarization and politicization of the church, which ordinarily should be in unity. The political class, of course, takes advantage of such disunity to further exploit the state and use the religious leaders to influence the members to do its bidding, thereby promoting dependency.

Alluding to what he described as ‘religion without sacrifice’, Akinola maintains that:

Whereas authentic and genuine worship necessarily involves sacrifice and self-denial, what appears to be popular in our environment today however is a religion of convenience that glamorizes wealth, pleasure and power, and makes little provision for sacrificial love, self-denial and self-abnegation... (Akinola, 2009:58)

It is, furthermore, important to state that wealth, miracles and riches are in themselves not evil, except to the extent to which they glorify the user rather than the Giver (God). Thus, while criticizing the Nigerian church system and making comparison with American evangelism tradition, Aiyede et al., posits that the effective and functional character of the American system “represents the Christian faith as a message of hope in a condition of hopelessness, generating a confidence in the possibility of change placed on the existence of a power that supersede the premonitions of objective reality”(Aiyede, Simbine, Fagge&Olaniyi, 2011:221). This is not particularly so in Nigeria. The ineffectiveness and dysfunctionality of the Nigerian system exposes the majority of the poor people to exploitative acts, in their search for the elusive breakthroughs and miracles, while, on the other hand, it emboldens venality and misconduct by public officials who enjoy protection largely because of the easy adaptability of Nigeria’s age-long patron-client networks and clientele politics to such abuses.

The essential point we maintain here is that if the preaching of Christ had remained the focus of the church in Nigeria, much of the denigrations of the church, its leadership and adherents wouldn't have been known. However, religionization of politics and politicization of religion, coupled with manifest connection with political 'big men' have effectively shut the door to the performance of the spiritual role of the church as the 'watchman over the city'. Truth, therefore, becomes a scarce commodity as the church itself becomes guilty of the very thing on which it is meant to castigate the ruling elite. This oppressive class are given adequate attention and 'first-class' treatment when they enter or worship in any church regardless of the performance or discharge of their public stewardship. The church members' relevance is assessed not on any spiritual basis but according to the value of their material contributions to the church. The ongoing pandemic of corona virus (code-named COVID-19) reveals not only how fake some 'miracle-working churches' can be, but also most importantly, how pathetic some churches care for tithes and offerings much more than the members' welfares.

Undoubtedly, Jesus Christ would not have identified with the oppressor of the masses even as Apostle James, in the Holy Bible, declared that true and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and widows (the less privileged) in their affliction and guard against corruption (James 1:27). Again, unfortunately, rather than being a safe haven for the oppressed, the church itself oppresses the members through the above means, and specifically by exploiting the meager resources of the masses to, for instance, build mega schools and luxurious mansions that a majority of the poor adherents cannot attend/afford; and fly planes and aircrafts that the poor members, whose incomes are being expropriated, cannot profit from, among others. Such is the tragedy of the church given to material, rather than spiritual, prosperity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Base on the above, we conclude that the political leaders use the church to cling to power and dominate the followers through exploitation and expropriation of members' resources. With the way religion has been seriously manipulated, sometimes using the church leaders, to further under-develop the people and the state, the Nigerian political leaders have not lived up to its expected oversight role to critically carryout desired expectation of the state to guarantee the economic advancement of the Nigerian state. We therefore recommend the following measures with a view to using the church as a mechanism of economic prosperity and development of the people and the state:

As an agent of socialization, the church should rightly educate the followers (members) on political issues as well as matters of national economic importance which will ultimately see the members free from dependence and shackles of ignorance. The church leaders should therefore desist from using the church as avenues for promoting idiosyncratic political or personal opinion cum inclination. Prompt and adequate sensitization will mean that the people are aware of their socio-economic and political rights and entitlements, and empowered to pursue them independently of handouts from the church. In other words, the church should exercise its power of spirituality to liberate the people and embrace democratic participation in decision making. The church should also actively contribute to Nigeria's economic development through members' empowerment and economic opportunities aimed at providing the people with basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

In the same vein, the political leadership of the state should stay clear from using the church for their personal gains. While it is true that the church (religion) is inseparable from the state, the use of the church to perpetuate or propel personal political gains will not only jeopardize societal peace but also scuttle the people's economic development. Therefore, the delicate balancing between politics and religion must be maintained without bias. The church leaders should, in all honesty, rise to the challenge of addressing the scarcity of credible leadership in Nigeria. Christian religious leadership ideology should be re-orientated towards the wellbeing of the Nigerian populace, who find themselves engulfed in poverty and deplorable living conditions, rather than primitive accumulation of wealth that profits nothing.

The church members – and this also applies to all religious followers – should be wary of every activity in the church by being vigilant, diligently testing all actions and directives of their leaders to see if they conform to liberty, good conscience and social and moral acceptability. Like the Bereans in the Holy Bible (Acts 17:11), the members should develop independent spiritual inquisitiveness to confirm that the church leaders' "thus said the Lord" is truly the Lord's voice devoid of any political coloration or political undertone. This becomes necessary given the fact that 'prosperity and miracles' gospel has become the order of the day and many self-made pastors

and bishops indeed take advantage of the members' spiritual dependence to exploit and further impoverish them. Above all, beyond the church-state relations, the government of Nigeria has critical roles to play in rescuing the state from economic underdevelopment and set it in motion for economic prosperity through strategic economic policy making; implementation and evaluation to ensure that such policy engender the desired outcome. Such arrangement, when backed with necessary political will, will ensure that every sector of the economy is empowered to work and function optimally.

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