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A PROHETIC CHURCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE: EARLIEST EXAMPLES FROM ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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Abstract

This study examined a prophetic Church from the varied examples of Acts of the Apostles. It further probed the social problems of human rights in Nigeria with a focus on the fifth book of the New Testament. This study presented these social problems in Nigeria as well as x-rayed the diverse ways Acts dealt with the challenge bordering on human rights. It equally looked at the ways a prophetic Church can focus on these lessons in order to externalize it and fulfill her responsibility in the society. Focusing on the Christian religion, this paper argues that the prevalence of human rights in Nigeria despite Church growth is evidence that the Church is failing at its social roles and losing potency as the conscience of the society. The research hypothesis is; that problems of human rights abuse and violation could be addressed by a prophetic Church that is active in meeting the needs and dealing with the challenges of the people. The significance of this reflection lies in the fact that not so many studies have focused on using examples from Acts to re-emphasize the role of the Church in the subject of human rights in Nigeria. The method adopted in the study is both comparative and analytical. The study concludes that there is a big gap the Church can effectively fill using the examples of the early Christian community in Acts. This research is of the opinion that solution does not reside with the government and foreign agencies alone. The Church as a part of the grass root has a great role to play towards solving this problem. It is for this that this present study is conceived to highlight the achievements of the early Church and to challenge the contemporary Church to wake up to her social obligations and use her position to tackle human rights abuses in Nigeria.

Keywords: Prophetic Church, Human Rights, Nigerian Experience, Exemplary Lives, Acts of the Apostles.

Introduction

A Church that is not concerned with the welfare, the quality of the life of the people it ministers unto will sooner or later fade. The Church not bothered with the poor conditions and implementation of human rights in its environs and other social realities would gradually

lose its relevance amongst the people. Nigeria today is in a dire need for a Church that would task itself beyond spiritual salvation but as well the physical. Nigeria answers the giant of Africa, but are we truly the giant? Using the indices of economic, political and social structures, it is glaringly obvious that the country is far from the name it bears. The very many problems of Nigeria such as poverty, corruption, poor social institutions, and blatant abuse of human rights, mass killings, and pains behoove a concerned individual(s) as to what are the lasting solutions to these issues. In a like manner, poor leadership and followership is aiding corruption and eating deeply into the fabrics of the nation as a whole. This is in line with the thoughts of Eboh (2006) who argues that "a socio-political system that breeds conditions of poverty and structural injustice cannot dispense justice to all" (p. 143).

The prophetic Church therefore is burdened with ensuring that human rights enshrined in our constitution are upheld, promoted and protected. Restoring the lost dignity and selfhood of Nigerians and the general quality of life are urgent priorities.

This research will generally explain the roles of the Church in addressing these existential issues faced by many Nigerians. Proffering solutions and restoring faith and hope of the Nigeria Christians should form part of the mission of the Church. If Christ, his disciples and the early church were concerned with the problems and challenges of the communities they lived, we should be concerned with what has become of Nigeria recently.

Clarification of Terms

For the purpose of clarity, it is important we explain the terms useful in this discourse.

The Church: Acts 11:26, introduces the followers of Christ as Christians (people who behave like Christ). Many scholars have suggested that Jesus did not intend to establish a distinct religion outside Judaism, rather those who continued his earthly ministry evolved gradually to become a strong force to reckon with. Richard and Bowden (1983) define the church as the worshipping assembly called forth by God. Nmah (2012a) adding to this notes that the church is not a building, steeple, resting place but a people. Further, a more detailed description of the church is in Nmah (2012b) pointing that, the church therefore connotes the presence of Christ in the world and its most fundamental task is to build communities of holy character. Brown, Oriek and Perkins (2011) emphasize that "For Eph 2:19-20, the Church is the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone" (p.1338).

The Greek term "Ekklhsia" meaning assembly refers to the Church. From the onset of his ministry, Christ the founder may not have intended to found a new religion. However out of His life and ministry this Jesus' movement emerged, grew and took a formal shape into an organized community called the Church. Searching through the synoptic, Mattew 16:17 was the first placed Jesus used the word Church, he promised to build his Church upon the rock, Peter. The earliest designation of the Christian group in Acts was *koinonia* as they were known for their life of harmony, spontaneity and unity. The key description was with "oneness of heart". Also for the first time, in Acts 2:47, the word Church was used to describe the followers of Jesus by the author of the book. The name was not only for the Christians in Jerusalem but as well other Christians in other places such as Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Ephesus, Syria etc.

The Prophetic Church: This term is coined form the words prophet and Church. At the surface, one may be pushed to explain this to mean a Church that foretells the future and

makes known what has happened in the past. Unfortunately, this is what has become the modus operandi of the many churches springing up in every corner of Nigeria today. It has since assumed the very characteristics of many new religious movements in Nigeria, to reveal the future and the past of the members. They are essentially famous and relevant for this art. This is because Africa is legendary a deep religious world. Obviously, this is why its people continue to search for the cause of every problem even those whose solutions are otherwise rational and simple. For them every event must have a spiritual correlation. The rising of African Independent Churches and some Pentecostal Churches are to fill this overwhelming gap created by realities of the people. Albeit, misrepresentation of the true message, false prophecies and miracles for economic gains are rampant throughout Africa because of this unchecked need to spiritualize random occurrence.

The Greek word proyhthj is referring to the prophet. A prophet is an interpreter of oracle or hidden things. He is a spokesman who solemnly declares God's word he received by inspiration to the people. He does not say the mind of God alone but lives it out in character and in truth. The words of Prophets especially in biblical narratives are understood as a verbatim word of God. Sometimes God speaks to give hope and other times to predict impending doom. Kittel and Friedrich (1995) asserted that "The responsible aspect of the prophets also finds expression in the fact that they do not just proclaim ineluctable judgment but also warn and admonish in order that judgment be averted" (p. 811). The prophets from the Old Testament understanding are the mouth piece of God. In addition, they are renowned custodians and authorities in the Jewish religion and history. This idea was also pronounced in the New Testament. They are authorities whose words and actions are respected in the Jewish setting. Often Jesus cites the Prophets when He wants to correct an issue c.f Mk 11:17, Jn 6:45. As well in other New Testament passages, key speakers sometimes do refer to the prophets to buttress their points/teachings (Acts 7:42 and 48, Acts 10:43, 13:40, 15:15). As much as they were called by God to make known his mind in matters of religion they were also active in speaking God's mind in other matters of the society. These concerns include poverty, politics, social welfare, social justice and corruption e.t.c. They were inclined to speak about these matters to ensure a concrete actualization of God's will amongst His people.

Apparently, a prophetic Church is not a Church that only concerns itself with predicting the future and revealing the past. It is not a Church that seeks to showcase its charismatic gifts as a powerful seer and deliverance minister or exorcist. This is a common practice and area of specialization in many contemporary independent Churches. It is an assembly of the called out children of God, who express the wholesome image and life of Christ. Charging itself with the declaration, proclamation of the message of God in such a way that it gives answers and hope to problems of man. Thus it is a Church that actively seeks to ameliorate the pains and give hope to the people in distress. Simply put, it is a Church that does not distance itself from the social realities of the people and not complacent or reluctant in pursuing the course of justice for the good of the masses.

This explanation given above about a prophetic Church and the earliest examples from Acts of the Apostles is bearing to what this paper aims to achieve.

Human Rights: Human rights are those basic universal, inalienable, non exchangeable, indivisible rights and freedom inherent to all human beings regardless of race, sex, nationality,

ethnicity, language, religion or any other status. These rights belong to us till death. Without these people are at best slaves of the system they belong to. For Kamruzzaman and Das (2016):

> Human rights are those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. The basic rights and freedoms, to which all humans are entitled, often held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law (pp. 5-6).

The belief in sacredness of human life precedent in many world religions could be said to be one of the earliest thoughts about human rights. As well, the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and philosophies contributed immensely to the development of what we have today as human rights. Christianity and other Western historical documents had expanded this and gave it a much concrete shape. Especially the Magna Carta of June 12, 1215 and the American Declaration of Independence and American bill of rights, were documents that further cemented the progress and strides in human rights formally. By 1948, the United Nations adopted this charter under Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All the members are expected to recognize and enshrine these rights in their constitutions. The tenets of human rights include the following: Freedom of speech, freedom of association, free of movement, freedom of thought and expression, right to work, equality before the law, respect for human life and others. These rights are to be protected and promoted by all and sundry especially in countries where these rights are enshrined into the constitution.

Human rights violation and abuse is a global concern. It is perturbing that the enactment of the Human Rights Commission of Nigeria and activities of different International and local organizations have not affected positively a decrease in the indices of these cases of abuse. In this line, Onimisi (2018) observed that over the years the Human Rights Commission of Nigeria received increased cases of complaints since its establishment. The abysmal abuse of power by security forces, incessant insecurity, gagging of media by top government officials, religious and tribal crises, corruption and indeed poverty are some of the indicators of a colossal neglect and willful violation of human rights in Nigeria. This rot and decay has further damaged the image of Nigeria.

A Prophetic Church in the Acts of the Apostles

In this section, events and narratives in Acts that exhibited the social concerns of the early Church would be discussed.

The historicity of the book (Acts of the Apostles) may be questioned by some critics who find it lacking in comparison with the modern approach to history. However, historically it is the first of its kind since the Church assumed her status outside Judaism. Acts of the Apostles allowed us to gain a glimpse of what the early beginnings of the Church looked like. The examples and lessons obtained are helpful in discovering the social roles of the Church and other ways it could be more assertive in handling the issues of human rights.

Persecution: The coming and out pouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 ushers in a new era in the lives and activities of the disciples. Those who were formerly timid became bold and were filled with grace and power much needed for the task of the mission ahead of them. In Acts 2:14-42, Peter spoke energetically in defense of the disciples. Christ in a similar way was

concerned for his for He knew that their sufferings were imminent and so He predicted these events and encouraged them before He departed. The Acts are narratives are filled with chronicles of persecution, imprisonment and even death of the disciples. Rightfully, the Church rose up to the challenge, encouraging, praying, defending and preaching in order to restore hope and order. These passages illustrated some of stories of the persecutions of the early Church Acts 2, 4:1-22, 5:17-42, 7-8:1-2, 12:1-19, 17:4-14, 19:24-41. The examples and reactions of the Church are very vital in this discourse. Persecutions threatened to tear them apart and make them deny the faith, but they were resilient and emphatic in the proclamation of the gospel. At different times, the apostles gave sermons and put up treatises to encourage one another and give hope in the face of these injustices.

Sharing and Communal Living: Notably, the early Church exemplified the prophetic ministry also in the character of communal living, *koinonia* (fellowship), and distribution of things according to the needs of the people. One of the major motif of the author Luke-Acts is the universality of Christ. After the death of Jesus, the writer transferred this universality and oneness to stories about the early Church. It was their most prominent feature. The first chapters of Acts pointed to these themes (Acts 1:6, 1:14, 2:1, 2:5, 2:42-47). Their increase did not interrupt this communal living and unity. Acts 2:42-47 gives a detail of their life style "[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common; [45] and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.[46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (RSV). Further, Acts 4:32-36, the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira in Acts 5: 1-12 showed the consequence for those that willfully contravened the clauses of this community code. This feature and attitude of the early Church was one of the greatest strength it wielded that helped withstood opposition. This concern for the general brethren and needy was one of the key ways the Church grew numerically and spiritually.

Rights and Conflict Resolution: The selection of deacons in Acts 6 to settle the problems associated with the sharing of food is an indication that the interest of the early Church here surpassed the need for peaceful fellowship but for promotion of equality amongst the brethren. In the same way, the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 shows great concern for the welfare of the Gentile converts who were harassed over the issue of circumcision by some Jewish Christians. The attempt at dialogue and peaceful settlement of dispute sets a standard that should be emulated by the present Christians especially here in Nigeria where religious crises and intolerance is unconcealed. Here, one can observe a canon set by the Church to eschew all forms of conflicts and segregations that may infringe the freedom of individuals and may even cost lives due to violence. More so, the concern they had for the sick should be reckoned with. They were practical and effective to further spread the gospel. Compassionately, they healed the sick and went about feeding the people spiritually. This zeal for mission and evangelism is borne out of the desire to ensure that even the Gentiles are saved also.

The Church, Human Rights and Nigeria Today: The Way Forward

As a people Nigerians are passing through difficult times, a prolonged nightmare and help seems very far. The solutions and recommendations of different scholars and people have not done much to solve these problems. The hope of better days has been shattered by worsened situations and bad leaders. Insecurity, crises, intolerance, maiming, arsons, killings and destruction of properties have overtaken many states and regions in Nigeria. Some of these incidences are with and some others are without religious undertone almost a weekly story. The helplessness displayed by the Federal and state government is devastating. This scandalous incompetence and unalloyed weakness in handling security matters have moreover damaged the perspective of the world about the country. The abysmal state of Nigeria has further impaired its economic advancement as more foreign investors are pulling out of Nigeria constantly. The truth is that these miseries and hopelessness are not God's desire for his people. The Church is the conscience of every society and in the Nigeria experience; the Church has a responsibility and duty to live up to her calling. Living up to this obligation is by emphatically preaching the message of Christ in such a way that it adequately addresses the problems of the nation. Agunwa (2017) points out that "Through religion we can inculcate in individual virtual virtues like: obedience, humility, meekness, love for one's neighbor, forgiveness of injuries and resignation to God's will" (p.202). Without doubt, one can say that these virtues listed by Agunwa (2017) are exalted by Christianity. When implemented, they go a long way in buttressing a prophetic message of the Church. The Church should by way of examples emphasize the importance of morally conscious society. By essence, Christianity should represent the hope of corrupt free Nigerian society. Further, the gospel should thus give hope to the multitude, the oppressed, the poor, the sick, the children and the weak, seeking therefore to protect them from the mishaps that have become everyday experience in the country. Clearly, Ehusani (1996) remarks that:

> The historical experience of those whom the Christian faith is being addressed in Nigeria, and who must find meaning for their religious pre-occupation is indeed one of poverty, disease, oppression, widespread abuse of human rights, structural injustice, dictatorship, large scale corruption, unemployment, ignorance, violence and death (p.25).

The Church, its leaders especially is tasked with how to present the message of Christ as that which brings hope to the people. Many of the OT prophets were very active in this form of preaching and message, they were outspoken in social and national matters. Moses, all through his relations with God's people, the Israelites, was always concerned of the needs of his people (Ex 4:30-31; Ex 3:11-15; 15:23-26). Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Nehemiah and also the other prophets were always preaching and proclaiming the message of God concerning the well being and social situations of the people. The messages the prophets delivered are not for the spiritual alone, the general welfare and social conditions were regarded too.

Emphatically, gross abuse and violation of the basic rights of the masses are plagues the country has faced for a long time; these are social issues and sadly they still persist, causing pain and hopelessness to the people. According to Okoli (2012) "It has been identified that the following core principles widely accepted by governance stake holders: participation, fairness, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency are all lacking in Nigeria thus

making development in the nation a very big challenge" (p.34). These qualities mentioned above remain the ideal in the Nigerian society because many know them, yet refuse to make these the reality and experience for the masses. More so, thesis and evidences of wide spread corruption and abuse of public funds and offices are undeniable. These have scared the genuine attempts by a few to revamp and revitalize the country.

The big question is how we as a nation can overcome these challenges such as: the abuse of human rights, poverty, corruption, violence, herdsmen killing, structural inequality and injustice, unemployment and oppression? This concern raised must be answered through the preaching and message of the prophetic Church. A prophetic Church must also be willing to walk their talk by involving actively in this prospect of restoring the dignity and rights of individuals. This is a duty and responsibility that must be taken serious. The Church has a particularly special duty towards the poor and the less privileged (Nzomiwu, 2012: 66). The admonition of Peter in 1Pet 3:15, should be a focus of the Church in defending this hope in us. It is paramount to say that Nigeria's experiences post independence with regards to the social, political and human rights demand for a Church that is involved in preaching of God's message in response to the social realities of the state and socially effectual in curbing the flagrant abuse of basic rights. In other words, condemning every evil practices that is fast depleting the natural rights of man and challenging those which are quick assuming the status quo.

Imperatively, the Church should transcend beyond mere friendship and affiliation with the rich. By implication, its primary call to bring in everybody into the fold despite class, gender, age and racial differences is of utmost importance. Nwadialor and Nweke (2014) quipped that "Christianity should serve as a superstructure upon which the modern Nigeria nation should be founded" (p.19). The interest of the masses should as much as it is possible be fought for, protected and promoted by the Church. Boff (1985) observed that the Church which creates an abstract and idealistic image of itself, which is spiritualized and wholly indifferent to the traumas of history, may face danger of approximation. Finding lasting answers to the challenges of Nigerians should be a part of the vision of the Church, to achieve a more just society. Consequently, the desire to become part of the solution and help establish a culture of social justice in Nigeria should be part of the pre occupation of the Church. As Obiefuna and Kanu (2014) stated that:

> This has greater implications for those who take part in political and social life, and does not in any way exclude the church who has a right to intervene on ethical and moral issues related to the good of the individuals and peoples, especially on the issues bordering on the human rights of every person (p. 150).

The most effective tool of the prophetic Church is the word of God. Using the narratives of what God did in Christ. These gospel narratives are still available and applicable also for his children in Nigeria. This word of God can be used to restore the hope of the Nigerian faithful even non-Christians as well. Efforts should be placed therefore on the formulation of theological interpretations aimed at solving Nigerian problems so far, especially on the subject of human rights. The Church cannot afford to be complacent or silent over these issues; our silence may be mistaken as support. It is worthy to mention that some Churches are rising up to this challenge, however more can still be done that will be far reaching and more effective.

Madu (2004) reflecting on the role of the Church in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular, he affirms that "Any theological re-formulations to suite the psyche of Nigerians should be geared towards her aspirations and hopes, to the extent that it will liberate her from all obnoxious forces inimical to the enhancement of her Nigerianness" (p. 107). It is no longer a request but an urgent demand for a Church that will expose, highlight, consistently denounce the evil practices in the country and be solutions to these imminent needs. Nigeria is a democratic state and a member of United Nations; the positive features of this form of government should reflect in the lives of the citizens, it includes the strict upholding of the principles and tenets of human rights.

For a Church to maintain its prophetic posture, it is important that it should not be rooted in pursuit of power and material things or privileges associated the office it occupies. It should transcend the gospel message to be incarnate in nature. By incarnation here, the gospel message speaks to the Nigeria reality, so as to be more meaningful to the people. This requires a theology and message that understand the predicament of the people and address them, giving hope, taking action where and when necessary. Nmah and Udezo (2015) posit that "Christ is present in every human situation, in every community and every human tradition" (p. 267). The implication of this statement is that Christ is present even in the unfavourable conditions that many find themselves in Nigeria. The gospel appropriately and emphatically should be used by the Church to answer to these existential problems and ensure that rights of the citizens are not by any means rendered only on papers.

A Prophetic Church (in Acts of the Apostles) and Human Rights: Implications for Nigeria. It is important here that we relate the ways which the prophetic Church can help to solve problems affecting human rights. The ways of which the key apostles featured in the book (Acts of the Apostles) would be highlighted and applied in solving problems bordering on human rights in Nigeria.

As already noted above, the early Church passed through series of persecution which helped in defining and sustaining the rudiments of the faith proclaimed today. The second chapter of Acts gave the details of the persecution in Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit. This became a common pattern of experience for the church. However because they received boldness, they marched on fearlessly declaring their faith. The conditions of Nigerians have so degenerated that this persecution have become a common occurrence, religious killing aiming at eliminating a particular group of persons. Therefore a gospel that encourages boldness and gives the hope of God's continuous presence in the face of this abuse of human rights (freedom of worship) is highly needed. It should be such that give practical steps on how the victims tackle this problem without losing their lives possibly in the process. The Southern Kaduna crises have been regarded by some as an intentional genocide against a minority in Kaduna state. It is discomfiting that greater numbers affected are Christians and the inability of the government and other stake holders of the society to curb these crises is disheartening. Some few years back, we heard of a woman that was butchered in Abuja because she was accused of disturbing a non Christian area of the city during her morning cries.

Remarkably, throughout Acts, the missionary activities of Paul in the Gentile world were not devoid of persecutions and hard times. His opponents usually tag his message blasphemy

and unfavourable. He was vehemently hated for preaching the gospel against the stated religious conditions of the then Roman world. They always find reasons to attack him. In a similar, freedom of speech and freedom of worship have been gagged by both military and civilian regimes in Nigeria. Just as they persecuted Paul, many have been martyred by some opposition for the sake of their preaching and religious stance. The Church in Nigeria cannot afford to keep quiet any longer. When Paul was arrested at various intervals of his missionary journeys, one method is observed in his different defenses; Paul's deploy of indefatigable and swift arguments in his apologia. This device includes his declaring of his citizenship where needed and his exceptional knowledge of the law. When necessary he identifies himself as a Jew and some other times, he announces to the court that he is a Roman citizen from Cicilia (Acts 21:39). At these instances he utilizes his knowledge of what made up the natural rights in the then Roman world (Acts 22:3-21, 24:10-21, 26:2-23). This declaration of citizenship always reverses the way the court treats him, they most times have no choice than to acknowledge and respect his right as he is a full citizen. At another instance in Acts 16:37, he was quick to mention violation of the law when he was slapped in the court. Indeed knowledge is power, Paul knew his rights, and this informed his choice of arguments at his trials and the content of his speeches and sermons. Hence, the prophetic Church can make use of the method of Paul (A thorough knowledge of the basic human rights) by continuous education of the people of their rights as members of the society and the Church. By this, the total ignorance of basic rights displayed by many Nigerians would be surmounted.

The proceeding and resolution of Jerusalem council forms another substantial input to the subject that should be noted. It is important to mention here the fundamental reason for this council. In Acts 15:1-2, the circumcision group and their teachings had prompted the need for the apostles and elders to sit and decide concretely over this matter. The response of this council towards this debate germinated the much later advanced teachings of Paul, on freedom in Christ and equality of all people in Christ. By this time, the concepts of human rights in the Roman era had already stratified the society and the slave system was fully operational. The resolution of this Jerusalem council and the later remarks of the leading apostles influenced the abolishment of slavery centuries later and to the formal development of contemporary human rights.

The prophetic Church can found organizations or groups that will be made up of professionals in the field of law, human rights and conflict resolutions to educate the masses, give professional counsel over matters of abuse and violation of human rights. Small groups and organizations are very effective here, their functions may include: massive grass root awareness creation, replicating of similar grass root organizations at other local levels and community teachings need to be done. Ignorance will be combated thoroughly through this means. The more accessible these groups are, the more effective and productive they would be. Moreover, the masses are to be encouraged to speak out and even seek redress when their rights are violated. It should be noted here that only such serious legal actions from a prophetic Church can set a legal precedent that will benefit not only the Church but the society at large. The prophetic Church is thereby charged to walk their talk, as preaching alone may not always be enough to achieve a just society that respects the fundamental rights of its citizenries. Wanton and the unending abuse of rights by the unjust systems in Nigeria must be stopped. Let the Church of God rise now!

It is worthy to note that there is a serious mitigating that could adversely affect the postulations of this study, the deficient status and stature of contemporary Churches in Nigeria. It is dispiriting that the Church has neglected its lofty spiritual and social position for fame and political relevance. This has stunted the efficacy and impact of the Church in Nigeria. Ethnical and political alliances by the Church leaders have become counterproductive. The Church's insufficient response or action in the face of defective social conditions is best described as shameful. Enwerem (1995) highlighted how religion was used in incessant political tussles and unrest in post-independence Nigeria. Religion and the Church inclusive continue to play a pivotal role in politics of the country. However sometimes, these involvements are overt, selfish and immodest that they diminish the value of the Church. The precarious position of the Church here is an impediment that could hinder the effectiveness of the Church in confronting the social problems of the country. A Church whose hands are soiled with benefits of negative politics and religious bias in Nigeria will find it difficult to speak out or act when necessary against outright abuse of rights by the said government.

Another crucial factor that may undermine the effectiveness of a prophetic Church in Nigeria is denominationalism, lack of unity and accommodation between different Christian groups. Nmah (2020) asserts that "Devotion to the interests of a particular denomination is narrow-mindedness or parochial adherence to party spirit that often endangers effective evangelization and creates spiritual and moral bankruptcy among the believers" (p. 14). Denominational bias has robbed the Church of a united common front in addressing social problems affecting the people in Nigeria. Various Christian bodies such as CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) and PFN (Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria) e.t.c are often perturbed by quasi denominational and political bickering. The Church in Nigeria in order to fully take up its place as a conscience of the Nigerian society and a spiritual guide to the nation needs to look inward first. By inward looking, the outmost priority is addressing its internal crises and shortcomings and by so doing the Church can be the compelling voice in promoting and protecting the lives of the people of God in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has taken time to explain the various scholarly definitions of the Church to point out the fact that Church has both divine and human aspects. Attempts were made at clarifying the concept of the Church and prophetic Church. It also highlighted the important roles of this Church starting from the early Church examples. Human rights in Nigeria were finally connected to the prophetic Church and thereby charging the Church to embrace its task of continuity. If the OT prophets, Christ and the early apostles were not reluctant in preaching and protecting of the lives of the people they lived with then the Church in the contemporary Nigeria Church should not exempt itself from such a crucial call and duty. For the forbearers of the faith, it was not solely a matter of salvation or spirituality rather they were interested in the total welfare of the people. The Church therefore has a role to promote and protect the rights of the people. As much as it is within its capacity, pressurize the Nigerian governmental institutions and stake holders and the general masses to adhere to the principles of human rights. This will go a long way to eradicate social injustice, inequality and abuse of human rights in Nigeria. Further, the proactive involvement of the prophetic Church will help caution the way the state agencies abuse and violate basic rights of the masses. Barbarism may befall a society that is not concerned with human rights. The Church as a religious group and part

of the society has an essential role to play; to stand up for the masses, educate them and assist them seek for professional help as at and when necessary.

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