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CHURCH AND REBRANDING PROJECT IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed the role of the church in rebranding project in the contemporary Nigerian society. In the recent times, Nworah (2006) observed that governments and countries are increasingly beginning to employ branding or rebranding as their marketing techniques to sell their national image or countries to the rest of the world in order to increase their international profile, attract foreign and direct investments and making her place an ideal destination for tourism and trade. The researcher made use of primary and secondary sources of data collection as their methodologies. The work discovered among other things that the solution to the Nigeria problem needs not to be left in the hands of the government alone. The church and the civil society organizations should all put their hands on deck to see that our nation is resuscitated and truly rebranded. That there must be an intrinsic attitudinal change in the way we see and do things in our country. The work recommended among other things that the church as an ethical instrument must not compromise its stands in knowing the truth, speaking and teaching the truth in all situations.

Keywords: Role, Church, Rebranding Project, Nigeria, Contemporary Society.

Introduction

The concept of branding or rebranding has traditionally been associated with products and services, rather than with countries, places and cities. Global companies and corporations and their marketing communication agencies have continued to create and use branding as a distinguishing the strategic competitive factors in the market drive for consumers (Nworah, 2006:2). In the recent times, Nworah (2006:2) observed that governments and countries are increasingly beginning to employ branding or rebranding their marketing techniques to sell their national image or countries to the rest of the world, in order to increase their international profile, attract foreign and direct investments and making her place an ideal destination for tourism and trade. According to Alabi (2009:1) to rebrand, reposition or repair, in plain layman's language, means to change consumers' perception about a product or brand and attracts positive affection or affinity to it for the benefit of all stakeholders particularly the promoters of the brand. Therefore, rebranding, repositioning or repairing connotes a change from negative to positive perception.

Nigerian government has through the Federal Ministry of information and National Orientation launched the "Nigerian Image Project" which was later renamed "the Heart of Africa Project" in July 2004. In the administration of Yar'Adua, the Minister of Information and communications, Professor Dora Akunyili announced her ministry's intentions and commitment to revamping the national rebranding campaign which was begun by Chukwuemeka Chikelu, former minister of information during the Olusegun Obasanjo's government. Sequel to the above desire to rebrand Nigeria, Akunyili on Friday, March 2009 inaugurated a 22-man committee on National Rebranding (Nworah, 2009:1).

Similarly, on Tuesday, March 17, 2009, Akunyili unveiled the logo and slogan for the project "Rebranding Nigeria" with a slogan Good People, Great Nation" (Akomolafe, 2009:1). It is observable that the presumed reason for launching and/or resuscitation of the rebranding project in Nigeria is for Nigerians to repackage themselves and divest themselves of the ill-labels, reposition her national image, rekindle the passion and spirit of patriotism.

Is it really possible for Nigeria to achieve maximum impact of the rebranding project through mere rhetorical campaigns, radio announcements and television programmes without the Church which has the spiritual mandate for character remolding and to turn sinners into saints through the 'teachings and/or the power of the word of God-Rhema? To this end, Ngele (2007:58-59) emphasized that: Rhema is the spoken word stirred up by the power of the Holy Spirit...by rhema a preacher recreates lives with the Holy Spirit. Transformation is possible when men and women of God get rherna and unction grace as they labour in the word and prayer ministry.

The above demonstrates the impeccable posture of the Church in character remolding and instilling ethical values and moral principles that ensures a positive change in the conduct and behaviour of the adherents. By this, it is arguable whether the federal government can effectively achieve its desires in the on- going rebranding campaign in isolation of the church. In the light of the above, the central task this paper is set to investigate is to examine the place of the church in the on-going national rebranding project in Nigeria and what ethical role has the church got to play in collaboration with the federal government in order to give the image of our beloved country Nigeria a new lease of life.

Definition of terms

In order to ensure clarity and enhance a better understanding of the basic issues and subject matter of this seminar paper, this section is devoted to the definition of the key terms such as: The Church, Branding, Place (National) Branding, National Rebranding, Ethics, and Christian Ethics.

Church

Church is one of the religious concepts that have got plethora of definitions. As it is, it comes up in diverse ways and forms (Ugwu, 2009:27). Willmington (1984: 691) stated that:

The Greek word in the New Testament for our English word "Church" is ekklesia. It is derived from the verb ekkaleo. The compound ek means "out", and kaleo means 'to call or summon". Thus, the literal meaning is "to call out". More so, this word church was derived probably from the Greek Kuriakon (i.e. the Lord's house), which was used by ancient authors for the place of worship. In the New Testament, it is translated from the Greek ecclesia which is

synonymous with the Hebrew Qahal of the Old Testament both words meaning simply an assembly, the character of which can only be known from the connection in which the word is found.

Similarly, Strong (1890: 26) emphasized that the world Church comes from the Greek term Kuriakon, which means belongs to the Lord" or "Lords". Haines and Northville (2008:3) articulated that the Church or ekklesia is a compound Greek term derived from the verb ekkaleo. According to them, the prepositional prefix ek means "out" and kales means "to call", thus compound word ekklesia (Church) means "called out".. The Church simply refers to an assembly of called-out people. They also maintained that many New Testament terms are derived from the Old Testament, and ekklessia is used in the Greek Septuagint to translate the Hebrew term qahal. Bender (1962:6) said that: The term qahal frequently used in the Old Testament for an assembly of the people of God. This was where the rule of God was to exist, and where teaching and discipline were carried out… this unfolds the basic relationship and truth underlying both the Old and New Testaments.

Haines and Northvilles (2008:5) explained that the Church came into being soon after Jesus ascension (40 days after Easter) on Pentecost (the seventh Sunday after Easter).

The problem with these definitions is that they do not match the New Testament concept of the church. Thus, in order to present more concise biblical definition of the church, Ononogbu(2009.0184) summarily presents the church as the body of Christ, a called-out group of believers in Christ.

Branding

Branding is traditionally associated with products and services, rather than with countries, places and cities (Nworah, 2006:2). According to him, global companies and corporations and their marketing communication agencies have continued to create and use branding as a distinguishing the strategic competitive factor in the market place; and also in the fierce market drive for consumers. Alabi (2009:1) states that "branding is all about perception and that is what differentiates a good brand from the rest of the pack in the category.

Much of the definitions of branding, are focusing directly more on explaining what brand means. Nilson (2000:2) wrote that a brand is really just a symbol with tremendous potential, and that this symbol can be expressed in many different ways. The brand symbol can also become a distinguishing or distinctive feature from other competing brands.

According to Cawking and the Hankinson cited in Nworah (2006:3), "a brand is simply a product or service which can be distinguished from its competitors". John Murphy cited in Hart and Murphy (1998:8) suggests that such distinguishing aspects and brand features could be tangible and intangible. To this end, Lemon (2002:3) maintained that:

Branding is a strategic process, one of the important types which your company can undertake. Broadly speaking, strategy is a top-level plan or framework in which tactics are deployed (sometimes on many fronts at once) to reach specific goals set by your vision.

In this light, Nworah (2006:3) defined branding as the marketing and management process that gives a product, service organization, or personality a unique identity and image such that it is easily and positively identifiable and distinct from competition.

National Branding

Olins (1999:2) reveals that "the popular assumption is that national branding is a novel concept". According to Nworah, national branding is defined as;

The process whereby a town, region, country (place) actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself, with the aim of positioning it internally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and investments (Nworah, 2006: 3).

According to Mordi (2009:1) nation branding has become very popular considering the importance of nation brand architecture and profiting as a gateway to national development in a world driven by the contents of globalization. Anholt (2005:5) emphasized on the strategic imperative for developing nations to apply branding principles in their trade relations with the developed countries. According to him, "more branded export business is most certainly a step in the right direction for an emerging country (like Nigeria).

Frost (2004:3) also makes a strong case for national branding campaigns when he remarks that "there's no arguing that the image we have of another country says a lot about how we view it as a tourist destination, a place to invest or a source of consumer goods". However, while some scholars argue for nation branding other argue against it for example Drenttel [2004:6] argues against the concept of Nation branding in his article "My Country is Not a Brand' he expressed thus:

Even nations have become brands… other symbol for a country should not be created by branding experts. When vocabulary of a nation's foreign policy is the vocabulary of branding then it is, in fact, selling Uncle Ben's Rice. This transaction, with the vocabulary of the supermarket counter, is not how I envision my country (America) speaking to the rest of the world (Drenttel, 2004:6).

This goes to show that there are few voices of dissent, but it does not take away the strong argument and need for the adoption of branding principles in the marketing of place and/or selling the image of a country.

National Rebranding

The term “rebranding” is synonymous with repositioning or repairing or image cleansing or laundry. In plain layman's language, to rebrand, reposition or repair according to Osewa (2009:1) simple put, means to change consumers perception about a product or brand and attract positive affection or affinity to it for the benefit of all stakeholders, particularly the promoters of the brand. Alabi [2009:1] explained that marketing professionals may call it either rebranding, repositioning, or repairing. It connotes only one thing to the man on the street —a change from negative to positive perception.

Concisely, Nasiru (2009:1) saw rebranding as: The process by which a product or service developed with one brand, company or product line affiliation is marketed or distributed with a different identity. This may involve radical changes to the logo, brand name, image,

marketing strategy and advertising themes these changes are typically aimed at the repositioning of the brand/company, usually in an attempt to distance itself from certain negative connotations of the, previous branding, or to move the brand up market.

National rebranding is a process of making a country and her citizens to change the way they behave, project, see and think of their country. According to Agbese (2009:1) National rebranding is an approach which aims at uprooting the pandemic of negativism that afflicts all of us as a Nation. He pointed out that it is a cardinal principle in public relation and advertising that when a product begins to lose its market share, it is repackaged and rebranded, it should be follow that a country's image is stinkingly tarnished, it is time to clean it up. The above view is supported by Brymer (2003:5) who added that countries will compete daily with neighbours or bloc regions for tourism, inward investment and export sales and those countries that start with an unknown or poor reputation will be limited or marginalized. They cannot easily boost their commercial success. To this end, Anholt (2005:3) opined that the issue of weak national brands and identities reduces such a nation's attraction in the international community and places them in low positions as potentials brides in the competition for tourism and investment dollars.

In the case of rebranding Nigeria, Agbese (2009:2) maintained that "rebranding is the formula of calculated National sermon to arouse our dormant passionate for patriotism. According to him, this strategy persuades us to appreciate the simple fact that if the image of our country remains poor we remain a pitiable Nation and a pathetic people, while every country, big or small, laughs at our faces.

Ethics

Ethics refers to moral principles that govern or influence a person's behaviour (Hornby, 1995:393). According to Okwueze “ethics” is derived from the Greek word ethos which means wisdom, conduct, culture or way of life. Many regard ethics as a branch of philosophy concerned with what is morally good or bad, right or wrong. In the light of the above, Agha (2003:1) defined ethics as; "A branch of general wisdom called moral philosophy. This is the study which led to an examination of all human conduct, and this type of philosophical study is known as Ethics". Thus ethics always involves a reflective evaluation of any human conduct. (Okwueze, 2003:2).

Christian Ethics

By Christian ethics we mean putting faith to action, thus, the basic principle in Christian ethics is to relate faith to action in various situations (Agha, 2003:20). In the study of Christian ethics we apply the biblical teachings to our African traditional and cultural heritage. In our ethical behaviour we definitely follow the Gospel teachings as the standard of our decision thereby putting our faith and theology into practice —faith in action.

The Problem with Nigeria and the Need for Rebranding

(Onuoha, 2001: vii) in other words, "Nigeria can be described as a nation without the philosophy for discipline, nobility, integrity, accountability, transparency and honesty". He said that "Nigeria possesses all the ingredients and characters of a failed state". Nigerians have been associated with various crimes and other social vices both at home and abroad (Nasiru, 2009:1).

Bribery and Corruption, lawlessness, poor attitude to work or poor work ethics, prostitution, kidnapping, advanced fraud (419), human trafficking, drug trafficking, abuse of human rights, disregard for human life and property, production of fake and substandard goods and services, armed and pen robbery, tribal, ethnic and religious squabbles or intolerance, looting and embezzlement of public fund by government officials.

Emenyeonu (2007: 23) lamented that;
Looting of the public treasury, electoral fraud, judicial corruption, murder of political opponents, abuse of power and all other kinds of heinous vices are the staple of many of those who occupy positions of leaderships in government both at the local, state and federal levels it is common knowledge that resources meant to provide needed goods and services for the welfare of the citizenry are often times stolen by governmental leaders.

Against this backdrop, Achebe (1983:1) stated that the trouble with Nigeria is simple and squarely a failure of leadership. He explained that there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air or anything else.

As a means of survival, everyday thousands of Nigerian youths are leaving the country for countries in Europe and America; even go to neighboring countries like Ghana, Egypt, Libya, Somalia and morocco among others. The cause of worry is the manner the young boys and girls suffer to get out of this country. Some trek thousands of miles in the desert and in the process a number of them die while some get imprisoned (either for crime or as illegal aliens).

The place of the church in the Rebranding Project in the Nigerian contemporary society
Having identified the need for national rebranding in order to reinvent Nigeria into a pride of her place in the international community and to a reasonable/appreciable extent pragmatically examined some empirical examples of countries that have successfully rebranded; our preoccupation here is to practically locate the place of the Church in the on-going rebranding project in Nigeria.

Essentially, the Church is seen as a beacon of change, but the question remains, has the Church in Nigeria occupied its rightful position in pioneering and/or engineering this National wave of change in the name of rebranding or is it still standing aloof from this Herculean task and expects the change from nowhere?. In fact, it is demanded that the Church be active in engineering the process of campaign. The Church needs to show deep concern in the problems of Nigeria, especially in this rebranding project that is all about a campaign for image laundry and attitudinal change.

Although the church has not maintained sealed lips in decrying the evils that are perpetrated in Nigeria, yet the Church as a segment of the civil society is still lacking in its expectations. In fact, the attitude of some church ministers are not helping matters in this struggle. In this light (2004:9) aptly stated that: The constituency (church) has not spoken out with any articulate voice and moral failures within the ranks of Pentecostal pastors have not reflected positively on the movement to have any appreciable impact. Alarmingly, due to lack of moral rectitude some church ministers welcome and/or accommodate and celebrate criminals in order to enjoy their ill-gotten money (Nasiru 2009:3). In a more polite manner, many sermons from the pulpits of some churches or denominations seem to be dealing devastating blows on

the Nigeria leaders and hammering on how corrupt these leaders or politicians have been. But the obvious questions is "who are thesecorrupt politicians or leaders? Are some of them not the same members of the church? Are they not good friends of the churchleaders (ministers of the gospel)? Are they not the dignified people that occupy special scats, especially front seats in the Church? Worst still and very unfortunate too, when these corrupt leaders must have manipulated their ways into the corridor of power and siphoned the public funds, the 419 members, yahoo- yahoo boys and armed robbers; they come back to the Church for their thanksgiving services or book a special mass for celebration.

Rebranding Nigeria: The need to carry the church along

To rebrand simple demands for attitudinal change, character remolding and value reorientation which the federal government cannot effectively or maximally achieve in isolation of the Church. In fact, why should it even be only the government that is concerned about the image of the country? It should really be the collective responsibility of eve1Y Nigerian to defend the integrity of the Nation (Akomolafe, 2009:2). The Church is the social institution that has the divine powers for a true and all-round rebranding and transformation of lives. Agang (2007:2) explained that: The gospel is the great resource of inspiration and grace for transformation from both the roots for change can grow deeply and the fruitful tree can grow over time and be a source of health for many.

Evident from the above citation is that the power of the gospel is a grace for transformation and healing therapy for every social sickness and disease. Therefore, we need a true and unadulterated gospel that has the capacity to encourage social and economic order, freedom and justice (Agang, 2007:2). In fact, it is being practically religious that is the answer. Martin Luther King Jr., says that "*the man who is not religious begins at nowhere and ends at nothing*" He further observes that "religion is like a mighty wind that breaks down doors and makes that possible and even easy which seeing difficult and impossible " (King in Agang, 2007:47). Therefore, it is the undiluted ethical gospel of the church that can make the difficult and impossible task of rebranding Nigeria possible.

The Church as the conscience of the society should be greatly involved in the process of nation building which is what the rebranding project is all about. This implies that in a developing nation like Nigeria, it becomes imperative for the citizens to conform their conduct to the norms of morality (Agha, 2004:21).

The Church and Pragmatic Steps towards Rebranding Project: An Ethical Response

There cannot be any meaningful result in the rebranding Nigeria project without an ethical response to the way we think, the way we talk, and the way we act. In fact, the path of righteousness has remained a compulsory option for Nigerian rebranding project. Proverbs 14:34 expressly states that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people ". This is because when a nation is morally conscious and the people are all righteous in living their lives, the Lord will be their God and they His people and possession, He will fight for them in their battles against any aggression from the worldly and spiritual enemies (Chukwuma, 2009:211). But whenever a nation turns against God, it cannot stand, irrespective of who their king is, and the number of soldiers they have, and even their sound socio-economic and political strategies.

In Ecclesiastes 7:1, we are reminded that, "A good name is better than precious ointment every material possession is nothing but our name or integrity is what matters. One may imagine what makes America great and successful! It is nothing but their national philosophy that has anchorage on God, hencetheir National Motto: "In God We Trust.

Indeed, tuning to God is the surest way for true rebranding in Nigeria. For the Bible says "if my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land". (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The way forward

It is evident that Nigeria's problem is enormous and multi- faceted too. It is an obvious fact that corruption has portrayed Nigeria in the bad light and earned her all sorts of bad names, hence the need for rebranding. To solve the problem of image cleansing and repositioning, the following recommendations will be right steps to take.

i. The solution to the problems of this Nation needs not be left in the hands of the government alone.' The non-governmental organizations and above all the Church should all put their hands on the desk to see that our nation is resuscitated and truly rebranded.
ii. There must be an intrinsic attitudinal change in the way we see and do things in this country. This calls for a total overhauling of our value system and orientations so as to do what is morally right at all times, no matter the prevailing situations. And to punish justly those who go against the socially accepted behaviour and standards.
iii. It is a common knowledge that an idle hand is the devils workshop. Therefore, as some of the anti-social behaviours and high rate crimes are attributed to joblessness or unemployment, the government should create employment opportunities for the teeming jobless population.
iv. For the rebranding programme to be a success, the campaign against poverty must be taken seriously.
v. If really we want to rebrand this country, both the leaders and the led must have a rethink and put up a positive attitude and rebrand ourselves internally.
vi. The church as an ethical institution must not compromise its stands in knowing the truth, speaking and teaching the truth at all times and in all situations.

CONCLUSION

The rebranding Nigeria project is on its way to success if the above recommendations are properly implemented. Indeed, the goals of the rebranding project will become achievable if there is a political will and ethical response to pursue it head long. The ethical responsibility of all to be transparent and accountable cannot be over emphasized. The earlier the citizens accept the fact that we are all entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the transformation and survival of the state, either as leaders or as subjects, each playing his/her roles and enjoying the benefits and privileges as well, the better for Nigeria as a country and its rebranding drive. The reorientation of the society will only result in its perfection when the morals constitute itself into autonomous science which is the positivist thinking of Auguste Comte, corresponding to a practical art, the art of good and accountable governance (Izibili and Aiya, 2007:233-234). Finally, the task of rebranding Nigeria by the federal government

will be an exercise in futility in isolation of the Church. This is because the Church, by inculcating the right values in her members and other members of the society can positively influence what they do in their professional and vocational lives, which is the truest essence of rebranding.

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