



## Evaluation of Church Administration in Nigeria, and its Failure to Stem Moral Decadence

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### Abstract

*The paper evaluates church administration in the face of the moral decadence prevalent amongst the congregation. It also described what church administration is, what morality was in the earliest times and compared the organization with how it is presently. All functional organs/offices of the administration were considered, with a view to ascertaining their responsibilities to the society. The paper also identified and discussed the various permissive moral laxities; as could be found in the church. However, it was noted that, there were inhibitions which would not allow the church to be effective in moderating the morals of the present day Christians, and which has allowed the church to become impotent and permissive. The researcher adopted the descriptive method in the research. It concluded that, the church would have as much as possible intervened in the affairs of the modern Christians, to check the present high level of immorality, but for the constitutional provisions on human rights. The church is left with no option that to operate within its provisions, as Nigeria is a secular state.*

**Key words:** Bible, Church administration, Christians, Committee, Nigeria.

### I. Introduction

It is puzzling to know that, the Church in Nigeria has found it challenging to correct or tame the social laxities and the pervading sinful practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What makes it more surprising is the fact that, the church now tilts against the spiritual concept of Pentecostalism; a concept which had emanated as a correction of a hitherto depraved society, intending to correct and replace the social and spiritual depravity with a spirit led, filled and driven movement. Yet, not much of such corrections have been achieved! Therefore, the very essence of church reformation and Counter Reformation, which were directed at ensuring a sin free and a God-fearing society, seems to have been

defeated. What makes it more appalling is the fact that, Pentecostalism has become the trend and vogue in Christendom, more so in Nigeria.

This is an issue that has remained topical for some decades, without anyone being able to find an acceptable solution to it. Some schools of thought have often blamed the failure, not on the content of the scripture, but on the ineptitude attitude of churches' administrations. This position is reinforced by the fact that, if the bible had sanitized the hitherto evil society in the past, why not now? The answer could be that, it obviously once did, when the handlers were well disciplined and therefore had passion to positively impact on the society. The bible has remained virtually the same, notwithstanding the numerous versions of it. Why then has it become very difficult to repeat the same feat of discipline even now, when the world is in desperate need of such a change?

Some schools of thought reason that, the answer could be found in the ineffectiveness of Church administration. This opinion says, if we had a strong, and well-disciplined administrative structure in the various church denominations, implementation of the biblical tenets would have been easy to enforce, and the society would have been the better for it. Therefore, this work shall proceed by first defining various church administrations, the various laxities prevalent in today's Christendom and from there proceeds to a reconciliation of practices with biblical positions.

### What is Church Administration?

By a way of definition, church administration or management could be considered as a science or an art, and even a gift that involves procedures and techniques, which could be learnt by study and by practice. What this means is that, church administration calls for relational sensitivity, intuition, and timing. These could be regarded as natural skills which could also be enhanced or improved on through experience and



training. Furthermore, administration in the Church of Christ is the exercise of those powers of prerogatives with which one has been vested by the church. Administration involves the question of authority and the self-governing powers of the Church<sup>1</sup>

Apostle Paul also explained church administration as a spiritual gift (I Cor. 12: 28). In line with Christ's great commission to carry out this instruction, it becomes imperative to implement this and it required some tact and methodologies, if it must be done. This meant that the apostles had to plan, strategize and effectively execute the plans as directed by Jesus Christ. Obviously, this could only be done by a very determined and organized church, whose activities are propelled by the needs and resources at the disposal of the local churches.<sup>2</sup>

Today, even the smallest congregations are expected to plan and organize their functions and works. Therefore, in order to function well, a church conducts its businesses primarily in three ways: through church officers, church councils and through Committees.<sup>3</sup> This paper would therefore, go back in history and examine how the early church organized its administration to enable her deal with discipline, congregational spirit, norms and standards. Thereafter, it would explain how church administration is conducted in the contemporary times, while enunciating her failure or success in instituting, executing, and maintaining discipline.

### Early Church Government/Administration

It must be clearly stated that, nowhere in the New Testament could anyone find an ideal or prescribed administrative model of church administration. However, one thing that is undisputable is that, such Christian assembly eventually had at least one Elder and a group of people called Deacons. When the church began its life in Jerusalem, it was governed by a Council of Apostles, who guided it in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. In those days, there were no elders, deacons, bishops, synods, districts and whatever other forms of administrative structures known to us at this time.<sup>4</sup> Overtime, the structure developed to full- fledged government of Elders, Deacons and Bishops. To understand the administration of the early church, proper description of these offices must be done.

Very early in the life of the early church emanated the office of the Elder. The office remains up to date. Later, offices of the Bishops and Deacons grew out of the office of the elders.

Acts chapter 11:30 speaks of the relief of the poor brethren in Jerusalem, sent through the elders there by Barnabas and Saul. Also Acts 14:23 speaks of Paul and Barnabas as having appointed elders in churches during Paul's Missionary journey.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that this arrangement must have come from the contacts of the early Christianity with Judaism, which was well reputed for a well-organized administration of its synagogue in this manner of having a single elder who headed and led the synagogues.

The criteria for becoming an elder are well captured, as well as the required parameters for their election. The New Testament applied two basic Greek words: *episcopos* (Overseer) and *presbuteros* (elder), which ostensibly referred to the same office. By this, during the early church government, all elders had pasturing responsibilities (I Peter 5:1-2). In fact, they constituted the pastoral staff. It was also believed that elders were paid for their pastoral services.<sup>6</sup> However, it must be noted that despite their being associated to pastoral staff, and the book of Ephesians chapter 4 stipulates specific specialization and division of labour amongst the elders. Therefore, it could be said that, there is distinctive office of pastors and the person who occupies the office exercises an overall under shepherding function among the flock and among his fellow elders.<sup>7</sup> In the early period, there was no hard and fast attempt to differentiate the elders from the bishops. This paper would hereafter attempt to examine the different office in the early church, with a view to demonstrating how the hierarchical order had assisted in managing the early churches.

### The Office of Bishop

The office of the bishop also played a great role in the administration of the early church. It had earlier been discussed in this paper that, there was a difference between the elders and bishops, as the two were considered as the same. The onset of a differentiation between the two offices showed up in the letters of Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in Syria. The letter was written in AD 115, while he was on his way to Rome as a prisoner. From the elders, thus emanated the office of the bishops, who were expected to lead the body of elders in a congregation or head all of all the churches in a city.<sup>8</sup> The bishops were called Monarchical Bishops. The office of the bishop in the city, with time came to be regarded as the head of the entire church in that province. He was called Metropolitan Bishop.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently emerged from



this, the office of the Pope who became the head of the bishops.

### The Office of Deacons

When and how the office of deacon originated is not certain. The scripture does not suggest specifically what their duties are, but does give a good yardstick for their appointment. Evidence within the bible suggests that, the office of deacon was open to both men and women Rom. 16:11).<sup>10</sup> The appointment of the seven mentioned in the sixth chapter of Acts is definitely not the beginning of the office of deacons.<sup>11</sup> Ignatius wrote that, the deacons must obey the bishops as the grace of God and the board of elders as the law of Christ.<sup>12</sup> It is imperative to mention that, the early church administration was quite different from the contemporary administration. Although, to some extent, some churches still retain certain aspects and structures of the early church's administrative paraphernalia. It must also be noted that, additions and modifications in certain areas had been introduced. One major difference between the early church and the contemporary church in their administrative structure is the unitary nature of administration in the early church and national, whereas, contemporary church administration is diverse and localized. This has challenged the structure and forms of the church have been seriously affected.

The reformation and schism of the 16<sup>th</sup> century led by Martin Luther King had serious impact on church administration. The aftermath was a split in Christendom. The reformation gave rise to the emergence of new movements and churches. The overall importance of this is the birth of a consciousness of every church to have and exercise its distinct form of government and administration.

For instance, the Anglican Church has a different governmental structure when compared with the Catholic Church. Even the protestant churches all have different structures from one another. The present arrangement has brought about more emphasis being placed on the local administration of the churches, rather than the national administration. Suffice to say that, despite the fact that most important aspects lie with every local congregation, they are still obliged to fall in line with the general supervision of the central government, which is constituted in a hierarchical order.

This point is made more relevant when we consider the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), formerly known as Evangelical Church

of West Africa, where the governance of the church begins from within the congregation. The Church may be headed by a pastor or Reverend, with the later assuming a higher authority. The Reverend of a District Council is however responsible to the President of the Church, based at the national headquarters. Meanwhile, every District Council is further sub divided into First District Council, Local Church Council (LCC), and Local Church Board (LCB). All of these are responsible to a District Leader who heads the Church Board.<sup>13</sup> the Baptist has a similar organization with the ECWA, while the present day Roman Catholic still retains most of the early Church's features.

It should be appraised that the Church Administration as obtained in the African Independent Churches are very much different. Take for example the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement, there is various numbers of offices, beginning with the Local Church, through the Districts and finally linking up with the headquarters. Their administrators begin with the Evangelists, Apostles, Senior Apostles, Most Senior Apostles and Special Apostles, in that order from which group the Church Leader emerges. The Church Leader heads every sub-headquarters he is directly responsible to the office of the *Baba Aladura* at the national head-quarters. The *Baba Aladura* is the supreme head of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement.<sup>14</sup>

The aforementioned discuss reflects the pattern of the general governance of these identified churches. However, more primary is the day to day running of the churches. In that wise, proper focus should be paid to the structures within the churches. To this extent, it does not appear as if there is any hard and fast rule of pattern designed for adoption by all churches. The above discussion therefore is better described as a general and broad pattern for virtually all the churches, be it Mainline, Protestant or Independent Separatist Churches.

For the contemporary Churches to function very effectively, its business must be conducted primarily in three ways: through Church Officers, Church Councils and Church Committees.

### Church Officers

These belong to the administrative services ministries of the church. They are normally elected by the church to include Moderators, Clerks, Treasurers, Financial Secretary and Trustees. They are usually recommended by the Nominating Committee and elected by the Church to serve for a specified time.<sup>15</sup>



### Functions of the Officers

The Moderators' main assignment is to make preparations for and to preside at church business meetings. They also help members stay informed and involved in church business by promoting attendance and participation in business meetings. They also clarify matters voted for later action and follow up on same. As for the Church Clerks, their function includes recording, processing and maintaining accurate records of all church's business meeting transactions. The Clerk is also responsible for all official church membership records and communications.

Meanwhile, the Treasurer's principal function is to have proper receipt, accounting and disbursement of Church's funds, within policies established by the church, for adequate financial control. Closely related to this is the Financial Secretary who is responsible for maintaining accurate records of individual members' contributions. Lastly is the office of Trustees. These serve as legal representatives in all transactions related to the church. They hold legal titles to the church property and they sign all documents related to the purchase, sale, mortgaging, or rental of church property after approval by the church, in regular business transaction.<sup>16</sup>

### The Church Council

The Church Council's major priority is related to planning, coordinating and evaluating the total work of a Church. They most often provide support through the pastoral ministries and educational ministries programme of the Church. Actions are performed as required by the planning and administration needs of their respective Churches. Its membership includes every church staff member whose responsibility is related to the operation of one or more church programmes. All the Lay Readers are assigned with diverse responsibilities on church programmes. In this instance, it is not unusual to find some church members of Church Council equally serve as active members, while some serve as ex-officio members.

### The Deacon Council

This assists with Church pastoral ministries' programme. Its major functions are planning, coordinating and evaluating the work of the church related to pastoral functions. The concept of deacon comes from Greek word *diakonein*, which means to serve. Each Church decides how many deacons are needed to implement an adequate programme of pastoral

ministries and process by which deacons will be selected. The head of the Deacon Council serves as a member of the Church Council.

### Church Programme Organization Council

A church should have a council for each of its educational programmes. For instance, the Sunday School Council. This group determines the direction of the programme and coordinates its works with other education organizations through the church Council. The Sunday School Council consists of the general officers of the Sunday school, plus the departmental director for each department of the Sunday school. The Council is headed by Director of the Sunday school. For proper coordination, the director of the Sunday school also serves as a member of the Church Council.<sup>17</sup>

### Functions of Church Committees

Church Committees function to plan, coordinate, implement and evaluate the work assigned to them by the church. The approach they adopt has several benefits for a church.

- a. It spreads the administrative load among members of the congregation, thus living deacons and church staff more freedom for ministry.
- b. It makes use of skills immense individual skills within the church
- c. It makes room for members of the congregation to feel part of the church administration

On the whole, Committees are formed as occasion demands for it. But sometimes, there are standing committees, which change from time to time. There could be building committee, disciplinary committee, etc. the earlier concerns itself with monitoring and supervision of the new church building. Their report is directly made to the church council. The disciplinary committee on the other hand, sees to the maintenance of law and order within the church.

### Church and the Weird World

Evidences abound to suggest that, the church and her membership have been deeply involved in weird worldly affairs. Weird worldly affairs in the sense that, many non-spiritual practices, which ought not to be found among Christians, are now holding grips of the church, to the extent that, some have infiltrated and permeated the laities, clergies and the administration of the church, such that, it now becomes practically difficult to make a clear cut difference, on one hand; between the church and its members and on one the other hand, between the church and the



general society, where mundane behaviours are obtained. Subsequently, this paper would attempt to highlight some of these unethical practices which have turned the church a commonplace for indiscipline and recklessness.

### **Financial Misappropriation**

The church of this century is replete with financial mismanagement and misappropriation, just as obtainable in the secular world. There have been reported cases of such indiscipline across all denominations. There are reports of pastors who have been relieved of their positions as a reprimand for their recklessness. This problem is on the rise in churches and amongst pastors, perhaps because of the general surge in the quest for prosperity. It is not unlikely that the church has itself to blame for this decadence, as it is majorly guilty of indulging in unbridled prosperity preaching. The influence has rubbed off on the members, as all sorts of unwholesome financial practices such as internet frauds, embezzlement and even ritual killings for money are daily occurrences in some churches and amongst many Christians.

### **Adultery and Fornication**

As against the warnings of the Bible, adultery and fornication are widely prevalent in churches and amongst Christians. The situation seems not to have arisen in a day though. It appears there had been a gradual and steady rise of this phenomenon. It is not unheard-of today seeing men of God having mistresses and concubines among their members. Same goes for even the self-professed women of God. The practice, although shameless, is however becoming a trend that no one seems to be surprised about anymore. Some schools of thought have argued that, the frequent exposures of the servants/ministers of God are probably responsible for the gaffe. No matter how strong the points, it would be an inexplicable position.

### **Indecent Dressing in Churches**

The mass population these days thrives on body flaunting and seductive dressing. The intentions are not very clear. What this behaviour tends to portray is, over *sexualization* of the society. What seems more responsible for this repulsive attitude is perhaps of what the Bible described as moral perversion. It is not uncommon to find ladies among the congregation who are inappropriately dressed, and provocatively sitting at the front rows. It is difficult to determine what their immediate intentions are. What is however

certain and undisputable is that, such untoward behaviours are inappropriate, uncivil and not in accordance with biblical doctrines.

### **Constitutionality and Civil Rights/Liberties**

As much as the church would like to moderate the morality of her members, some basic facts must however be acknowledged. These days, constitutionality, human rights and privileges, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and association amongst others have taken the frontline in the thoughts and deeds of every parishioner. All congregants are very much conscious of their constitutional rights and privileges so much that, a presiding pastor has to take this into cognizance in his daily interactions with members of his church; otherwise, he would be labeled an interloper. This, to a large extent has hindered the church from going full blast against some behaviours and actions of its members which could be considered as ungodly and unbiblical. Therefore, members of the church, these days operate within great latitude of constitutional freedom, where normally, Christians ought not to have operated.

The situation has so degenerated to the level that, a clergy or even the entire church administration could be sued before the court of law, as much as the entire assembly, if someone considers their actions and or inactions to be infringing on their constitutional rights, freedom and liberties. Obviously, this has inhibited the enforcement of discipline in today's churches. Therefore, the church has become highly permissive and liberal, even to those ideas and ideals hitherto considered to be sinful. The bible and its doctrines have to a large extent been as it were; rendered impotent by a hypersensitive weird and depraved society.

## **II. Conclusion**

In conclusion, comparing the early church administration with the contemporary church administration will leave one agape because of its sophisticated nature. These days, more emphasis is placed on the administration of the local churches. This has unavoidably formed the root of present-day administration, while the central administration merely supervises and sometimes coordinates the affairs of the various local churches. Sometimes, the various churches are even independent of one another as it is the case in the Baptist Church. To this extent, it is more favourable for propagation and quick spread of Christianity. No wonder the church has been expanding in leaps and bounds,



yet, lacking in moral discipline and proper biblical/spiritual growth.

### III. Recommendations

From the foregoing, the under listed recommendations could be beneficial to the Church Administration as well as the congregants.

- i. Church Administration should concentrate more on developing the spiritual lives of their congregants than they do the physical
- ii. The bible should be the main guide in dividing the word
- iii. The urge to densely populate the church should not be the basic consideration of the church establishment and founders
- iv. Pentecostal preachers should be courageous to condemn out rightly, untoward attitudes of the congregants, while they themselves offer exemplary leadership
- v. Right and godly attitudes should be rewarded by the church
- vi. There must be proper training of the various categories of the church leadership
- vii. Sunday School education should be proactive in exposing characters that are strange to a Christian life
- viii. All church teachings should be Christ centered and divinely communicated to the congregants
- ix. Church Administrators should place more emphases on earthly human endeavours than the heavenly ones

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