

THE CHURCH AND THE STATE: SEARCH FOR A NEW MORAL AND SOCIAL ORDER



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INTRODUCTION

Both the Church and the State have their duties towards the people that make up our society. To put it in another way, the people who make up the society have great expectations of the Church and of the State. Before going further, it is important to make few clarifications of the terms being used in this paper.

I. EXPLANATION OF TERMS

1. **The Church:** There are several ways of understanding the Church. One way of understanding the Church is as a building. Even when there are no people inside, if one asks, “Where is the location of so and so Church?” People will invariably refer one to a building. A second way of understanding the Church is as congregation. Whether they are in their building or not, the congregation is called “Church”. That is why we have some Churches today meeting under trees. In places where insurgency has badly affected the buildings, Churches are meeting under trees and shades of all kinds. There are also Churches that meet in hotels and make-shift shelters. Third, the Church sometimes refers to a denomination. If you ask

somebody what Church he/she goes, the response can be “I can attend the Baptist Church or the Celestial Church or the Cherubim and Seraphim Church”. In that case, the Church means the entire denomination. Lastly, there are times when the Church refers to the company of all Churches, meaning a spiritual or universal body. When all Churches come together or a majority of Churches come together and speak with one voice, it is often regarded as the voice of the Church. The “Church” in this paper refers to the company of all Christians as represented under various umbrella bodies, and particularly in Nigeria.

2. **The State:** There is one meaning of the word “State” which has to do with the condition of a person. That is not what is meant here. The State is a nation or a territory considered as an organized political community under one government. The State can also refer to the civil government of a country. Nigeria therefore is a State.

3. **Moral Order:** The word “moral” is concerned with human behavior; good or bad, right or wrong. Definitely both the

Church and the nation are concerned about moral behavior and on this, there is synergy most times. For instance, the Church teaches its members not to steal. Stealing is an immoral behavior. The State also says that stealing is immoral and by the law, the State punishes those who steal. Moral order is a body of unwritten customs, conventions or behaviours which serve to maintain societal order. If any society will function properly, it must be guided by behaviors acceptable to the people. In this case, moral order may differ from society to society, depending on the consensus of the people.

On moral order, Immanuel Kant said in *Essays and Treatises on Moral, Political, and Various Philosophical Subjects*, [p.371](#), 1798: "So may the gospel, though its phenomenon is but an event of nature, be referred to a principle, different from it, and which has for its end the producing of **moral order** in nature." In other words, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is expected to produce moral order. Also, John Locke, in his 1862 book called: *A System of Theology*, Stationers' Hall, [p. 279](#), said: "So also the apostle expresses this great change as a new creation, or renewing, that is, being made again, or anew, after a **moral order**." In other words, the new life of a renewed believer could be described as a life after a moral order. Again, speaking on Moral Order, Diodato Lioy, in his work - *The Philosophy of Right: With Special Reference to the Principles and Development of Law*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, [p.314](#), 1891, said : "The **moral order** embraces the totality of our duties towards God, towards ourselves, and towards our neighbours."

Consequent upon the above, the opposite of **moral order** could be stuff like moral

disorder or moral breakdown or moral decline or moral collapse.

4. **Social Order:** According to Collins English Dictionary, Social Order has to do with the way the society is organized. Webster Dictionary says that Social Order concerns the totality of structured human interrelationships in a society or a part of it.

To talk therefore of THE CHURCH AND THE STATE in SEARCH FOR A NEW MORAL AND SOCIAL ORDER is to talk of a collaboration between the Church and the State. That means that the Church must be ready to work with the State in order to develop and maintain a moral order which will shape the society. Our society must live in orderliness and this cannot take place unless the Church and the State work together. The Church must take its position to be a voice in the nation. The Church must always *conscientize* the nation towards right values. But before this can happen, three things must be properly understood as ground for Church and State collaboration.

II. CONTEXT FOR CHURCH AND STATE COALLABORATION

1. **The issue of the Separation of the Church and State:** The history of the Church shows different stages in the matter of the Church and the State. There was a time when the State sought to control the Church. This is wrong because the authority of the Church must come from God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Where the State controls the Church, it dictates the kind of Church that will be accepted. It pays and transfers the clergy; takes responsibility of the buildings and sometimes closes the Church. There were times also in history when the Church controlled the State. At that time the clergy enjoyed the best of

treats, forgetting the Bible and ordering kings and rulers in the way they wanted. After these extreme periods, the time came, particularly with Augustine, and through the time of Reformation, when there was advocacy for the Separation of the Church and State. This came to be because, if the Church should continue to be one with the State, it would be subordinate to the State and would not be able to speak against the excesses of the State. However, the separation of the Church and the State must not be taken to the extreme. The Church, according to the Scriptures, must be subject to the rulers and those in authority because they have been put there by God. In Nigeria, for instance, even the government encourages collaboration between the Church and the State. At the swearing-in of our new President recently, both a Christian and a Muslim Cleric prayed. That means that in Nigeria, the Church is recognized and respected.

There are also many Faith-based organizations set up by the Church and assisted by the State for the development of the nation. For instance, on HIV and AIDS, there is collaboration between the State and the religious bodies, the Church and the Mosques, to carry out the treatment of people. Thus, we have many Churches which are centers for the treatment of HIV and AIDS and the religious organizations take their supply of medication from the State. There are many other areas of collaboration between the Church and the State. Polio Vaccines are being administered on Sundays in many Churches by Government Agencies. For example, the Hepatitis B medication is being administered in my Church by the government agency in charge. The point here is that the Separation of Church and

State must not be carried so far as not to collaborate. When William Wilberforce fought for the Abolition of Slavery in 1807, it was at the behest of his Pastor, John Newton. The whole fight on abolition began in the Church. Wilberforce was encouraged by his Pastor until the Bill of Rights was passed. That means that Church members must be involved in politics, unlike the olden days' crusade of calling politics a dirty game. If Christian members are not there, how can the moral and social order of the nation be influenced? Also, in the area of Conflict Resolution and Inter-religious harmony, a lot of collaborations are taking place between the Church and the State. Also, in the area of Security, the former Minister of FCT always carried Church and Mosque leaders along for the sake of peace. If total separation of the Church and State are we practiced, the Church will not be able to contribute to moral and social order.

2. The Importance of Intra-religious harmony. Christ prayed that the Church should be one. If the Church is not one, how will the Church be able to come to consensus on moral values that will contribute to the building up of the nation? If the Church continues to operate in disunity, how can the Church say so and so should be done to build our society morally? Each denomination must work on itself; swallow our pride and work in unity in order to effectively contribute to the moral and social order of the society. Thank God for the Christian Association of Nigeria, but what is happening there is a far cry from the unity being advocated. It is in our unity that our strength lies.

3. The Importance of Inter-religious or interfaith Collaboration. Christians and

Muslims in Nigeria must seek to collaborate where it is possible. There are a lot of commonalities in the two religions which can bring us together. While the sincerity of both groups can be in doubt while doing this; where sincerity pervades, there can be a way forward for our nation. In fact Nigeria, of all nations of the world, with a large number of Christians and Muslims, without such number in any other nation, has the capacity to lead the world in the example of inter-religious harmony. There is no country like Nigeria in the world and our collaboration, without watering down our faith, can become a genuine platform for the conversion of others.

III. AREAS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF MORAL AND SOCIAL ORDER

We cannot propose an endless list here and we must appreciate the grounds already captured. The Church is already collaborating with the State in the following major ways, among others:

1. **Education** – From the Nursery to the tertiary levels, the Church has collaborated with the government (the State) in providing education. Education is a great key to moral and social transformation. A good number of the human resources that make up the work-force of the country received their education through the Church, including non-Christians. More importantly and in view of the nature of education that the Church has been providing, moral and social order are being transformed.

2. **Health** – The Church has provided several highly reputed hospitals in the country. There is no doubt that the hospitals built by the government cannot meet the needs of the nation. Thanks to

God for the various hospitals in the various communities which have become haven of recovery for many Nigerians, Christians and non-Christians alike.

3. **Social Services** – While the two mentioned above can be called social services also, the Church has been involved in providing special services such as: schools for the blind, the learning brail, arts and craft centers, leprosy colonies; habitat for victims of infanticide, rehabilitation centers for drug users, home for prostitutes and so many others.

4. **Aesthetics** – Most times people underrate the contribution of the Church to the beautification of our communities and our nation. Beautiful Church buildings and structures belonging to the Church have enhanced the quality of our societies and nation. Also, Church homes for Pastors and other staff have in no small way benefitted the State in reducing the accommodation needs of the society.

5. **Welfare** – The Church helps to pay school fees; hospital bills and prison bills of inmates. Many things which the State ought to be doing are being done by the Church.

6. **Employment** – The Church has provided employment for many and by so doing, assisting the State. In my Church, the total number of staff taken care of by the Church is over 200 monthly, which include – Pastors, teachers in the nursery, primary and secondary schools. There are other Church staff like drivers, cleaners, etc. Can you imagine what a great number of people are being taken care of by the Church?

7. **Moral and Social order** – The principal work of the Church is to preach and teach for the reconciliation of men to their Creator. This automatically leads to the right behaviors towards God, towards others and towards self. The prayer of the Church and the morals, which are the goal of the Gospel, have been major contributions of the Church for which we must be grateful.

V. THE WAY FORWARD BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND STATE

Having mentioned the above list, it is believed that there are still ways the Church and the State can collaborate in order to achieve moral and social order. Recently, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Lagos State was joining hands with the Lagos State Government in closing down places of worship for noise pollution. This involved both Churches and Mosques. CAN stood by the government to ensure that people do not infringe on the rights of others by immoral behaviors. Other areas of collaboration to be explored by the Church and the State should include the following:

1. Environmental Sanitation
2. Closing Time for Night Clubs
3. Child Abuse
4. Child Trafficking
5. Drug Abuse and Bad Parenting
6. Hawking
7. Prostitution

8. Noise pollution
9. Distortion of Master-plan
10. Unfaithfulness to paying bills
11. Corruption
12. Terrorism and violence

CONCLUSION

The matters of moral and social order are quite germane. We must continue to appreciate what we have done and seek to enter into unreached frontiers. With God on our side, the State will be a better place to live in. The Bible says: in Jer 29:7-8 - *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

We must therefore seek the peace and the overall development of Nigeria by participating in its struggles for moral and social order; for, if Nigeria prospers, the Church will prosper and every individual will prosper. But before we reap our harvest, we must plant our seed. If you don't release what is in your hand, you cannot get the new, unseen things to come. Let us therefore collaborate with our nation so that our contributions will help to develop everyone and ultimately glorify God. Bless His Name.

NOTE: Being A Lecture Delivered At The 25th Anniversary Of The Cherubim And Seraphim Church, Daki-Biu District, Abuja On Wednesday, September 2, 2015



Cross-section of participants at the C&S Movement Church Dakibiyu District, 25th Year Anniversary Lecture delivered by Rev'd Dr. Israel Akanji, Chairman CAN FCT Chapter at the Dakibiyu District Headquarters, Abuja on 2nd September 2015