

GOD SHEPHERD: ROLES OF METHODIST CHURCH NIGERIA'S MINISTERS IN THE DIOCESES OF REMO

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Abstract

The Methodist Church Nigeria's ministers in the Dioceses of Remoland, Ogun State Nigeria play significant roles as good shepherds. Through their leadership and guidance, they provide care and nurturing for the members of their congregation. They demonstrate compassion, empathy, and wisdom as they guide their flock towards spiritual growth and development. These ministers also serve as role models for their community, upholding moral values and setting an example of virtuous living. They actively participate in community outreach programmes and through their dedication and service, they positively impact the lives of individuals and families. Additionally, the ministers work tirelessly to foster unity and harmony within the church and the larger community. Through their diligent efforts, the Methodist Church Nigeria continues to thrive and serve as a beacon of hope and faith in the Dioceses of Remoland. The good shepherds of the Methodist Church Nigeria in the Dioceses of Remoland, Ogun State Nigeria play a crucial role in the growth and success of their congregation and community. The ministers do pray fervently to checkmate or ward-off the prevailing Churches. Indeed, prayers constitute the hallmark of MCN's ministers. Ditto, evangelism is prioritized. This is to ensure that the lost souls are found, such that they would not end up in perdition. Couples who are at logger-heads occasioned by one umbroglio or the other, and have even vowed to call it quit are amicably settled. Visitation is considered as significant in the Dioceses of Remo. It is even considered as a sine qua non, as those who are visited feel quite important, since they are recognized. This is even much pronounced among proselytes. Counseling of those in trauma is carried out diligently, for necessary encouragement. This would obviously lift them out of their state of despondence.

Introduction

Shepherding was predominantly the occupation of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Their main source of livelihood thus hinged markedly on this profession. Virtually all of them i.e. the Israelites were probably into this occupation which was doubtlessly popular among them. To shepherd, succinctly means, to take good care of the flock. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Israelites enamoured exceedingly the chosen profession of theirs and were justly proud. A good shepherd would know his flock by name, one after the other. In the same vein, the flocks, too, know their shepherd. Even when there is a mix-up during pasturing in the wilderness, the shepherd would identify his own among the numerous flocks that probably inadvertently mixed-up. He would call them by their names and they would follow him almost instantaneously, because the flocks know their shepherd too.

The psalmist alludes that: The Lord is my shepherd ... (Psm. 23: 1). This simply means that God is his protector. Jesus also referred to himself as *the Good shepherd* (John 10:11). This simply means that he is the one that takes care of Christians and eventually died for the remission of their sins, just as a good shepherd would willingly die for the flocks, even in the face of obvious vulnerability.

Brief Examination of Good Shepherd

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, edited by Hornby, defines *good* as, of high quality or an acceptable standard, pleasant; that you enjoy or want, showing or getting approval or respect for.¹ Buttressing the position of Hornby, Shashi states that *good* is any object or service that upon consumption, increases utility and, therefore, can be sold at a price in a market. If an object or service is sold for a positive price, then it is most likely a *good* since the purchaser considers the utility of the object or service more valuable than the money.² In the same vein, the *Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines *good* as having the right or proper qualities, beneficial, valid healthy, sound, virtuous, honourable, enjoyable, pleasant etc, skilled, considerable-something good, benefit, something that has economic utility (with the) good persons, personal property, commodities, the desired or required articles.³ One can see glaringly from the above that *good* is something that is considered desirous or worthwhile by the person looking at, or assessing it.

God is depicted as the shepherd of Israel in the Old Testament... Greek word *kalos* here suggests the beauty of perfect competence as well as of moral goodness. True care of the sheep comes about through ownership. Those who have no right over the sheep flee when there is danger, but Jesus by virtue of that relationship He has with the father ... lay down His life for the sheep.⁴ The Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus defines *Shepherd* as escort,

guide, marshal, direct, usher, drive, guard, watch over.⁵ Doubtlessly, the good shepherd loves the flock. In the Bible times, according to Hale, even good shepherds did not usually lay down their own lives for their sheep. But the one *Good shepherd*, Jesus, did lay down His life (Mk. 10: 45). He laid it down of his own accord.⁶ It is imperative to state quite unequivocally that Jesus was not compelled to lead the sheep and even died for the same. However, he willingly did that out of his own volition. Arguably, this was not probably possible in the flesh, rather he was imbued spiritually, and that was why he could accomplish that with relative ease.

Salient Roles of Methodist Church Nigeria's Ministers as *Good Shepherd* in Remo Dioceses

Clergymen in the Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN) Remo Dioceses have numerous germane roles to play. However, one of the most paramount is probably evangelism. Evangelism, according to the trio of Brand, Draper and England is the active calling of people to respond to the message of grace and commit oneself to God in Jesus Christ. While many think of evangelism as a New Testament phenomenon, profound concern for all people is also obvious in the Old Testament.⁷ Evangelism connotes bringing to the fold of Christ those who are still wandering in the dark. The MCN ministers in the Remo Dioceses have taken it upon themselves to ensure that none will end up in perdition. Hence, decidedly, they have been transversing the length and breadth of the dioceses to reach out to those who are yet to see the light. It is obvious that this task is arduous, and indeed herculean, nevertheless, they are not resting on their oars to ensure that they reach as many as possible. Many who ordinarily would not have been saved have been found and brought to the fold of Christ. That is probably why the MCN is growing by leaps and bound in Remoland. When it comes to evangelism, the MCN's ministers are always resolved to accomplish the desired goal. They endeavour to go to the nooks and crannies of virtually every community to disseminate the gospel. The ministers are always resolute, even in the face of trite oddities, to propagate the gospel to guarantee the emancipation of the lost sheep.

Besides, prayer is the hallmark of the MCN ministers in Remo dioceses. They usually embark on constant and rigorous prayers to ensure the growth and development of the dioceses. Of a truth, they have a very strong conviction in the song that states, inter alia:

Prayer is the key (2x)
Prayer is the master key
Jesus started with prayer
And ended with prayer
Prayer is the master key

Indeed, many Christians have belief in the power inherent in prayer and that is why they are relentless (in prayer) both day and night. According to Geaves, Christian prayer shares with other world religions, prayers of petition, adoration, invocation, thanksgiving and penitence. Prayer may be offered in private individual devotion or in set liturgical forms which are congregational. Prayer may also be vocal and silent. In silent prayer, the individual attempts to ascend mentally or emotionally to God, and various disciplines have been developed by the monastic orders to help achieve this. This has given rise to a number of christics.⁸ Geaves goes on to pontificate that the distinct aspects of Christian prayer arise from the atoning role of Jesus Christ, who provides the deepest evidence of the personal and intimate relationship which God has with this creation. It is Christ who has provided the justification that makes it possible to move closer to God, and many prayers are through his intercession.⁹

Again, part of the roles of the MCN ministers in Remoland is the amicable settlement of rifts among couples who are at logger heads with one another. Evidently, the ministers have been able to settle couples who have vowed to call it quit with each other. They have served as obvious agents of reconciliation by teaching the couples what the position of Jesus Christ is, in respect of marriage. According to Ola Akande:

Jesus did not teach that marriage is to be entered into as a matter of convenience or pleasure. He taught that marriage is part of God's original purpose of mankind, and must be taken seriously. In marriage, a man and a woman are united emotionally, physically and spiritually. A union so consummated cannot be dissolved. It must remain a permanent relationship until death breaks it up.¹⁰

Furthermore, it should be stated without any spirit of immodesty that *visitation* is part of the distinctive roles of the ministers in MCN in Remo dioceses. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, edited by Hornby defines *visitation* as an unexpected appearance of something/somebody.¹¹ Webster's Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus sees *visitation* succinctly as a visit by a superior.¹² There is no doubt that *visitation* is quite imperative in maintaining *flock* for Christ. There is no gainsaying the fact that when members of the church are visited, they feel honoured and encouraged to continue in the faith. Church members who are visited usually feel somewhat happy, as they are convinced beyond every reasonable doubt that they are recognised, and consequently feel quite significant. This is much pronounced when members are sick and their absence is noticed in the church and *visitation* is subsequently carried out.

Also, counseling is part of the pertinent roles of MCN ministers in Remo dioceses. Counseling is seen by shashi as a helping service that uses dialogue to guide a person in dealing with a problem of self, situation or both. Most counselors are members of teaching, psychological, medical, religious, legal or social work profession... Dialogue may be one-to-one or in a group. Problems addressed in counseling range from objective to selective concerns. For example, legal counsel may impart impersonal information, while family counseling deals with intimate feelings.¹³ Henneman also sees counseling as:

An organised field which includes a variety of guidance services that help people deal with personal, educational, and vocational problems. The majority of professional counselors serve in schools, for example, have full-time counselors who advise students about planning courses, choosing careers, and handling personal problems. In other schools, guidance is provided by part-time counselors. Traditionally, guidance was part of teachers' job, professional counseling is a 20th century development. The field of professional counseling also included vocational counselors who work in state, city or private employment services and rehabilitation counselors who assist the handicapped.¹⁴

To counsel, in brevity, is to guide and uphold those with frail bodies apparently because of the trauma that they are facing, occasioned by an unpalatable incidence or occurrence. The ministers of the MCN have evidently taken counseling as a task that must be done to bring out their members who are in the dungeon of very pathetic situation(s). Usually, those who are not opportune to counseling when they have challenges do remain in their pathetic situation(s), for a longer period of time, than those who are.

In the same vein, the MCN ministers in Remo dioceses, are not oblivious of the restiveness of the youths in the contemporary days. Consequently, they are working quite assiduously on how to deradicalise them by way of bringing them up in godly ways. Regular youths' programmes are organised to train them on issues bordering on moral rectitude. According to the duo of Danfulani and Atowoju:

If adequate attention is given to the proper upbringing, formation, empowerment, human-resources development and training of the youth in a desirable direction, and conducive environment especially if done at an early stage, it is expected that this will bring about a lasting positive impact on

their lives; ethical values, thinking pattern ideology, orientation and general outlook on life. The *modus operandi* guiding their day-to-day activities will take its root on these principles, becoming their guide even in adulthood. Nevertheless, training becomes more meaningful when the environment of training provides credence to what is being taught. Only then can a positive response to training be induced and actualised.¹⁵

Again, the MCN ministers consider education as a *sine qua non* to the growth and development of Remo dioceses. They have, therefore, decidedly, prioritised this in virtually all their endeavours. Education is placed at the top echelon in all reunifications and at all times. According to Zanini, “education is a process or the result of a process by which an individual acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights. Education includes the development of cognitive (intellectual), affective (attitudes and values), and psychomotor (sensory-motor) skills and abilities. It may also be defined as growth-the cumulative effect of changes in behaviour resulting from experience, both planned and unplanned”.¹⁶ Zanini goes on to pontificate that education may be defined as learning acquired through formal and informal process. This would include formally directed learning from a teacher, mentor, priest or other adult, specifically charged with instructional duties or formal acquisition of learning through interaction with family, peer group, and community. Increasingly in modern societies, informal and unplanned sources of education encompass books, magazines radio, television and computer networks.¹⁷ Buttressing the submission of Zanini as succinctly stated above, Shashi pontificates that education is the transmission of knowledge to members of society. The knowledge passed on is in the form of technical and cultural knowledge, technical and social skills, as well as the norms and values of the society. A formal process of learning in which some people consciously teach, while others adopt the social role of learner.¹⁸ Shashi is not done. He goes on to state unequivocally thus: Education formally is a social science that encompass teaching and learning specific knowledge, beliefs and skills. Good teachers in a given field use a variety of methods and materials in order to impart a knowledge of a curriculum to the students.¹⁹ Mindful of the above submissions, the MCN ministers in Remo dioceses have made up their minds to encourage education in their dioceses to the greatest level, humanly possible.

Conclusion

The role of *good shepherd* was evidently demonstrated by Jesus Christ. He came to liberate people from their sins by first and foremost preaching to them such that they could see the light. Indeed, if he had not done this, many would have ended up in perdition. It was his efforts, as divinely ordained, that saved people.

He ended up dying for the remission of sins that he knew absolutely nothing about. His death served as the atonement for us all. He (Jesus) was actually God's incarnate, otherwise he probably could not have accomplished the desired goal of laying down his precious life for sinners, some of who are very adamant when it comes to repentance. The ministers of the Methodist Church Nigeria have taken a cue from the roles of Christ. They have thus served as *good shepherd* by performing salient roles which are pertinent to the growth and development of the dioceses in Remoland.

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