

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN LAWYERS IN NATION BUILDING

By

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(Protocol)

Introduction

I would like to thank the National Association of Catholic Lawyers, Abuja Chapter for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts on our role as Lawyers in nation building. Although I was mandated to speak on the role of 'Catholic lawyers', I took advantage of my mandate to broaden the discourse to 'Christian lawyers' and not just catholic lawyers. In my study of jurisprudence, I am aware that at a point in history, there was unity – one church, one faith and one empire and that church was the Catholic Church. However, the empire was the Roman Empire. Today, we have many churches and empires.

I would also like to thank the Association for making me to systematically scan through and read the Holy Bible from Genesis to Revelation for the first time in my life. I can see God's Anointing hand doing something marvelous in my life.

As ordinary citizens, we as lawyers all have a stake in nation building. Both religiously and constitutionally, a lawyer stands in a unique position as an advocate, intercessor, mediator, conciliator, minister in the temple of justice and Chief Law Officer. Thus a lawyer shares these attributes in addition to his ordinary civic and political duties. Without delving into jurisprudential polemics, the Holy Bible will be our guide. We will not examine our roles as stipulated in the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners.¹

The foundation of society was established when, through Moses, God gave us the Ten Commandments² and other laws³ to establish the boundaries of human conduct and government. Moses was the first to prophecy the coming of the Messiah, a prophet like Moses himself.⁴ The Jewish tradition lists Moses as the author of the Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus Numbers and Deuteronomy. They form the theological foundation of the Bible. Moses was the only person with whom Jesus ever compared himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me⁵. In John 5:47, He added: “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” Indeed Moses was a ‘type’ of

¹ Rules 1-38 of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners 2007.

² Ex 20:1-17

³ Ex 21-23

⁴ Deut 18:15 – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.....” When Jesus was asked to name the most important commandment, He responded with Deut 6:5 – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”

⁵ John 5:46

Christ because in the 40-year journey of the nation of Israel, Moses stood as their leader and intercessor. Acts 7:22 tell us that “Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”

In this presentation, however, we intend to focus on the Holy Book especially the works of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ to determine what is expected of us as lawyers in nation building.

Nation Building

In the context of this presentation, in order to appreciate our roles as lawyers, we must understand what is ‘nation building’. We must state *a priori*, that ‘nation building’ is a normative concept that means different things to different people. In ‘Beyond Intractability’⁶, there is a treatise on nation building. Thus the term nation-building is often used simultaneously with state-building, democratization, modernization, socio-economic development, political development, post-conflict reconstruction, and peace-building. But each concept is different, though their evolution is intertwined and interdependent.

In Nigeria, from pre- to post-colonial days, lawyers have been very active participants in nation building. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was a lawyer, so was

⁶ See Carolyn Stephenson, ‘Nation Building’ in Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess (Eds) *Beyond Intractability*, **The Beyond Intractability Knowledge Project**, [Conflict Information Consortium](#) (Formerly *Conflict Research Consortium*), University of Colorado, USA. January 2005.

Chief FRA Williams, SAN, Chief Fani-Kayode, Chief Denis Osadebay, among others. They were also Christians.

We must add, however, that nation building is an evolutionary process that takes a long time. There are debates as to whether nation building is best done by the military or the civilians. What role did the Norman Conquest play in England? What role did the Napoleonic wars play in Europe? What of the American War of Independence? However, from the Greek City states, democracy has been preferred to any form of government.

The Role of Christian Lawyers

Generally, a lawyer is an individual who has been trained in the law of a country and has acquired the relevant professional qualification to practice law. The Christian lawyer therefore, apart from attaining the above status must be seen as one who identifies with the Holy Bible especially the works of our Lord Jesus Christ in conduct and conversation.⁷ Consequently, the Christian lawyer as a disciple, must be an Advocate, Intercessor and Mediator⁸ and is expected to learn from Jesus Christ⁹ and do what Christ did and even do much more because Jesus Himself said in John 14:12 that His

⁷ Acts 11:26

⁸ See Louis Rushmore – Come Meet Jesus as Mediator, Intercessor and Advocate – <http://www.gospelgazette.com/biographies/lous.shtml> accessed on 18 November, 2015.

⁹ Matt 11:29 & John 13:15

disciples would do greater works than He did. In nation building, Christian lawyers must do more than Christ.

a) Jesus Christ as an Advocate

As Jesus is referred to as our Advocate¹⁰ so is the Christian lawyer expected to “**Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy**”.¹¹ Thus the most fundamental and original purpose of lawyers is to plead for society and people and defend the poor; deliver those who are drawn towards death and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.¹² We must speak up for the marginalized if, because they are poor, they are treated unfairly at Nyanya Motor Park or at Abuja Airport. We are God’s Ambassadors, acting on His behalf to defend those who are violated. How many of us have rendered pro bono services? How many of us are good soldiers of Jesus Christ.¹³

¹⁰ 1 John 2:1 – “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. Jesus also used the word ‘Helper’. See John 14:16; 15:26, 16:7; Acts 9:12, 1 Peter 5:8 and Rev: 12.10. Religious leaders who were experts in the Mosaic or Jewish/Roman law are not exactly lawyers as we know the profession of law today. The closest to modern day prosecutor was Tertullus, a Roman, who was paid by Jews against Apostle Paul before Governor Felix (Acts: 24:1)

¹¹ Prov 31:8-9 (New Int’l Version); See also Ps 82:3. Jesus is our Advocate with the Father. Sin is incongruous in the life of a Christian but if he does sin, Jesus pleads his case. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. Jesus is also Savior, sent by God to rescue us from sin. Only through him we can have eternal life.

¹² Prov 24:11

¹³ 2 Tim 2:3.

We can say that all the Priests and Prophets of the Old Testament are lawyers who plead for people before the King and God. Christian lawyers should be able to influence their environment and enforce the principles and values of Christianity.

b) Jesus as Mediator

Jesus Christ is the only mediator between humanity and God. No one else in heaven or on earth better knows both the divine and the human circumstances, therefore, making Jesus Christ the only qualified Mediator between man and God. Further, Jesus Christ has “all authority...in heaven and on earth”¹⁴ necessary to mediate effectively. The hostility between mankind and God is sin that man has committed. Conversely whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin¹⁵ and through addressing the problem of sin, Jesus Christ mediates between man and God. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have their respective mediators. Moses functioned as the mediator between Israel and God under Judaism¹⁶. The apostle Paul acknowledged that Moses was the mediator of the Old Testament.¹⁷

¹⁴ Matt 28:18

¹⁵ James 4:17

¹⁶ Ex 20:19-22 and Deut 5:5

¹⁷ Gal 3: 19-20.

However, Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament.¹⁸ Speaking of the New Testament, our Lord “is the mediator of a better covenant”¹⁹.

c) Jesus as an Intercessor

The great intercessors in the Old Testament are Abraham, Moses, David and Prophets like Elijah who all interceded for nations, kings and families.²⁰

However, the ultimate is our Lord Jesus Christ whose main preoccupation in heaven is interceding for us. Jesus Christ is intercessor between mankind and God. In a particular sense Christ is represented as drawing near to God and pleading on behalf of men.²¹ Literally, the word “intercession” means “to come between”. Simply put, in the Bible, intercession is: “The act of petitioning God or praying on behalf of another person or group”. The words used in Jeremiah 27:18 and Hebrews 7:25 are ‘make intercession’. Thus intercession involves reaching God, meeting God and entreating or pleading with Him for His Favour. Some of the earliest occasions of someone acting as an intercessor were in the persons of Abraham for the City of Sodom²²

¹⁸ 1 Tim 2:5 and Hebrews 9:15 and Heb 9:12-15

¹⁹ Heb 8:6

²⁰ Although David was a king over Israel, quite different from a prophet whose traditional role was to intercede, King David stood shoulder high as one of the greatest kings ever in Israel for his remarkable and often moving intercessory prayers known and used today as the “Psalms of David”. In Ps 25:22, David prayed “redeem Israel O God out of all his troubles” – a prayer used today all over the world.

²¹ Rom 8:27; Heb 7:25 and Jer 27:18.

²² Gen 18:16-33

and Moses for Israel.²³ There was no need of an intercessor between man and God until sin visited the Garden of Eden.²⁴

The apostle Paul characterized the ministry of our Lord as “the ministry of reconciliation”.²⁵ The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah or Christ would make “intercession for the transgressors”.²⁶ Being “at the right hand of God” since his Ascension, Jesus Christ is precisely positioned to make “intercession for us”²⁷. The intercession made for us by Jesus Christ is ongoing, “... since He always lives to make intercession for them”²⁸ or as a writer expresses it: “This intercession is an essential part of his mediatorial work.” “The ministry of reconciliation” pertains to making “reconciliation for the sins of the people”.²⁹

Scripture also notes two additional intercessors besides Jesus Christ. First, the Holy Spirit participates in intercession between mankind and God.³⁰ In a much inferior consideration, Christians through their prayers make intercession for their fellows.³¹

²³ Ex 8:16 – “.....let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert”

²⁴ Gen 3:8

²⁵ 2 Cor 5: 18-19

²⁶ Is 53:12

²⁷ Rom 8:34

²⁸ Heb 7:25

²⁹ Heb 2:17

³⁰ Rom 8:26-27.

³¹ 1 Tim 2:1 and Luke 18:1

The Christian lawyer is expected to act as an intercessor thereby standing in the gap and persevering in prayers for those in authority. This enables the leaders to lead with the fear of God and minimize errors in the course of governance.

Akin to the role of an intercessor is Christ as an ambassador.³² The Bible enjoins the Christian lawyer to make a passionate appeal to people on behalf of Christ in order to reconcile them to God.

Conclusion

If we assume that nation building is evolutionary, political, social and economic, what is our position as Christian lawyers using Christ's attributes – advocate, intercessor, mediator and ambassador? Our submission is that we should use the scriptures to ascertain how our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ played these various roles. In carrying out all these functions, we should be peacemakers³³ and be obedient.³⁴ We must have peace before we can become peacemakers. Peace is the result of a forgiving heart, now

³² 2 Cor 5:20

³³ Matt 5:9. Other than making peace, He also said "I must be about my Father's Business" (Luke 2.49). His last will and testament was "Peace, I leave with you, My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). He came to bring peace, made peace through the blood on the Cross, and called us to be peacemakers. Peacemaking is the family business we all need to share.

³⁴ Rom 6:17; Thess 1:7-9; Heb 5:9; Rev 2:10; Acts 8:12 and 1 John 1:9

filled with Christ's spirit. Do we have forgiving hearts? Remember that our Lord forgave a woman caught in adultery.³⁵

In order to learn how to discharge our duty as a witness for Christ³⁶, we should look at His examples. He was always witnessing by the well of Samaria, or in the Temple at Jerusalem, by the lake of Gennesaret, or on the mountain's brow. He was witnessing night and day; His mighty prayers were as vocal to God as His daily services. He witnessed under all circumstances: Scribes and Pharisees could not shut His mouth. Even before Pilate, He witnessed a good confession. He witnessed so clearly and distinctly that there was no mistake in Him. Christian lawyer, make your life a clear testimony.

We stand in a privileged position: by our training we propagate what our Lord and Savior was known for – advocating, interceding and mediating. As soldiers for Christ, we are witnesses to His great works.

Our role as New Testament Christians, especially as lawyers is no longer limited to the confines of our privileged relationships with our clients. We are officers, nay Ministers in the Temple of Justice and light bearers in society.

³⁵ John 8:3.5

³⁶ Acts 1:8

As Christian lawyers, whenever we are placed in positions of leadership having been made kings and priests³⁷ by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords we should let our light shine³⁸.

Lastly. I leave you with the words of 2 Timothy 2.2-4:

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardships with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

As lawyers, our role is not just the administration of justice but religious, political, economic and social. Similarly as Christians, we should remember our role as moral, spiritual and ethical compass for the nation particularly at this time when societal values seem to have completely collapsed. By our training, religion and place in society, we are fully equipped to be successful nation builders. That is why we are 'learned'. That is what we are.

³⁷ Rev 1:6

³⁸ Matt 5:16

Above all, we must be good lawyers as our Lord and Savior condemn or rebuke or admonish bad lawyers.³⁹ However, always remember the most important commandment – “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”.⁴⁰

Thank you for your attention and God bless.

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³⁹ Luke 10:25; 11:46; Matt 22:35; Isa 59:4 and 1 Corin 6:6.

⁴⁰ Deut 6:5