

## **PROPHETS AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN ANCIENT ISRAEL: MESSAGE TO CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Beyond being the mouth piece of God in the religious world, the role of prophets has been extended to the issues of socio-political concern in the larger society. In other words, prophets are agents of positive change and societal transformation. They are socio-political activists. This is not only obvious in the biblical history but viral in the socio-religious space in human history. Given this as a basis, scholars in Biblical Studies and other fields of study have been examining these role and activities in history. Hence, building on this expedition, the focus of this paper is to examine further some obvious roles of Prophets Jeremiah and Amos amidst of social challenges in Ancient Israel. Using historical-theological interpretive approach, the paper, however, compares the passionate activities of the duo in the settings of their operation with those of the contemporary Nigerian Christian religious leaders amidst of social challenges, paying due attention to their activities. It, however, concludes that there is a need for more vibrancy on the part of the Nigerian Christian religious leaders in supporting the government to containing the looming social ills, which have spread their tentacles in incessant killing, kidnapping, rape, inter-religious conflicts, insecurity, cultism, sectionalism, tribalism, secularism and many others in the Nigerian milieu. It thereafter recommends that the Nigerian Christian religious leaders or clerics should not compromise their calling, so that they can continue to be relevant in rescuing, building and developing a society that needs to be rescued from socio-political ills and religious challenges.

**Key Words: Prophets, Social Challenges, Ancient Israel, Nigerian, Religious Leaders, Nation Building**

### **Introduction**

From time immemorial, especially in religious history, *nabhiim* (prophets) have been known as bearers of God's messages. Their roles as socio-political activists in the governance of the human world can never be underscored by any means. In the Old Testament era, YHWH always raised prophets to make His will known to people. The messages have always been for specific people and reasons. It is therefore mandatory for these religious personnel to obey the instruction given to them to deliver or otherwise face the consequences of their disobedience. However, It does not mean that there were no false prophets in circulation, who usually capitalised on prevailing situations to mislead unsuspecting people (Familusi, 2018:17); even with that the true ones registered indelibly their consistent messages into the hearts of the people in order to see changes in their lives and societies (Akintola, 2008:114).

In this wise, Prophets Amos and Jeremiah were very prominent and assiduous in restructuring the state of the nation in their generations. Amos, the shepherd and sycamore tree dresser, a man from Tekoa rose to speak and repudiate the despotic acts of his days, even though he was not a professional prophet, yet the Lord sent him to prophesy (Amos 7:14-15). His

assignment is described with the word *הִנָּבֵה* *hinabe* “preach” or “foretell”, a verb niphil imperative from the word *naba* “to preach”. So Amos was neither court prophet nor among the band of prophets (Akponorie, 2018:14). He had the passion to preach, proclaim or prophesy against the social ills and unethical situation in the land. He called the people to repentance and ignited their sense of equity and justice between the elites and the poor in the city of Samaria.

While this was the mission of Amos in 788 – 747 B.C in Samaria, Jeremiah got himself committed later in Judah in 626 B.C. He rebuked the people of Judah, who lost all sense of accountability to the Lord on how they worked. As a result, there was oppression of the weak and the deceit of the defenseless (8:6; 5:28). There was no equity between the poor and the rich. There was satisfaction in some quarters, while some others suffer from malnutrition and poverty. Prophet Jeremiah looked round and found that greed and other social ills were very rampant in Judah. The unbridled pursuits of selfish gain had displayed unity and equity. In view of this, Jeremiah reprovved the people of Judah for failing to care for others, who would not offer some economic benefits in return, including orphans and the needy (Jer. 5:28); aliens, widows and innocents (Jer. 7:6). He did not spare any class of people whose hands were found in perpetuating social evils. He made charges against particular individuals, who he felt were wrongdoers (Jer. 5:26) and against all individuals (Jer.7:2); against the leaders of business—the rich (Jer. 5:27) and government—Judges (Jer. 5:28); against cities in Judah (4:16-18; 11:12; 26:2); and against the nation as a whole (Jer. 13:10). Every element of the society, individually and institutionally were not spared (Moon & Mathew, 2010:122).

Premised on the characteristics and features of these two biblical prophets in their respective nations of operation, this paper comparatively study the Nigerian religious leaders or clerics so as to know if they are still within the mission of the prophetic space and verdict. It unveils the activities of the religious leaders, who are by implication today prophets, priests, pastors e.t.c, to know whether they are still very much committed to their prophetic calling in curbing and containing the social evils. It also investigates how stringent they are in addressing the social ills and challenges, which the Nigerian citizens are faced with in phenomenological order of life.

### **RELIGIOUS LEADERS: CONCEPTUAL NOMENCLATURES**

At this juncture, there is need to unveil our concept of religious leaders or practitioners in contextual definition. Thus, the compound nomenclature sounds clearly as a body of persons, who carry out religious activities either by vocational or professional expedition for the moral reconstruction of individuals and societal restructuring. These are the set of people we call the “men and women of God”, even though all humans by virtues of their creation in God’s image are supposed to be addressed as such. They are so designated on the ground that by every standard, they demonstrate and appropriate godliness in society. They act as social activists in defending the course of God in the face of ungodliness, and uphold moral and just standard in the society; all for the wellbeing of the citizenry.

However, prominent among these religious leaders in the Nigerian milieu are the prophets, priests, pastors and other clerics. Nevertheless, the religious duties of all the aforementioned in the Christian religious circle could in a way be radiating around the prophetic ministry. Nonetheless, looking at them systematically, all these religious experts can still be categorised into two common offices, that is, the prophets and priests, regardless of the denomination; because the ministries of both are culminated in prophetic activity, though the priest's duty is originally in connection with ritual and sacrificial activities. These two religious clerics are distinguished figures in religious history. In view of this, a cursory look shall be placed into their meanings and roles as they apply to the activities of Amos and Jeremiah; hence by contextualization and implication, their current Nigerian contemporaries.

### **Prophets as Religious Leaders: A Premise for Nigerian Context**

It is apt to clarify some of these religious leaders that formed the bedrock of this paper. As remarked earlier, attention shall be given to only two religious offices, which are prominent in biblical and religious history, and who in other words, serve as agents of transformation and change in the society. These two include the prophets and priests. No doubt, their religious roles are similar, intertwined and commensurate. Logically, an individual can play the roles of both. A very good example was Aaron, who was both a priest and prophet. The book, Exodus 4:16 says: "He (Aaron) will speak for you", and Number 6:23 says, "Tell Aaron...this is how you are to bless the Israelites." The dual roles of Aaron here suggest that he served as both priest and prophet (Shield 2004:63). However, it is still ideal in this paper to consider them differently. Thus, the word "prophet" has a lot of meanings, even though it has religious origin and very prominent in religious history as well, yet its uses go beyond that boundary (Dada, 2002:9) and to begin its examination in a simple definition may pose a notable problem (Blenkinsopp, 1996:27); all because prophets defy generally acceptable academic description (Akao 1993:104).

In the Old Testament parlance, prophets are God's messengers or spokespersons. The Hebrew word translated into English *nabhi* is derived from the verb meaning "to call". Given his word and explanation, Akponorie (2018:73) opined that the etymology of the word *nabhi* has revealed that he was one, who poured his utterances loudly and madly with deep breaths as on giving incoherent cries. He looks at its root from the Akkadian and Arabic words *nabi* meaning "to call" or "to announce" or from the root word *naba*, which means to bubble up with inspiration. Similarly, examining Familusi's thought, the prophet is understood as a person, who has been called to serve the Lord or serves as a caller, or announcer or a spokesman on behalf of his caller to his audience (Familusi, 2018:18). Coming from another perspective, a prophet in the religious society and history is seen as a person, who teaches the doctrine of religion having received (as commonly claim in history) inspiration directly from God (Dzurgba, 1992:33). Thus, the prophet could be said to be someone called, sanctified and divinely inspired. He is a vehicle through whom God reveals His will to the people. He is an intermediary between God and His people (Familusi, 2018:18). He calls people to repentance and teaches them godly living, moral ethics and philosophy suitable for standard living in the society.

In other words, and in a clearer term and after a critical study of the prophetic personnel, Lasebikan (1985: 22) described the prophets as socio-religious activists, who played a teaching role of the reformation of their society, challenging abuse of power by leaders and of the despotic rules of kings. And these prophetic functions were prominent in the ancient Israelite prophetic history and tradition (2 Sam.12:1-12; 1Kings 18:17-19). They played several role of societal reformation. They tended to help the poor masses to discover their lost property (1Sam.9:1-20). They acted as military advisors to kings (1Kings22:1-2; 2Kings 43:11-19); they were much known for appointing, enthroning and dethroning kings (2 Kings 9:1-13); performing miracles of various kinds (2Kings 6:1-7; 5:1-4; 1Kings 17:17-24; 2Kings 4:8-37). In fact, Ramsey (2007:25) further stressed that the prophets laid claims to be the oracles and mouth piece of God, who preached, exhorted, guided and cautioned the erring people.

Our examination of the prophetic figures so far has shown that the prophets in the ancient Israelite prophetic tradition and history were eminent religious personalities whose prophetic roles affect the socio-political life of the community in which they functioned. They were not idle characters, who would fold their hands and arms or be carried away by mundane elements, but distinguished figures, who were up to the divine task of societal reformation and nation building.

#### **Priests as Socio-Religious Leaders: A Premise for Nigerian Context**

Priests were another group of religious leaders or personnel, who were very prominent in the religious and societal history of mankind in ancient Israel. Funk & Wagnall (1999:273) described the priest as “One especially consecrated to the service of a divinity and through whom worship, prayer, sacrifice, moral teaching, rebuking of offenders and social service to the state are offered. Beyond these, he has the authority to declare absolution, that is, forgiveness of sin or simply put as by whom deliverance is obtained by worshippers. Right from the time of the institution of the priesthood, either through the Adamic, Aaronic or by the order of Melkizedek, the priest as a socio-religious leader has always been seen as a mediator. Apart from being representing the Divine Being before His subjects, the priest is an ambassador, a chosen vehicle through whom God reaches out to the people (Benkinsopp, 1995:45).

The priest in the Old Testament offered some social role, which could also be narrowed as part of the spiritual assignment in order to better the standard of living in the society. Affirming this position, Blenkinsopp (1995:33) upheld that the sages, priests and prophets interacted with the society in the social and political evolution of Israel. They were day labourers, potters, temple keepers and constructors of the societies in which they functioned. They taught Israel the law of YHWH, His statutes and ordinances. Their lips were to keep knowledge, and the whole assembly were to seek the law of YHWH in their mouths, for they were his messengers (Mal. 2:2-4; Ezra 7:10).

The Priests also acted as judges. In view of the Aaronic priests, they knew God’s law, the societal ethics and moral philosophy. They were officiating as judges and specified the

divinely ordained penalties for various sins and the breaches of the laws. One of the commandments given to the people of Israel was that “they should come to the priests, the Levites and to the judges that would be in those days, who would enquire and teach them the sentence of judgement and the recompense of law (Deut. 17:9-11). Coupled with these was the blessing they regularly put on the people in the name of the LORD (Num.6:27; 2Chron. 30:27; Lev.9:23-24).

The Priests usually gave central concern to the economy of the society, where they function following the laws guiding theft, or economic mismanagement. This was often important in the case of punitive charges given to the guilty party. This made them to place a correctional measure on the people, like the judges on the land. They also extended their societal commitment to the medical as they served as doctors for the communities where they functioned. The internal evidence details many medical techniques the priests were to follow in various situations. Although, it is most obvious that the major disease the priests were curing was leprosy but there must be others as well the biblical evidence (internal evidence) may be silent about. Priests were told to look for sores or other marks such as peeling of the skin to determine if a person was unclean (Zachary, 2011:14). Thus the prescriptions for the unclean—those found to be diseased are for the reason of public health and the welfare of the nation.

Premised on the above analogy, it is apparent that priests got involved in the overhauling facet of the society to make positive impact. They worked eagerly to reconstruct the moral status of Israel and in the society of their service at large. They corrected and rebuked those whose characters were unworthy of God’s standard. Like the prophets who were their religious contemporaries, they rebuked the despotic activities of kings and their subjects; teach the laws of YHWH; encouraged the people to do as the law dictated; saw to the economic affairs and the overhauling wellbeing of the people. They were socio-religious and political activists called into playing dignified roles for the services of God and humanity.

### **Social Challenges and the Prophetic Mission of Amos in Samaria**

Indisputably, it was worthwhile that political independence, expansion and prosperity characterized Israel during the heyday of Jeroboam (Schultz. 1970: 337). There was an overflowing luxury and ease in Israel at this period. More so, trade with Phoenicia tolls on caravan traffic across Israel and Arabia, and the northward expansion at Syria’s expense, however, fattened Jeroboam’s coffers. Trade and commerce flourished in Israel at this period (Harrison.2009: 23) and, there was economic boom all over the kingdom that invariably attracted neighbouring nations. As a result, capitalism and aristocracy in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel became an international knowledge, which marked the moral decadence of the nation. The Northern Kingdom, however, opened to an advanced state of decay socially, morally, judicially and religiously. Thus, there was a rapid rise in the standard of living. Social evils became the trend all over and prevailed in the society.

Distinctively, extortion and marginalization of the poor became so rampant in every fabric of the society as everyone wanted to be rich and the rich, richer. Moreover, influence, affluence

and ill-gotten profits became the most notable features in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The urban business men manipulated the small farmers by stock piling grain, buying crops at low prices, and offering loan at high interest rates to the poor farmers, knowing fully that they could not pay. Besides, the poor land-owners were forced off of their land, and the merchants then purchased it, grew crops with debtor-slaves, and sold grain at high prices to the landless peasants, who had been displaced. To buttress this further, the evaluation of the internal evidences of the text, or Amos' oracle expressly proves that the rich were affluent enough to own several houses apiece (Amos 3:15). They were keenly desirous and interested in ostentatiously expensive furniture and never denied themselves any bodily satisfaction. The worst of all, the women involvement in the social evils was so laudable that they advanced ill-gotten wealth and merriment at the expense of the poor. In the oracle of Amos, he refers to them as —cows of Bashan on mount Samaria...who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who say to their husbands,—Bring us some drinks|| (Amos 4:1). Furthermore, in their lust into worldliness, pleasure and social complacency at the expense of the poor and needy cum secularism, Amos records against them that: You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. (Amos 6:6).

Generally, their social indulgence completely deprived the common citizens the equal rights in the economic, social and political facets; though, keenly assiduous in religious piety, even though, it was not centered on the ideal tenets and rudiments of Yahwism. The nature of their religious practice was characterized by syncretism. To this end, it was not negotiable that the poor were really poor and shamefully exploited.

In the economic sector, there was business rackets, with over-ambitious motive and high rate of extortion. They say: When will the moon be over that we may sell grain and Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat; skimping the measure boosting the price and cheating with dishonest seals,...selling even the sweepings with the wheat. (Amos5:8,9), as this, on the other hand, reflected the nature of secularism in their communal life. Thus, they became so intoxicated by profit making expeditions without minding the state and plight of the poor or needy.

Traditionally, regarding justice in the Northern kingdom, it is believed that the local courts composed of elders and judges were the only institution capable of putting an end to various injustices, but they received bribes and perverted justice. They condemned the innocent people because of trivial debts and confiscated their properties. The poor were pushed off their land by manipulation (just like the case of Ahab and Naboth), as a result of which they lost their status in the community; for without land, their economic livelihood or survival were threatened drastically (Ogedegbe, 2007:101). It was also a common sight in Israel to see weeping women and children who had been forcefully evicted from their homes by greedy money lenders. When they could not meet up with the exorbitant interests charged on loan, their homes were confiscated and sold; there was no one to appeal to, as the judges were corrupt. Indeed, corruption and injustice of diverse kinds that discarded equity reigned supreme in the land of Israel that Murphy relays as:

Social injustice was rife: the poor were oppressed and those in need, like widows and orphans, were not cared for. Materialism was the attitude of the day; wealth was considered the greatest thing in life, and only people with money were thought to be important. The rights of the poor were not defended in the courts and officials would take bribes (Murphy, 1967:23)

The inconsequential situation, into which the poor were subjected, however, robbed them of their common senses and worth that they still unconsciously fell into servitude. They, as a result, suffered severely from property racketing, in that; they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed (Amos 2:6,7). They go as far as perpetuating evil in the legal sector over which the equal rights of the faithful citizens were gallantly denied, the public standard of morality were at low ebb; the societal standard went to the pot, and authorities and the rules of law were despised. The practice was crystal clear in these words: You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth, you trample on the poor and force him to give you grain.(Amos 5:10,11).

Premised on these series of social evils and challenges in the Northern Kingdom of Ancient Israel, Amos the Shepherd and Sycamore tree dresser, a man from Tekoa rose to speak and repudiated the despotic acts. Even though, he was not a professional prophet, yet, the LORD sent him to prophesy (Amos 7:14-15). His assignment is described with the word *hinabe*, meaning to preach or foretell — a verb niphal imperative from the word *naba* — to preach. So Amos was neither court prophet nor among the band of prophets, but singularly committed to preach, proclaim or prophesy against the unethical situation in the land. He called the people to repentance and ignited the sense of equity in them. He encouraged them over the equal sharing of the national cake and perquisites among citizenry; and to restore divine ideals, which could foster national unity. To Amos, injustice is the misplacement of priority or corruption of justice (Agboluaje, 2007:88). He articulated a stern message of doom that could bring about societal transformation and a change of heart, hence affirmed that Israel's disastrous fall would be occasioned by the heartlessness and dishonesty with which the rich maltreated the poor. Thus, on a good note, his oracle was with the intention to save the nation from the impending judgment and calamity that lied ahead, which was interpreted too as "The Day of the Lord".

### **Social Challenges and the Prophetic Mission of Jeremiah: A Premise for Nigerian Context**

The study of the book of Jeremiah reveals the several manifestations of social evils in Judah. Yet they could be systematically streamlined to some major themes. And as worse as injustices were in the time, there were no much incidence of kidnapping, banditry and incessant killing like they are in Nigeria today. Nevertheless, it was adversely disastrous in the land as unjust activities became prominent. The people knew no limits in the deeds of evil; they did not judge justly the course of the orphans, and did not defend the right of the needy (Jer.5:28). The people took the moral law and ethics of the land for granted. They held fast to deceit; refused to speak honestly; everyone aided and abetted wickedness, saying "What have I done? (Jer.8:6) and the system of the land was of greed and manipulation

(Brueggemann, 2007:63). What ought to be done for the good of the populace in the land was done for individuals' own profit. So there was economic crisis in the land.

Thus, seeing some of these social issues and challenges, Jeremiah rose to condemn them without knowing whose ox was gored. The prophet was morally upset about the common deteriorating and decaying life of his audience. The good of the land was his utmost concern. The aliens, the poor, the widows and orphans were despised (Jer. 5:28; 7:6). Hence, confidently, the prophet rose to denounce these practices. His insistence on the common good of the general land was to institute important foundation for business ethics and common motivation for the good of the land (Wright, 2014:79). He condemned the lack of integrity, which he saw among the people. They misunderstood the concept and essence of integrity, forgetting that integrity entails following the same ethical precepts at home, at work and everywhere. Thus the LORD sent the prophet to them saying, "Will you steal, murder,...swear falsely...and then come to the temple, act holy and be saved? (Jer.7:9-11). The prophet denounced these attitudes and called the people to the life of a true integrity. He bemoaned their spirit of disunity, lack of mutual concern for poor masses and the overhauling complacency; all in bringing back the state of the nation to normalcy.

### **Social Challenges and Christian Religious Leaders: The Nigerian Context**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a federal republic in West Africa. After her independence since 1960, she has risen to the component states of 36, with a federal capital city called, Abuja. Alao (2017:12) confirmed that Nigeria shares borders with Benin republic in the West, Chad and Cameroon in the North East, Niger; in the South lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. She has a fertile agricultural land, extensive mineral resources and vast oil reserves. She is highly dependent on income from export of crude oil while gas income accounts for foreign exchange earnings. But history records that much revenue has been lost through capital flights by multinationals, squandered on prestige projects, embezzled by a series of corrupt rulers and wasted through inability to harvest and refine all that is drilled, hence corruption is a massive evil in the country, hence majority of her population live below the poverty line (Adagbada, 2018:170).

One of the major attitudes that characterized the Judahites was their religious activities that discarded the law of YHWH and the love for their fellow men. They seemed to believe that they can violate YHWH's law and statutes in work and daily life, and then come to the temple to behave as holy men and women. Similarly, Nigeria is probably the most religious nation in the world. Its landscape is dotted with spires, domes and turrets. Its noisy metropolitan areas teem with church, calls for prayers and evangelical activities. No doubt, enraptured worshippers contribute significantly to the unhealthy decibel levels of the nation. Following the assertion of Osunde (2017:78), "Individuals sport religious appellations, like Prophet, Rev., Deacon, Apostle and Bishop. All the religious emblems and social ranks in the society are obsessed with titles. They count so much on titles and their stomach demands, yet they forget the social challenges that are ravaging the land. They envisage restructuring and a better tomorrow but fail to act towards the actualization.

They have forgotten that there can be no meaningful reformation, change for better society and nation building without necessary ingredients such like justice, faithfulness, true love and unity. A quite number of social ills beset our nation Nigeria, and invariably, have posed several challenges to the land. Adagbada (2018:172) remarked this when he said:

Some of the problems facing our nation, Nigeria, include ethnicity, poverty, embezzlement of public funds, corruption and fraud, unemployment, child labour, religious and ethnic violence, armed robbery, political thuggery and assassination, money laundering, drug peddling, the monetisation of the gospel in the name of prosperity preaching.

No doubt, Nigeria is sick and bedeviled with all sorts of social ills at the moment that pose challenges all over the nation. The rate of corruption, kidnapping, banditry, cultism, killing, rape, tribalism, sectionalism, regional division, economic marginalization, disunity and insecurity is on the high rate; hence restless and turbulence everywhere, despite the chorus about religion everywhere.

Nigeria is known to be a ground of pluralistic religion. Religion is a very common phenomenon. The market women talk about it. Even carpenters discuss it in their workshops. It is a common issue for discussion among farmers on their ways to the farm. Religion here, religion there, yet social challenges and religious ills are still on a high frequency. Her citizens live in fears and tensions due to insecurity of every kind. Substantiating the above fact, Oni (2021:24) remarked:

Nigeria was acclaimed the most populous country in Africa but has been inundated by security challenges that had become major issue for the government. The wave of insecurity further increased through the threats of kidnapping, terrorism, highway robbery, banditry...piracy... While our country had been turned into killing fields of the African continent, the vampire perpetrators are tireless terrorists, brazen bandits and fully armed Fulani herdsmen carrying out a filthy agenda, known only to them and their heartless sponsors...The northwest region of the country had further become a hot bed of criminal gangs as killer, herdsmen and bandits incessantly raid villages, stealing cattle, kidnapping for ransom, and burning homes after looting food supplies.

Obviously, the Nigeria before independence is not the Nigeria of today. Though the general appearance of the cities and villages has changed, yet social attitudes and value systems have deteriorated. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor continue to widening. This worsens disparity between the rich few and the large number of the poor. There is more of agitation for geo-political zoning, regional division and sectional concentrations than national interest, despite the teaching of oneness and unity from the Holy Books.

In the religious circle, conflicts massively abound. There are inter and intra-religious tensions everywhere. Religious adherents of different religious groups are involved in serious

disagreements. They oppose to doctrinal differences, ideas, opinions, feelings and wishes. Adherents engage in mutually opposing action and use coercive behaviour to destroy, injure, thwart or otherwise control their opponents (Gotan, 2004:78). This happens regularly as a result of their wrong interpretation of Holy Books. As observed earlier, some remote factors responsible for using religion as instrument of polarisation are also attributed to leadership tussles, which culminated in the proliferation of many denominations in the country (Adebayo, 2003:90). More so, sectarian jingoism, as well as excessive patriotism to self-religious sect have consequently transformed into fanaticism. All these socio-religious anomalies have contributed to the state of social ills in the nation.

Comparatively, Nigeria's socio-religious situation is similar to those of the nations where the Israelite prophets functioned. Thus, just like ancient Israel, Nigeria is in desperate need of spirit filled and true religious leaders. Since religion (even though bastardised today to some extent) has an important influence in the lives of the leaders and the led in every nation. Hence, religious adherents and leaders should use their divine offices to denounce the looming social evils and ills in the Nigerian society. They should utilize their divine mandate from God to instruct the erring political leaders and the nation at large. They should announce and declare the messages of love, unity and brotherhood with compromise. Religious leaders should not fold their arms and allow things to get worse. They are to boldly and authoritatively rebuke the erring ones in the society and fearlessly condemn their misdeeds; albeit, these efforts should be coupled with sterling quality of life, exemplary conduct, self-discipline, godliness.

It is highly essential for Christian religious leaders in Nigeria to take a clue from the prophetic spirits of Amos and Jeremiah, who served as catalysts to social transformation in the society, wherein they ministered. Sound messages ought to be what religious leaders should proclaim to the nation's citizenry. Moreover, it is their role and divine duty to pray for the peace of the nation; earnestly seeking the face of God, through whom the prayer for the end of unrest and social ills can be answered in our land.

But on the other hand, it is disheartening to note that some Nigerian Christian clerics or religious leaders have become toothless dogs that cannot bite. They have betrayed the confidence of their Caller in them. It is never an exaggeration to say that many have missed the direction and the focus of their ministries. They are more of prayer hirelings and diviners for the sake of naira and kobo; just because of their interest in material possession and earthly riches. As a result of these pitfalls, wealthy people, political office holders, and the so-called 'big men' thereby dictate the pace of some of these leaders. Sometimes, the same religious leaders, who criticize those in power, still go after them for favour to meet their personal needs (Odumuyiwa, 2001:123). This is absolutely wrong! Nevertheless, while those who carry out their ministerial duties in season and out of season; who stand for the truth; preach unity and peace are well commended, it is high time to say religious leaders should experiment the essence of their calling. If there is time their services are needed in the nation, it is now! The social ills in the land must not overpower the Spirit of the LORD in them or

render them ineffective, rather spur them into the activity of societal reformation and the rebuking of the looming social ills and acts.

### **Conclusion**

Religious leaders in Nigeria, regardless of regional sentiment should imitate the biblical prophets, who worked very assiduously in upholding justice and peace. Nigeria is religiously sick and socially bedeviled with all sorts of social ills. Religious leaders must rise to the task of fighting against all that can put the nation asunder. They should stand the gap both in preaching the truth and prayers; enough of the naïve and misunderstanding of their role of divine calling in a bedeviled setting like ours in Nigeria. Christian Religious leaders should be more active and committed. In fact, by now in the country, the religion that is riotous, helpless to the society, self-serving and mute in the face of wickedness and social ills should be jettisoned. Religious leaders and practitioners should no longer mortgage their precious prophetic heritage and mission, but rather imbibe that which will promote one Nigeria.

Finally, while the fearless and dignified among the religious leaders are saluted for their good work in denouncing the social ills in the society, particularly in the religious and political sectors, the unscrupulous among them should stop their commercial enterprises that employ hype, aggressive blitz and the like. It should be understood that the abject degeneracy of some religious leaders and clerics explains the disconnection of the church from the teeming society. The peace and tranquility we need in Nigeria; the unity and transparency we need; the good governance and equity we need; the security, moral reconstruction and rebranding we aspire for, can never be singlehandedly achieved through the implementation and execution of laws by the government; rather, the expedition is a collective effort of every citizen of the nation.

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