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# **FINISH STRONG AND WIN THE CROWN:**

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THE TASK OF RUNNING THE  
CHRISTIAN RACE TODAY



**PROF. BENJAMIN C. OSISIOMA**

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Presented at Standing Committee Meeting of  
Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) Held at  
Benin-City.

**FINISH STRONG AND WIN THE CROWN:  
THE TASK OF RUNNING THE CHRISTIAN RACE TODAY**

**by**

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## I INTRODUCTION

The story of Jim Baker is a metaphor for the challenge before the Church today. The man was one of the founding fathers of the prosperity movement in the US. He was also the founder and author of the PTL (Praise the Lord) Club! He built Heritage City, a so-called Christian city, with Scriptures and Christian music as the centrepiece of its social life. Jim Baker had served as a Pastor for 30 years, and by every human and natural standard, he was one of the best at what he was doing. Well, the long arm of the law caught up with him. He was accused of all sorts of postal and wire fraud under complex American laws, and jailed for five years. While he was in prison, his wife of many years ran off with his close "Christian" friend, and they turned their back on him. One night in prison, he watched on television as his house was razed to the ground by a bizarre fire. And to cap it all up, in a sober moment, he reviewed his personal theology, and came to the conclusion that as a Pastor, he had been preaching the exact opposite of what Jesus Christ said and taught.

A professor of law took interest in his case, and began a long and tortuous legal battle to prove that Jim Baker had not committed any crime known under American laws. The legal battle took quite some years; and Jim Baker had completed his five-year jail term before a Grand Jury returned a verdict that the charges for which he had been jailed, did not exist under American law. In other words, he was convicted and served a full prison term for a non-existing crime. But the man himself proudly proclaimed that it was the Lord Jesus Himself that sent him to jail, to secure his attention. He was so busy with his spiritual and social projects that he had no time for God and family. Out of all his travails, he wrote a book and titled it: *I Was Wrong*. It cost Jim Baker everything, for God to secure his attention. Today he still preaches and teaches; but his emphasis has undergone some transformation. May we never have to pay the kind of price Jim Baker paid for God to secure his attention.

I am persuaded that heaven is deeply concerned with what passes as Christianity today. Way back in 2005, I had been invited to speak to the Council of the Laity in one of the Anglican Dioceses. The topic for the talk was: *The Christian Business Man in Contemporary Nigerian Society*. As I prepared for the programme, one problem occupied my mind: Who is the Christian Business Man? A three-case scenario stared me in the face:

- The first case was that of a man who owned a flourishing Filling Station business. He had Christian stickers and Scriptural passages securely

pasted on the walls of the station. Christian music blared from loud-speakers, and even very challenging Christian messages were dished out on occasion. However, any time there was fuel scarcity in town, the first thing the man did was to shut down his station, only to re-open later at highly inflated prices. He never passed up any opportunity to add an extra 5 or so to the pump price of fuel, if he could get away with it. Besides that, he was an expert at adjusting his metres, such that he always dispensed less than the authorized quantity of fuel. Anytime he got into trouble with the Weights and Measure Division of the NNPC, he knew how to deploy his millions to get himself out of trouble. So how Christian is this business man?

- The second business man was into drug manufacturing and sale. He travelled abroad to foreign drug manufacturers in India and China to negotiate for drugs to purchase. He was known for getting manufacturers to reduce the active ingredient in manufactured drugs, and still package them as if they were of full strength. That way he could pay less than half the normal purchase price, but still sell at the full price. This business has made him a multi-millionaire. He now decided to acquire all the machines and parts for drug production - only this time, they would be fake drugs. Chalk could be packaged as tablets and sold at exorbitant prices. He had the good fortune that with his wealth, he could finance lots of building projects in the Church, and be knighted, or even crowned Pastor's warden. He was also known to have helped widows and fatherless children. Again, how Christian is this Christian?
- The third one is a respectable public servant who had risen through the ranks to the position of Director in the Ministry. Under special government programmes, he had been appointed to head one of the newer agencies of State. From his vantage position, he has amassed stupendous wealth - far in excess of what could be attributed to honest wages. He pockets funds ear-marked for road maintenance, pension payment, and improvement of power supply. Yet he refuses to see himself as a common thief. He feels no pang of conscience at the countless numbers who die daily on the ill-maintained roads; nor does he feel responsible for the aged pensioners who die on their way to unending verification exercises; nor even the families and individuals who die after inhaling poisonous gases from power generating sets. He is certain that God will not hold him responsible for these souls who might have still been alive, if only he had not embezzled funds slated for public service. He insists that since he pays his tithe, attends to his Christian duties, and tries the very best he could,

heaven approves his lifestyle. Again we ask, is this individual really a Christian?

So which of the three is the Christian business man? Is the Christian business man the church-goer, the knight, the communicant or the sponsor of Church projects? Are these the men upon which God will build the future of Church and Society? Have we as a Church done enough to raise eternal men and women who will point a deviant world back to God? Jesus Christ described His disciples as the *Light of the world* - men who would dispel darkness, and instal the brilliant incandescence of heaven's light in society. He also called them the *Salt of the earth* - men who would arrest corruption and decay in the world, and set peoples and systems on the right course back to God. Lastly, the apostle Paul described a new breed of men - not just living beings, but *Life-giving Spirits* (1Cor. 15: 45-49) patterned after the *Last Adam*, who would stand at the head of a new generation of men. Where is this breed of men today?

The Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry with twelve men selected to walk and work with Him to fulfil His God-given purpose. He chose to build a revolution, an earth-shaking, eternal phenomenon, on a rough and crude assemblage of characters. Four of them were fishermen - uneducated, illiterate, even uncouth. One was a radical, a liberation fighter, or even a terrorist, depending on where your sympathy lies. He was called the Zealot! One was a tax collector, a specie of the human family hated for good cause, and seriously denigrated among the Jews. One was a skeptic *par excellence!* You could call him a super-doubter - he never believed without seeing, and his name, *Thomas*, meant the Twin (Didymus) - a warning that every group, every fellowship, indeed every church has a Thomas lurking somewhere, waiting to be discovered. Yet another was a cynic - a disparager to the core, who did not believe that anything good could come out of Nazareth. One was a greedy, prehensile, grabbing, and malevolent accountant, whose love of money led him to sell his Master for the price of a slave. And the leader of the pack was an uncertain, unpredictable, almost unstable man, who often had his foot-in-his-mouth. There were no professors, no orators, no public relations goons, no highly esteemed theologian or Church prelate, no one with royal connections, and no millionaire to bankroll the project.

A profile of the lives of these men, was a picture of the ludicrous and the bizarre. They were not easy to teach or instruct. Topics like *FAITH* and the *CROSS* were a hard sell for them. They never understood the concept, and often resisted the stark implications of the Master's mission. On one occasion, Jesus had to

describe them as *"faithless and perverse generation"*. Perverse means *wayward, obstinate in the wrong, froward, capricious and unreasonable in opposition, turned aside from right or truth, wrong-headed, corrupt*. Christian virtues did not also come easily to them. Like the rest of us, they needed to learn the basic lessons about Humility, Obedience and Surrender to the Master's will. They often found themselves striving, struggling and contending over base issues: *'Who is the greatest?'* Finally, they had to contend with many questions, doubts, anxieties and perplexities at every turn: *"Master why could we not...?"* Selwyn Hughes well summarised it all: *"On the eve of Christ's death they argued about precedence; they slept while He wrestled in prayer; when He was arrested, they ran away"*. What a bunch!

All these notwithstanding, the surprise of the ages is that these men became specimens of the kingdom of God, products of divine revelation, and treasures of heavenly values and virtues. God produced the best from the worst. And these men have remained standards for all times, and for all generations, in excellence, probity, and integrity. They have become standards of right conduct for men in all ages, and have become a re-definition of values that heaven demands from sons of men who need to be Sons of the Kingdom.

What was the secret of their transformation? How did the best emerge from the worst? That is the challenge for the Church today. We must not drift with the tide of corruption and ineptitude. We must steer the world in the right direction, and bring the *shekinah* glory back to the Holy Place!

## II THE CHURCH BUFFETED BY THE WORLD

The last night before He confronted the Cross, Jesus Christ held the Last Supper with His disciples. As was to be expected, His mind was burdened, and He seemed quite pre-occupied. A ministry considered remarkable and outstanding in every respect, was about to climax in the events of Calvary. Further more, the life changing mission that brought the Creator into His world as a mere creature, was about to be left in less than expert hands - men who had proved that they were neither extra-ordinary in their commitment, nor specially endowed for the task in hand. Considering His birth, life, works, death and resurrection, what could have been the primary pre-occupation of Jesus that night? What would be His final briefing to the men who had walked the paths of Palestine with Him for three whole years?

We can well imagine the burden in the Master's heart as He began to speak

those last Words to His disciples. The future of Christianity would depend on the secrets He was about to reveal, and our victory in the race of life would greatly depend on what we can glean from what could be called the *Sermon from the Cross*. At the start of His ministry, He preached the *Sermon on the Mount*; at the close, He brought eternal and timeless nuggets of truth in the *Sermon from the Cross*. Yes! The cross was still some twenty-four hours away, but His soul was already burdened unto death. So what was the crux of His message? Everything He said that night, centred on one potent threat, one problem, one theme:

*If the **world** hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the **world**, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the **world**, but I have chosen you out of the **world**. That is why the **world** hates you. ... In Me you may have peace. In the **world** you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer. I have overcome the **world**... They are not of the **world**, even as I am not of it (Jn. 15:18-19; 16: 33; 17: 16).*

The *world* is the Christian's Public Enemy No. 1. Not the devil, for the Son of God was made manifest, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1Jn. 3:8); not the demons or hordes of darkness, for "with the finger of God" the Master casts out devils and demons. No! The problem is with the world, that mystery of iniquity sneaking up to the Church and corrupting and defiling from within, the very Bride of Christ. The problem God has with the Church, is that of the worldly believer - a world so 'churchy', and a church so worldly. No wonder the apostle warns: "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world" (1Jn. 2: 15-17).

The world is a comprehensive system of control over men, organised and directed by Satan in opposition to God. It is a gigantic counterfeit which exists to divert men from God. Satan has borrowed a number of beautiful things from God's creation, has perverted and corrupted them, and then pieced them together into his world system. Thus, worship of God becomes a religious duty no longer a delight; holy desire becomes illegitimate lust; joy changes to superficial happiness; quiet dependence on God is replaced by proud self-sufficiency; and conformity to Christ gives way to social concert. The world has a wisdom but not from God; it has a spirit but not of God; it has a philosophy, but not from God; it has a friendship, but not with God. The lust and pride of the world, are not of the Father; its cares are not for the Kingdom; it offers a peace, but not as of Christ; it has a god, but not the God of heaven. In the words of Dr. Jowitt:

*Worldliness is a spirit, a Temperament, An Attitude of the soul; It is a*

*gaze Horizontal, never Vertical; Its motto is Forward, never Upward; Its goal is Success, not Holiness. ... It has Lusts, but no Supplications; It has Ambitions, but no Aspirations. God is not denied, He is [only] forgotten and ignored.*

In the Old Testament, God often had complaints against Israel. Perhaps those complaints fit the Church and the Christians very perfectly today:

*Heaven and earth, you're the jury; Listen to God's case: 'I had children and raised them well, and they turned on Me. The ox knows who's boss, the mule knows the hand that feeds him, but not Israel. My people don't know up from down. Shame! ... My people have worked out on Me, their God, turned their backs on the Holy of Israel, walked off and never looked back (The Message, Is. 1: 2-4).*

Prophet Jeremiah adds his voice:

*Has this ever happened before, that a nation has traded in its gods for gods that aren't even close to gods? But My people have traded My Glory for empty god-dreams and silly god-schemes. Stand in shock, heavens at what you see! Throw up your hands in disbelief - this can't be! ... My people have committed a compound sin: they've walked out on Me, the fountain of fresh flowing waters, and then dug cisterns - cisterns that leak, cisterns that are no better than sieves. Isn't Israel a valued servant, born into a family with place and position? So how did she end up a piece of meat fought over by snarling and roaring lions? There is nothing left of her but a few old bones... (The Message, Jer.2: 11-15).*

The Prophet Malachi echoes the same truth:

*A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My Name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' (Mal. 1: 6).*

God's wrath was even more severe on the priests and prophets. They were heirs to the Levitical covenant. As priests of the Most High God, they had received a covenant of life and peace, that they might learn the fear of God. They were appointed to walk with the Lord in peace and equity to turn many away from iniquity. The law of truth was to be resident in their mouths and injustice was not

to be found on their lips. Says the prophet: *"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts"* (Mal. 2: 5-7).

But alas! The Church has not always shown the way to God; we often fail God and sadly disappoint the lofty expectations of those that truly hunger for righteousness. It was Eugene Peterson who said:

*The Pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are pre-occupied with shop-keeper's concerns - how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money. Some of them are very good shopkeepers. They attract a lot of customers, pull in great sums of money, develop splendid reputations. Yet it is still shop-keeping; religious shop-keeping, to be sure, but shop-keeping all the same. The marketing strategies of the fast-food franchise occupy the waking minds of these entrepreneurs; while asleep they dream of the kind of success that will get the attention of journalists. ... The only problem is that we are called not to be shopkeepers, but shepherds.*

Make no mistakes about it, the dividing line between shop-keeping and shepherding has been greatly obscured in our world today. Good old principles of American capitalism have been drawn down into religious practice; elegant foot-walk and well-practised techniques have replaced the power of the Spirit of the Living God; and mere pretence and showmanship now take centre stage instead of the fruit of the Spirit. The cross has been replaced as a symbol of shame, death and self-denial; it has become an ornament, a pendant to be worn for beauty. Again it was Tozer who said:

*There has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different; the likenesses are superficial, the differences fundamental. ... The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. ... The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public. ... The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. ... The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing. ... We who preach the gospel must not think ourselves as*

*public relations agents sent to establish goodwill between Christ and the world. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum. God offers life but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death.*

Leonard Ravenhill, the great and fiery preacher, summed up the state of the Church in very unflattering words:

*The New Testament Church was not electronic; it was electrifying. The Church fresh from the Upper Room invaded the world; now the Church in the Supper Room is invaded by the world. The New Testament Church did not depend on a moral majority, but rather on the holy minority. The Church right now has more fashion than passion, is more pathetic than prophetic, is more superficial than supernatural. The Church the apostles ministered in was a suffering Church; today we have a sufficient Church. Events in the Spirit-controlled Church were amazing; in this day, the Church is often just amusing. The New Testament Church was identified with persecutions, prisons and poverty; today many of us are identified with prosperity, popularity and personalities. ... **We lack apostolic power because we lack apostolic piety, and we lack apostolic piety because we lack apostolic purity** (Ravenhill, 1983: 59).*

The challenge remains how we are to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The real contention is how to finish strong and win the crown which the Master, the Righteous Judge, will give to all over-comers. The quest remains how to raise men and women who will speak for God in our generation, and restore unto the Church heights of apostolic power and purity that typified the New Testament Church.

### III ANGLICANISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Beckwith (1988) simply explains Anglicanism as *“a pattern of Christianity which arose in England, Wales and Ireland under the influence of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation and was afterwards carried by emigrants and missionaries to the English or British possessions abroad, and to some extent beyond them”*. The Anglican heritage is rooted in the fact that *a group of early Church reformers were personally devoted to the doctrines of Scripture and fervently advocated them even at the cost of their own lives*. The list includes such men as Thomas Bilney, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, Frith, Tyndale, Ridley, Robert Barnes and John Bradford. All these men were burned at the stake as heretics between 1531

and 1556. And though they lost their lives in the battle, *their testimony of faith and conviction made a profound impression on the English Christianity of the next four centuries* (Jensen, 1988). They set forth **a pattern that was liturgical in its worship, parochial in its organization, episcopal in its oversight, paedobaptist in its practice, and established in its relation with the state** (Beckwith, 1988).

Certain principles were fundamental to the work of these Reformers. The first priority was given to *the accurate translation and dissemination of the Bible*, in the belief that the reform of the Church and the salvation of men and women, depended upon dispelling spiritual ignorance through a sure knowledge of the Word of God. They demonstrated their *belief in the authority and sufficiency of Scriptures* by the assault on those beliefs and practices they did not find in the Bible. Thus, such Romish practices as purgatory, use of images, prayers for the dead, veneration of saints, and belief in sacred objects, were dismissed as mere 'superstitions'.

Today, the Anglican Communion is a world-wide fellowship of self-governing churches which share *a common bond of history and affection with Canterbury*, and bound together by the four-point common bond otherwise known as *the Lambeth Quadrilateral*.

- The supremacy and sufficiency of Scriptures;
- The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith;
- The two dominical sacraments; and,
- The historic episcopate.

It was from these early roots that the Church Missionary Society in England, undertook the missionary work of reaching out to the unreached continent of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps there were thoughts of trade and conquest on the mind of Her Majesty's Government as expeditions took off for Africa. But the greater and eternal consequence for us was that they also came with the Word of life. And it was in July 1857 that the missionary team berthed on the shores of the Niger. They came with doctors, nurses and the wonders of medical health; but more importantly, they brought also the means of spiritual healing. They brought schools and education, but still far more significantly, they brought the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, *the One who commanded the light to shine out of darkness at the beginning of creation, shines in our hearts, the glorious light of the gospel of Christ*.

A preacher once said that when the last trump sounds at the Rapture, to announce the end of the Church Age, the Holy Spirit will actually be coming back to reap what He planted on the day of Pentecost. The Church is God's planting, a supernatural creation, the Bride of Christ. On that first Pentecost day, the Spirit laid the foundation for the Church. What was the First Century Church like? The Scriptures give an account of the early Church:

*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; ... And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers... and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2: 41-47).*

The Church was marked by five distinct features/activities:

- i) *Evangelism* - They had some heart-warming news, real good news in need of a herald: *"He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone, to wash my sins away; And now I sing a brand new song, 'Amazing Grace', Lord Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay"*. This was news indeed; and the men ran with the vision;
- ii) *Discipleship* - They desired to abide in His teaching, and be moulded in the image of the Master. True disciples indeed, they sought to be set apart, consecrated unto Him, walking like Jesus walked;
- iii) *Worship* - They knew His *worth-ship* and were prepared to declare it to the world. They owed their lives and substance to Him, and they lived totally for Him;
- iv) *Fellowship* - They sought the communion, both of the Lord and of one another. They understood the beauty of togetherness in the faith and allowed their lives to be directed by this reality;
- v) *Service* - They lived to serve the Master in one another. Of course, they had the best Teacher in this wise, for Jesus came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

In Acts 13: 1-3 we see other aspects of this church:

*Now in the Church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets*

*and teachers... As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*

The Church had men with the *distinct ministries of prophets and teachers*, and these people were actually allowed to minister among the congregation. The church was structured in a manner that allowed prophets and teachers to apply their God-given gifts for the upliftment of the Church. It was also *a praying and fasting church*. The activities of the church gave prominence to these spiritual activities, and *the Holy Spirit had the liberty to intervene in their liturgy and worship*. This intervention was such as to direct the course of missions. *The church had a missionary vision*. At the say-so of the Holy Spirit, men were dispatched on a missionary outreach.

Yet a little more detail is added in 1Cor. 12: 28; 14: 26:

*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ... How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

The *ministry gifts were in full operation* in the church, and each person had a place and a calling to use his gift to lift up the Body of Christ. In such a church, no one would be justified to launch out on a lone mission (Gospel PLC) because he had been shut out of the ministry life of the church; everyone was allowed and actually encouraged to bring his gifts to play in building up the body.

Without doubt, such a church would face some problems; and the early church did face problems. The Corinthian Church is perhaps a very good example of the problems that could arise in this type of church. First, there was a *high level of immaturity* among some of the believers, to the extent that some saw themselves as followers of Paul, while some saw themselves as disciples of Apollos. The apostle Paul would call them *"carnal... babes in Christ... behaving like mere men"* (1Cor. 3: 1-3). Further more, they often *abused the spiritual gifts*, competing among themselves in the operation of the gifts. Again the battle-scarred apostle devoted three chapters of his epistle to teach on the use and abuse of spiritual gifts. Their skill in speaking in tongues was not matched by

a resolve to love the brethren. They did not seem to know that the *calling to love* is far more important than the display of power. The apostle Paul actually made a comparative discourse in 1Cor. 13: 1-3 to show that the nature of God (the fruit of the Spirit) is more to be desired in the Christian life, than the demonstration of His power (the gifts of the Spirit). See also 1Jn. 3: 14, 16. Finally, the Corinthian Church had *problems with sexual sin*, to the extent that a man could lie with his father's wife (1Cor. 5: 1).

The morale in this discourse is that *we must not allow the fear of abuses to deter us* from being a true New Testament Church. Giving unhindered let to the move of the Spirit may bring *prayer-house type* of problems to the church, but that must not be the *excuse to lock the Holy Spirit out of His church*. The early church also had those problems. At some point, the problems were so much that the first Christian Council of Jerusalem was summoned to try to resolve some of the issues. Yet, the church remained the elect of God, and the Bride of Christ.

These were some of the Biblical landmarks that defined our past. We must have these at the back of our minds as we begin to consider the challenge of running the Christian race today.

#### IV RUNNING TO FINISH STRONG AND WIN THE CROWN

The point has often been made, that people of Israel as they journeyed from Egypt the land of bondage, to Canaan, the Promised Land, is a type of the Church in the wilderness. There is so much we must learn from them. First of all, when we describe Egypt today as the land of bondage, we often forget that it was initially the *land of bread*. How did Israel find herself in Egypt? They went in search of bread and corn. But when they stayed too long in the land of corn, it became the land of bondage.

They had a glorious history rich with the Patriarchs, and they had a land promised them by God. Under Moses, they set out on their way to the land of promise. But they had severe handicaps and great disadvantages. First, they had lived for 430 years as slaves in a strange land, with all *the mental and psychological disadvantage* associated with it. They were accustomed to thinking as slaves, and had so lived for hundreds of years. Freedom and independence for them required a novel mind-set. Furthermore, they would have to fight their way through many nations to reach the Promised Land; yet they were *neither trained as fighters nor warriors*. They had no military arsenals, no chariots of war, nor horses for battle. They were just poor farmers and livestock owners, who had

lived their lives in slave labour, building cities for Pharaoh in Egypt.

To make matters worse, Israel had *many enemies and few friends*. All the terrible kings of the lands and nations were ranged against them. Friends where they existed at all, were few and casual; while the enemies were many and determined. Moreover, they laid *claims to territories* that were occupied by a multitude of nations and peoples - the Canaanite, Amorite, Jebusite, Hittite, Hivite, and the Perizzite. This multitude of tribes had the *occupation*, Israel wanted *possession*. And Israel did not seem to have what it takes to disinherit them. The only strength Israel had was GOD; yet they often succumbed to a curious paralysis of the will when the need arose to exploit this singular advantage to their benefit. This was their greatest disability! However, in spite of their disability, history records that they dispossessed every enemy that stood on their path, and vanquished well armed and well trained standing armies. Why? God was with them.

The morale of the account is clear! The Church will overcome to the extent that we allow the Lord to rule in His Church.

Jesus Christ addressed seven letters to the seven churches in Revelations 2 and 3. It is instructive, that the last message was addressed to the church at Laodicea. This church considered itself as rich, wealthy and in need of nothing. Yet its spiritual thermometer showed that it was neither cold nor hot, and did not know it was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. The typical thing about this church was that its doors were securely locked, with the owner of the church left on the wrong side of the door. Jesus Christ stood on the outside pleading for permission to come into His church. Within were self-contented men and women, doing their own thing, their own way. May that not be our portion in Jesus' Name!

So what should be the focus of the Church as we run the race today? Thank God for some glorious calls the Church has made. The Church of Nigeria has led with great boldness and deep conviction, the resistance to institutionalising the gay movement in the Church. Furthermore, the evangelical thrust of Missionary Dioceses has taken the Gospel into distant coasts and climes in our land. We thank the Lord for the fire of revival that has swept through the large part of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in the past 15 to 20 years. The *Divine Commonwealth Summit* that has only recently been held in two sessions, has brought some urgency and stridency to the pace of evangelism and discipleship in the Communion. The emphasis on the teaching and learning of God's Word,

has assumed heightened dimensions in the land. Thank God, the Anglican Communion has rediscovered her time-tested values of preaching and teaching the Word of God. While we applaud these great strides in our recent history, we must mobilise to sustain the momentum, and keep the focus in sight.

A Chinese proverb says that if one is planning for years, he should plant rice; if he is planning for decades, he should plant trees; but if one is really planning for centuries, then he should plant men. The Church of Nigeria must plant men! The New Testament Church had layers of ministers - Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Elders; then Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. Paul's ministry would later raise men like Epaphras, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Household of Stephanas, Tychicus, and Archippus - just to name very few. The early apostles knew the value of mentoring. The Church of the future must be one which combines deep spiritual conviction, with the ability to lead and inspire men. The need is for leaders who will raise other leaders - great in parenting and mentoring, and nurturing a new generation of men for the Church.

Perhaps the greatest need of the Church today is in the area of leadership. The Maxwell Leadership Bible offers us four portraits of a leader. First, he is a *shepherd*. The key operational word here, is *relationship*. A shepherd knows, loves, protects and leads his sheep. He builds lasting relationships with the flock, and his toughness or tenderness spring from his aching heart for the future of the sheep. And the people follow because of his relationship with them.

Next is *steward*. The operative word here is *responsibility*. The steward acts on behalf of an owner, overseeing others and managing possessions. He holds down the twin sense of **privilege** and **responsibility** and is both guardian and manager over the household. As a steward, he possesses an unimpeachable character, disciplined, upright and self-controlled. He is trustworthy and faithful, with no credibility gap, discharging his responsibility with a clear conscience. A steward is called to be faithful to his calling, accountable to the owner, and responsible to his subordinates. That is why he has followers.

Third, is a *seer*. The key word here is *revelation*. Leaders possess vision, and communicate God's Word to their people. The seer speaks with divine conviction about past lessons, present challenges and future direction. He is not just a judge, but a prophet; and he communicates with skill as a visionary leader. People follow him because of the revelation.

Finally, he is a *servant*. The key word here is *rights*. The emphasis is on practical

service not on privileges and authority. The leadership pyramid is based on some principles: as responsibilities increase, rights decrease; the range of options and liberties with time, money and words are widest at the beginning and narrowest as the individual grows into leadership. True leaders do not seek titles and positions of honour; they would rather surrender their rights. The insecure go for *titles*; the secure go for *towels*. Real security enables a man to stretch and stoop to perform small acts with a degree of anonymity. When a man has a vision that transcends himself, that focuses on an important cause or project that he is emotionally connected to, then he begins a journey to *servant-hood* - putting service above self.

This kind of leadership does not pride itself in its pedigree or antecedents. It does not leverage power; it loves people. It does not compete to win; it only seeks to serve. It does not have the heart of a boss, but that of a father. And the measuring rod for its success, is the life of the leader himself.

Jesus Christ laid down the concept of Christian leadership in these words:

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20: 25-28).*

While the above Scripture lays down the concept of Christian leadership, the practical demonstration of the same concept is shown in another Scripture:

*Jesus knew that the Father had put Him in complete charge of everything, that He came from God and was on His way back to God. So He got up from the supper table, set aside His robe, and put on an apron. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with His apron... After He had finished washing their feet, He took His robe, put it back on, and went back to His place at the table... If I the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you (Jn. 13: 3-5, 12-15).*

By this singular act, Jesus Christ raised service and sacrifice above self and status. Thus, the *TOWEL* and the *CROSS* have become symbols of Christianity.

I believe that we who are leaders in the Church today, have two distinct warnings from the Scriptures if we are not to miss out on the extravagantly generous riches of God's grace. First is the warning of Moses. Very few men come close to the pedigree and authority of the man Moses - the man who was on first name terms with God, spoke with the Almighty face-to-face. Yet a day came when he overstepped his bounds, and God pronounced a verdict that even grace could not reverse: Moses was to see the promised land, but would not live to inherit it. As an intercessor for Israel, Moses had pulled the Hand of judgement away from the people of Israel; but as he attempted to plead his own cause, God's reprimand was sharp: *"Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter ... for you shall not cross over this Jordan"* (Deut. 3: 26, 27). The file was firmly and finally closed!

The second example was that of Saul *ben* Kish. It was a little matter of detail. In Saul's second year as King of Israel (1Sam. 13: 1), he had a misunderstanding with Samuel the prophet, as to an issue of timing. Samuel had promised to come and carry out sacrifices unto the Lord, to enable Saul go to war against rampaging hordes of the Philistines. After the appointed time, Samuel was nowhere to be found, and the men of Saul were beginning to disperse. So Saul acted precipitously and offered the burnt offering and peace offerings, much against the Word of the Lord. Immediately he was done with the act, Samuel appeared. It was as if he was just waiting to know whether Saul would wait out his watch! With that little infraction, Saul lost a dynasty, lost a throne and lost a Kingdom.

It all happened in the second year of Saul's reign. Yet for 42 years, Saul sat on the throne, pretending to be King. Men whose files have been closed in heaven, still parading themselves as kings and leaders. And what a confusion it foisted on the people. They bowed down the head to Saul regularly: "Long Live the King!" Yet unknown to them, the vial of oil had left Saul's courtyard, and was now at Jesse's house. Long after heaven withdrew his mandate to be king, men were still bowing and prostrating to Saul. A church, a minister, a preacher may be long dead spiritually, yet filling the time with activities and programmes that heaven has no record of. The emphasis must be on quality outings, prompted and directed by the Spirit of God.

The confusion in Christendom today, must be laid principally at the doorsteps of the leaders. A new crop of responsible leaders must emerge, who are in the

ministry, *not for the gains but in spite of the pains*. An Anglican Bishop said that the true index of success for a servant-leader, is not the size of his congregation, nor the number of miracles he records at each meeting, nor even the level of prosperity his church has attained. No! The measure of success of a true minister of the Lord is determined by the size of the cross he is called to bear for the Master. For in the end, the only badge of honour we shall present before Him in eternity, are the scars we bear for His Name.

Yet another imperative, if we are to sustain the revival we have today, is that the church must give free rein to the Spirit of God in her affairs. As Israel marched from Egypt to the Promised Land, there were two remarkable crossings in the history of the people of God. First was *the crossing of the Red Sea* - it was essential for Israel *to leave Egypt*. But there was a latter *crossing of the River Jordan* - it was essential for Israel *to enter Canaan*.

- The one took them out of Egypt; the other took Egypt out of them;
- The one was a type of baptism of repentance; the other a type of the baptism in the Holy Spirit;
- After the Red Sea came the wilderness experience, the *manna* and the pillars of cloud and fire. After Jordan came the act of possessing their possession - the corn of Canaan replaced the *manna*, and the Commander of heaven's armies took over from the pillars of fire and cloud;
- If crossing the Red Sea confirmed the Israelite as a child of Yahweh, the crossing of the Jordan made him a soldier in the Lord's army;
- If the one symbolised his deliverance from bondage, the other signified his coming into his inheritance as his Father's son.

The promise of Scripture is clear:

Jesus said: "For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... Behold I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from in high" (Acts 1:5; Lk. 24: 49).

'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink... Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were *later* to receive (Jn. 7: 37-39).

...Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. ... The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever (Is. 32: 15, 17).

Church members must be encouraged to seek God's face to ascertain their gifts for service in the ministry. With the right teachings and the correct emphasis, the lives and ministry of men will take a new dimension. It was Demos Shakarian, the founder of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International who wrote a book titled: *The Happiest People on Earth*. He posited that men who discover their specific ministry gifts from the Lord, and are using those gifts to serve God, are the happiest people on earth. How true! Paul wrote to Timothy "to stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2Tim. 1: 6). The gifts of God are not given in full bloom; they need to be fanned into flame to glow and grow. In the stirring process, mistakes may be made; but it will serve no useful purpose to throw away the baby with the bath water. May the church of the future build and develop prophets and teachers, apostles and pastors, administrators and helps - just like the early church.

Finally, the Church must finish well! The writer of Ecclesiastes puts it this way: *"The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit"* (Eccl. 7: 8). The apostle Paul concurs:

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore ... I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1Cor. 9: 24-27, 22).*

Many years ago, I listened to a Pentecostal preacher (Ashimolowo Matthew) talk about *Finishers in the Christian Race*. He identified four classes of finishers. First are the *Poor Finishers* - Men who started well, and ended poorly. In this group you would find such like Judas Iscariot - one of the twelve, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Christ's cabinet, and a front-seat witness to demonstrations of the love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, the man moved from great promise to great disaster, from grace to grass. Reminiscent of the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho!

The second class consists of the *So-So Finishers*. These are men who started out with great favour, but ended their ministry and calling with a big question mark. Such was Samson - a man with an unusual calling, God's appointed

champion to lead Israel out of captivity to the Philistines. But the victor soon became the victim; his penchant for the fairer sex, became a snare for him and his ministry. He went to bed on Delilah's laps, and just could not wake up on Abraham's bosom.

There is a third group: the *Middle-of-the-Road Finishers*. These are men who lived before their time. They work with a frenzy, and move at a frenetic pace. And often, they leave a trail of abrupt end to their calling and ministry. One can only think of the likes of Elijah, borne away in heaven's chariot of fire, and Enoch, who walked with God and was no more - for God took him.

There is the final class of saints: the *Excellent Finishers!* Like the apostle Paul, they have fought a good fight, they have finished the race, they have kept the faith! Men who qualify as excellent finishers have a peculiar mind-set:

*None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ... For I am ready not only to be Bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 20: 24; 21: 13).*

May God help us all, to run straight and strong for the finishing line, and to win the crown of glory at last!

#### IV CONCLUSION

It was in 1975 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, that our dear father in the Lord, Rev. S. G. Elton (commonly called Pa Elton) of blessed memory, gave a prophecy that we have repeated *ad nauseam*. He said that God was sending a revival to the Nigerian church. It would sweep through the orthodox churches, and particularly the Anglican Church. And he warned the Pentecostals to beware lest they miss out on this revival. Nearly forty years down the line, that revival still smoulders and burns. Just like God sent the Baby Jesus to take cover in Egypt from the wrath of Herod, so the Word of God has found custody in the Anglican Church today. It is a great privilege for me as an individual to live to see this revival. And I am persuaded that it is just beginning; what we have seen thus far, is only a tip of the iceberg. However, it is one thing to have a revival; it is another to sustain the revival

A television preacher said that Nigerian revival is a mile in length, but less than an inch in thickness. He wrote it off as a revival that has had little impact on the character of the individual. Perhaps so; but still, we have come a long way.

Revival is God's quickening visitation of His people, touching their hearts and deepening His work of grace in their lives. Literarily, it means *to live again, to come back to life from the dead*. It is a process of spiritual animation, essentially a corporate occurrence, an enlivening of individuals not in isolation but together.

*But revivals are born at mid-night!* Only as men sow in tears, prayer and fasting, will they reap a harvest of righteousness. Only as men resolve like Ezra, to prepare their hearts to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances (Ezra 7: 10), will the candle of revival burn bright. For revivals must be Bible-based. The devil will strike back. He will first mock the revival; when that fails, he will threaten; next he will blackmail, smearing and sullyng character of men; then he will physically assault; and when all fails, he will "join" the revival and go clapping and clubbing.

*For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10: 37-39).*

*Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!*

Benjamin C. Osioma  
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