

## **Raising Marketplace Ambassadors in Pluralistic Nigeria Society**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Pluralistic Nigeria Society is currently bedevilled with many vices and corruption, especially in the marketplace. To surmount these problems and achieve the needed transformation, there is a need to raise marketplace ambassadors as God's divine tools for engaging the pluralistic culture. This paper identifies Nigerian society as a pluralistic society and the marketplace as the seat of power and authority where real societal change can occur in a pluralistic society. The paper underscores that "Christ's ambassadors in the marketplace" are the agents of change; however, much emphasis is placed on raising marketplace ambassadors in Nigeria. The paper highlights some biblical examples of marketplace ambassadors, critical areas of society where churches need to raise marketplace ambassadors and how the churches can equip business leaders for effective changes in Nigerian society. Finally, the paper addresses some peculiar challenges associated with marketplaces in Nigeria and recommends a means of overcoming such difficulties.*

**KEYWORDS:** raising marketplace, ambassadors, pluralistic Nigeria society

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A normal pluralistic society interprets diversity as a constructive edge rather than the destructive edge. They consider diversity a benefit rather than a threat; they appreciate the multiple viewpoints, customs, and choices resulting from cultural pluralism rather than fear different traditions and opinions. In societies that value cultural pluralism and diversity, citizens see differences as having the potential for strengthening society rather than weakening it. They work toward understanding the benefits of cultural pluralism and face the challenge of finding a balance between diversity and unity.

This paper aims to illuminate a growing need for the marketplace as a context for mission and affirms that the marketplace holds promise for building sustainable spiritual movements. The premise is that God's biblical mandate is to take the gospel to all nations. The Christian understanding of work has slowly been cycling through the phases of sacred and secular divide and assimilation.<sup>1</sup> The underutilisation of marketplace ambassadors in mission is compounded by the infrequent challenge to those involved in secular careers to use their professions as conduits for missions. While not all professions hold equal opportunities to influence society, every Christian in marketplaces is an ideal entrant for Christian missions in a pluralistic society. If churches embrace the marketplace approach to missions, they must intentionally raise Christ's ambassadors in marketplaces.

The paper also affirms the priesthood of all believers and calls on the church to equip, encourage and empower men, women and youth in marketplaces to fulfil their calling as witnesses and co-labourers in the task of transformation and evangelisation. There are thousands of Christians in marketplaces, people from all parts of the country, who are privileged to serve in various economic sectors of the economy.<sup>2</sup> They should be part of the dynamic move of God as a renewed call to His kingdom work. God is moving in Nigeria, calling His church to rediscover His heart and intention for marketplaces.

### **Conceptual Definition**

Pluralism can be defined as a state of society where people of different ethnic backgrounds, religions and social classes co-exist but continue to promote their diverse interests and tradition. It is one of the characteristic features of modern society. Pluralism is a philosophical term meaning "doctrine of multiplicity."<sup>3</sup> It is the belief that there are more than one consistent means of approaching truths about the world; and that people of different social classes, religions, and races can live together in a society. In his lecture on "Religion and the Pluralistic Society," Cyril Imo defines pluralism as the result of the social transformation that emanates from people of different beliefs, values and customs that co-exist by the force of social relationships.<sup>4</sup> It also entails a variety of values and interests which may overlap each other due to opposing worldviews of the members of the society.

Nigerian society is characterised by multiple worldviews, allowing citizens to choose from diverse religious, cultural, or ethical beliefs.<sup>5</sup> Nigeria is a divided society considering the plurality of ethnic groups and religious and cultural identities that define her political existence. Since her independence in 1960,<sup>6</sup> Nigeria has struggled to build and sustain national integration. "For decades, different segments of Nigeria's populace had, on different occasions, expressed feelings of marginalisation, of being short-changed, oppressed, dominated, threatened, or even targeted for elimination."<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, the dramatic change in our political and economic landscape has raised new challenges in evangelisation for Nigerian churches. The polarisation between North and South makes it imperative that the church seeks God's direction to respond appropriately to the present challenges. Tailored alongside the political and religious plurality in Nigeria is the church's need to consider new realities of Nigerian society. These realities include terrorism, kidnapping, the role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families, neglect of the physically challenged and many more. These and many calls for the church to prayerfully seek direction from the Holy Spirit for the transformation and evangelisation of our dear country. In a bid to achieve these transformational efforts, this paper posits that the church needs to "raise marketplace ambassadors in pluralistic Nigeria society" who will be an agent of change.

### **Marketplace**

A marketplace is a location outside the church walls, where people can work to earn a living. A place where societal issues of this life are transacted. It combines business, education, and government and non-governmental institutions.<sup>8</sup> The marketplace is a seat of power and authority where real societal change can occur. Important decisions such as economic policy and political decisions are made in the marketplace.

Pluralistic Nigeria holds unique opportunities and challenges for Nigerian churches and Christians in the marketplaces. The workplace is characterised by godlessness, selfishness, injustice, and corruption in the Nigerian context.<sup>9</sup> Some people in the workplace are making distinctions between their work-life and faith-life. They have divided the world neatly into two. One part is 'sacred', which involves all spiritual things in church, such as worship, Bible studies, fellowship and Christian work. The other part of life is described as 'secular'. It is a tragedy of time that the 'church' has domesticated and institutionalised its 'membership', rendering many who declare Jesus as Lord absorbed and consumed with the mechanics of 'organised church'. This sacred and secular divide immobilises the church and its mission to the world.<sup>10</sup> The Bible says: 'The earth is of the Lord's, and everything that is in it, the world and all that live in it (Ps 24.1). Faith is relevant in the household, neighbourhood, workplace and church. Some hardly see their work as a means of serving God. However, God established the institution and practice of business to fulfil His creation mandate to care for all of creation. He releases the power of business to help fulfil the great commission of making disciples of all nations.<sup>11</sup> God longs to be glorified through the workplace.

### **Marketplace Mission**

Marketplace mission is an evangelical enterprise of professionals who are called to serve Jesus' intention in the public sector through their vocations. It attempts to reclaim the entire arena of work, employment, and professions in all areas of life. It is an evangelistic activity outside the church's pulpit ministry. Marketplace mission aims at taking the gospel to people where they work, precisely through the evangelistic witness of professional colleagues.<sup>12</sup> It encourages the

integration of biblical principles into every aspect of workplace practice for the glory of God. Christians in business, politics, public and private service, academia, technocrats, professional writers, artists, and governance in the marketplace. They are to bring forth the glory of the Lord and fulfil His purpose through their lives and work in the marketplace. Therefore marketplace mission is a ministry conducted in secular places where Christians perform their businesses and work as civil and public servants to the fullest extent for worldwide evangelisation and discipleship in areas deemed strategic to propagate the gospel of Christ.

Marketplace mission is a holistic mission that addresses the whole person within the whole world of creation.<sup>13</sup> It is closely linked with Tentmaking and Business as Mission. Tentmakers take up the Pauline and classical missionary model of using their skills to gain access to mission fields and maintain support to “be all things to all people to save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Tentmaking activity involves a range of occupations, business and non-business, as God-glorifying and worshipful in itself,<sup>14</sup> while Business as Mission involves the use of business as a form of mission in itself and not merely a means to the missions.<sup>15</sup> Tentmaking and Business as Mission are exclusively on cross-cultural settings; however, marketplace mission is more on local settings.

### **Christ Ambassadors in the Marketplace**

An ambassador is someone who represents a king in the court of another king. An ambassador does not enter a country for his interest. He is to represent the interest of the sending nation. Believers, as Christ ambassadors, represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ ambassadors in the marketplace are Christians who resolve to represent the interest of Christ in the marketplaces effectively. According to 2 Corinthians 5:20. “We are Christ’s ambassadors. Just as earthly ambassadors represent and communicate the desires and will of the seating government that sent them. Hence, believers are to represent and communicate the desires and will of Christ to the marketplaces.<sup>16</sup>

Workplace ambassadors are being challenged to look anew at their activities to express their calling and service to God. They are being placed in their vocations as market people and used as instruments for extending God’s Kingdom. God has led a growing number of businesspeople to think strategically about how they can integrate their skills and experience in workplaces with the task of missions.<sup>17</sup> God is calling more marketplace ambassadors to infiltrate Nigerian workplaces with His kingdom agenda.

### **The Importance of Marketplace Ambassadors in the Pluralistic Nigerian Society**

The marketplace is the forum through which human economic commerce is conducted.<sup>18</sup> Marketplace ambassadors is an umbrella term for lay Christians working in food markets and petty traders that are being looked down upon by the middle and upper classes. It also includes people in business, paid or unpaid employment and self-employment. It is the only institution that touches all people on planet earth directly or indirectly. It is a pervasive part of every society, culture, and

people group in one way or another. Therefore, the church needs to raise ambassadors who will take both the presence and the message of Jesus to marketplaces for the following reasons:

First, Christ ambassadors in the marketplace are the agents of change whom God has placed explicitly in sectors of influence with the mandate to dominate such sectors for Christ. If the unreached people in workplaces will be meaningfully engaged with the gospel of Christ, the church must empower and send out more than “full-time missionaries” to vast fields of the marketplace. Christians have a clear mandate from Genesis chapter 1 to subdue the earth. This dominion mandate made us stewards of all things for God’s glory in the marketplace. Genesis 1:28-30.

As a corollary to the first reason, the command to make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:18-20 applies to all marketplace settings. All believers, including marketplace ambassadors, are called to make disciples. The church needs to tap into this larger group to make disciples in unreached communities. However, some Christian professionals have never seen themselves as missionaries. They have not discerned the sovereign hand of God in their work placement and considered that among a few hundred souls where they work, they are the brightest light of Christ their colleagues can regularly see. Like Nehemiah, Esther, Moses and Daniel, their placement is not accidental. Marketplace ministry compel Christ ambassadors to lives as transformed Christ-followers.

Furthermore, marketplace ambassadors have greater access to more unreached communities than traditional missionaries due to governmental and cultural restrictions. The culture is going out of reach of the pulpit-bound ministries. The cultural gap and the barriers are too great a huddle to cross. There are places where pastors are not welcomed. The platform for witnessing is no longer available to them in some sectors. At this moment, the church needs Hushai in the council of Absalom, who will frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam 15: 32-37) in the pluralised society. Moreso, people are generally willing to listen to the gospel presented by individuals with whom they have an affinity and relationship. And those relationships may develop faster and deeper through the natural connections made in the marketplace. An unbeliever can see what it looks like to be a normal marketplace person and a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It is not uncommon for pulpit ministers to see the profession of laypersons as virtually irrelevant to missions outside of the church’s work. As a result, lay professionals’ talents, resources, time, and energy are hijacked for the specific mission of the congregation. Meanwhile, the dichotomy between the sacred and secular culture is so severe that a pastor is not readily welcomed to the table in most secular dimensions of our society. To reach the 45.5% of Nigerians who are considered Muslims and traditional Adherents,<sup>19</sup> an army of Christ’s ambassadors must emerge and see their workplace and neighbourhood as a mission field. That is the reason why the church needs to raise marketplace ambassadors. Christians in various vocational sectors must be challenged to be salt and light in their professions and positively impact their vocational peers and the community.

Christians from diverse professions and disciplines, be it medical, educational, social services, finance and many more, can consistently and relentlessly reason about how they can impact their community and influence the marketplace for Christ. Lay Christians from the Layvarious professions can pray together for wisdom and direction from God about renewal in their professions.<sup>20</sup> Christians in workplaces become embedded intercessors in every vocational sector, informed intercessors with accurate research on the state of the national economy, on its plans and promises, praying for the transformation of Nigeria. The triads and quads of believers in their workplaces can hold one another accountable to a life of integrity before unbelievers and push for reform in the presidency, states and national assemblies, judiciary, military, police and educational sectors.

### **Key Areas of Society Where Churches Need to Raise Marketplace Ambassadors**

Certain areas are fundamental elements of any society. Each shapes the minds and perspectives of the people in society. Christians are called to have an impact on culture, but these elements of society also impact us.<sup>21</sup> Whether that impact is godly or not is determined by those who hold power and control over these sectors. That is why raising marketplace ambassadors are so important. The church must raise Godly leaders to influence these areas: Government, Family, Education, Media, Art, Entertainment, Business, Politics, Economy and finance. The areas that Israel Onoriobe called the “Mountains of Influence.”<sup>22</sup> These are the engines that run society, and the church should be a positive agent of change and transformation in society. It is vital to have godly marketplace ambassadors driving these engines.

The church’s strategy is to raise marketplace ambassadors to influence these spheres and transform society through the workplace because 90% of the daily time is spent in these spheres.<sup>23</sup> If the saints are well equipped to take their positions in the society and see their workplace as part of their God-given assignment, then the church can begin to influence these spheres positively and occupy places as the Kingdom principles are being released. It requires the involvement of a corporate people with a kingdom mindset to engage these key areas of society. The parameters of the Kingdom assignment to influence extend beyond the “church culture” into all the centres of society. Influence is not dominance; marketplace ambassadors are not called to force God’s will upon people; instead, they are to expose people to God’s heart and increase their access to His Kingdom. Through the faithful development of God-given talents, marketplace ambassadors become more useful in the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Marketplace ambassadors must acknowledge that life in its totality is to be lived under the Lordship of Christ. No church-related mission is more spiritual than any workplace missions; professions such as education, law, politics, journalism, or business. The Kingdom of God should influence every dimension of life, and marketplace ambassadors serve as salt and light wherever they work. Christian discipleship is expressed through the vocation is an important part of life. There is no difference between sacred and secular work; all vocation is capable of glorifying God.

### **How to Equip Marketplace Ambassadors for Productive Changes in the Society**

God has strategically placed Christians in positions of authority and influence. God intends to use them to take the Kingdom by force. By equipping them to be disciple-makers and transforming them into ministers in the marketplace. Christians in the marketplace are confronted with issues every day that test their faith and challenge their integrity. They need specific guidance on how to navigate through the issues they face. Sometimes, their work becomes a burden because of pressure, but God created work as a form of worship, which should invoke great joy.<sup>24</sup> Everything is sacred to God, and we are called to serve Him with our lives. This includes our profession, where we spend the majority of our time and energy. Christians need to understand this purpose for their work and be equipped for their spiritual role in the marketplace.<sup>25</sup> To raise congregations of responsible and proactive believers who see themselves as God's agents in the marketplace, Here are suggested ways to raise marketplace ambassadors:

#### **Teach Marketplace Ambassadors to be Fishers of Men.**

Bait is an essential tool for a bountiful harvest in the fishing industry. Economic issues are universal bait that has attracted employees, customers and vendors to marketplace ambassadors. Marketplace ambassadors are in front of unregenerated people who are in crisis and need. Many of these people will not seek the church as a place of refuge and guidance, but they could be spiritually impacted by marketplace ambassadors who have been equipped for such an opportunity. Marketplace Ambassadors must demonstrate how to live successfully on the earth. Some believers think the only way to share their faith through their profession is to put a scripture on their sign or business card. The world sees this as merely promotional. What they expect from Christians is a higher standard of integrity and intentional excellence in service.<sup>26</sup> When believers do not model this, it can potentially harm the gospel. We must apply God's word practically to our spheres of influence. As the Marketplace Ambassadors are trained and equipped by the church, they can be more effective to "fish" in the marketplace. The church needs to train market leaders to have a biblical perspective on the common questions of humanity.

#### **Teach about the ministry of the marketplace**

To transform the society for Christ, the church must change its orientation about marketplace ministry. The church needs to teach about ministry in marketplaces and send believers who will truly uphold biblical standards into the world.<sup>27</sup> Teaching the market people to be ministers in the marketplace can greatly expand the Kingdom of God. The Marketplace is a Mission Field! Statistically, market people meet more lost people every week than a pastor.<sup>28</sup> The harvest is ripe, but the workers are few (Luke 10:2). We need to equip market people in our churches to equip market people in the church, community, work, and nation. (Equip them to be equippers, disciple to make disciples).

### **Equipe Marketplace Ambassadors to see all aspects of their work as a potential ministry**

Marketplace Ambassadors need to develop a sense that God has strategically placed them in their workplaces to make a difference. They should be encouraged to add a new sense of purpose to people in their work lives. It is about churches helping people hold pressured lives together by better integrating faith, work, family, and all of life. The church should help market people see their work as ministry. Encourage them to put a “ministry plan” into their work plan. Preach the doctrine of work as worship from the pulpit.

Marketplace Christians should not create a secular-sacred division in business (witnessing is sacred but doing the accounts is secular). All works are part of our creation mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) and are done to God’s glory.<sup>29</sup> William Tyndale, the English Reformer, said, “to please God, no work better than other; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a cobbler, or an apostle, all is one, to wash dishes and to preach is all one, as touching the deed, to please God.”

### **Built purposeful relationship**

The pastor should intentionally build relationships with marketplace people. He should meet regularly with them in their workplace and discuss and study relevant issues in the marketplace such as money, corruption, godly relationships and leadership. When marketplace people understand God’s designs for the work, it has a personal impact on their conduct.<sup>30</sup> It is time for us to show believers in public sectors how important they are to God’s mission in the marketplace.

### **Encourage the participation of Marketplace ambassadors in the church**

Allow their input and ideas related to church management, conduct the church’s business with integrity, manage money and people well. When marketplace people receive guidance from the church, it will positively impact their works.

### **Biblical Examples of Marketplace Personalities**

#### *Bezalel and Aholiab*

These were craftsmen who headed the construction of the wilderness tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-2). God used them to construct the beautiful designs of the tabernacle and its cabinets. God did not instruct Moses the Gospel Minister and Apostle to Israel to do the work; instead, He anointed Bezalel and Aholiab, endowed them with the power of Holy Spirit to function in wisdom and all manner of artistry.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Joseph*

Joseph was an example of a marketplace ambassador. He was not privileged to serve in the temple. However, his life was powered by his spiritual gift of dreaming and interpreting dreams. His gift and dedication to duty made him to serve as Prime Minister in Egypt. Joseph was gifted with a prophetic mantle but fulfilled his calling in government and administration. He succeeded in



managing the complex economy of the greatest empire of his time. Through his faithfulness to the marketplace ministry, the Lord used Joseph to safeguard Israel from famine. (Genesis 37; Genesis 39- 50).

### *Joshua*

Joshua was Moses mentee; after serving Moses as a protégé, He became the leader of all Israel. His major calling was not in the temple but in fighting wars, taking territories and apportioning the Canaan as an inheritance for the people of Israel.<sup>32</sup> He was an ideal marketplace minister with a combined apostolic mandate over the nation of Israel.

### *Daniel*

Daniel was a highly esteemed prophet of his days. However, his place of ministry was the marketplace and not the temple. He was anointed with wisdom, understanding, prophetic insight and administrative insight. He served in cabinets of the Babylon and Medo-Persia kings.<sup>33</sup> Daniel was proof that God requires a high level of consecration from those called to marketplace ministry, Daniel 1:8. The book of Daniel shows how this man functioned as a Prophet and Marketplace minister faultlessly. His ability to interpret dreams and prophetic gift brought him great favour and recognition.

### *Mordecai*

Mordecai worked as an elder at the gate and later as a presidential adviser. He was not a pulpit minister. His diligence at the duty enabled him to be used by God to foil a coup plot against the King, which the Lord used to elevate him to a higher political office.<sup>34</sup> His assiduousness at the gate also helped him to make good use the information that Queen Vashti's crown was vacant. He seized on the opportunity to encourage his mentee Esther to put herself forward to be Queen. Esther Chapters 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10.

### *Nehemiah*

Nehemiah was the chief cupbearer or aide-de-camp of the Persian King, Artaxerxes, when news came to him of the desolate state of Jerusalem. His love for God and His chosen people made him to sacrifice all to lead the exiles back to the Promised land to rebuild the city's walls. He was proof that God can use a minister in the marketplace to achieve extraordinary results that will affect many generations.

## **CONCLUSION**

Raising marketplace ambassadors is an urgent task that deserves the utmost attention of the church of God in Nigeria. If Nigeria will experience the anticipated transformation, then the church cannot afford to neglect the marketplace where most national issues are being decided in the hands of unbelievers. We need Hushai in the council of Absalom who will frustrate the counsel of

Ahithophel. If the church is to engage the unreached billions, marketplace believers must play a part. The Church must empower and send out more than “full-time missionaries” to these vast fields.

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