



BUILDING STRONG CHURCHES

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MINISTERS ENGAGE

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Let me begin by thanking Pastor Gbeminiyi Eboda for inviting me to speak at this conference. I accepted the invitation because I believe he's a forward thinking pastor, and we need forward thinking men of God at this time in the history of our federation. If you're attending this conference you must be of like mind.

The topic of our deliberation today is, Building Strong Churches. There are of course as many approaches to the topic as there are definitions of what a strong church is. A church can be administratively strong. A church can be spiritually strong. A church can be membership strong. A church can be pastorally strong. There are so many ways in which a church can be strong. But whatever definition of strength we choose we must avoid a trade union or insular definition. A trade union definition of strength is how a pastors' collective will define strength, and it's irrespective of how everyone else defines it. It's how churches get into comparative analyses, comparing themselves to themselves. But the Bible says those who compare themselves to themselves are not wise. 2 Corinthians 10:12. We must therefore avoid a foolish definition of strength.

An insular definition of strength is how Pentecostals often choose to define strength. It's from an alternative dictionary available only to Pentecostals. Pentecostals have after all evolved an alternative vocabulary. It's called Pentecostalese. If we go by that vocabulary the only definition of strength is spiritual strength. And so when the Bible says we wrestle against principalities and powers our sole concentration is on the invisible forces in the spiritual realm. We forget principalities and powers are also in this realm, that the guys up there use agency leverage. Notice how many mortals are laying claim to the title of Prince of Nigeria. A principality is a being with the political authority of a prince.

For this lecture, this is my working definition of a strong church: a strong church is one capable of negotiating from a position of strength with extant power blocks, and able to determine executive and political outcomes. The paradigm of such a church will be radically different from the religious mind-set of the average ministry, though I do concede such definition raises the spectre of politicisation of ministry. The truth however is, contrary to our common belief the church is a political assemblage and Jesus is a political figure. The church is a nation. 1 Peter 2:9. In fact the titles used by ministers that we so cherish in Christianity were administrative titles in Rome. Seeing the church for what it is Paul adapted those titles for the church. For example, the word "bishop" is derived from the Greek word, "Episkopos." Bishop simply

means “overseer or general manager/ superintendent.” The Episkopoi or bishops were Athenian officials sent into allied cities to set up democratic constitution. It was a political title. “Bishop”, “deacon” and other titles were not Christian coinage. They’re adaptations of existing titles.

The priesthood of Jesus is after the order of Melchizedek not the Aaronic order. The Aaronic order is made up of pure priests. They served in the temple. But the man for whom the order of Melchizedek was named was both king and priest, and Jesus deliberately chose that priesthood. It’s a hybridised priesthood, a secular/spiritual combo. And we see Jesus carry the concept through in his choice of apostles. There was a doctor, an internal revenue agent, there were entrepreneurs and even a political activist. His name is Simon. He was a radical who belonged to a party dedicated to the violent overthrow of Rome. They were called Zealots. Save Levi who was from the tribe of Levi, none of the apostles qualified to be priests. Not even Jesus himself. He was from the tribe of Judah. Jesus changed the priesthood protocol. Without that change of protocol none of you sitting here today will qualify for ministry. Unless of course someone can prove the people from Abraka are part of the tribe of Levi. Even if we qualified to be priests we will be serving in the temple in Jerusalem, not in Nigeria.

The prophetic declaration concerning Jesus was wholly political: “A child will be born for us. A son will be given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and peace will have unlimited growth. He will establish David’s throne and kingdom. He will uphold it with justice and righteousness now and forever. The Lord of Armies is determined to do this!” Isaiah 9:6-7 GW. Within the context of that passage the titles, “Wonderful Counsellor”, “Mighty God”, “Everlasting Father”, “Prince of Peace” are political titles. As Wonderful Counsellor Jesus is imbued with wisdom to govern. As Mighty God he’s imbued with power. As Everlasting Father his reign is eternal. As Prince of Peace he exercises dominion. Peace can only be attained through strength.

Interestingly, the word “righteousness” in that passage is used as a political terminology. Righteousness is a technical phraseology encapsulating the constitutional rights of God in his sovereign capacity. The devolution of the sovereign rights of God is what makes us righteous.

Here’s another thing we don’t recognise. The reason we do praise worship in church is because church is a political assembly. God presides over this general assembly as monarch and so we praise and worship him. You worship kings. God’s system of government is monarchy. It’s why we

genuflect before him. You adulate kings. Were God a president there will be no praise worship. You don't adulate presidents. You just acknowledge them. The reason Jesus is anointed is because he's a monarchical heir. He's the heir to God's throne. You can't anoint a president. It's why no pastor has successfully anointed a presidential candidate in Nigeria. It's a conceptual impossibility. Nigeria is not a monarchy. Our anointing is God's devolution of political authority. It's why we can cast out demons. We cannot do so without political authority. It's why those demons beat the sons of Sceva to pulp. Jesus they knew as a political power, Paul they knew had political authority; who were they?

Interestingly, our adversary the Devil is not confused about political realities. Satan's admin organogram is blatantly political. What could be more political than a functionary called Power? Or Ruler of Darkness? Or Principality? "Spiritual Wickedness" is a political title it's not a moral reference. To explain that organogram to you, let me quote from my book, Of Madmen, Senators and Ambassadors: "Principalities are the first line of consultation, and they function as strategic advisers (to the Devil). They constitute the inner council. As causative chiefs, they are the conceptualisers of Lucifer's strategic programmes. They have overall responsibility for execution and strategy. They constitute the intellectual think tank – the brains. They design blueprints. They anticipate God's moves and strategise counter measures. As firsts they have pre-eminence.

The Powers execute the vision and strategy set by the Principalities at national and international levels. The Powers are directly in charge of the government of nations, influencing decisions at policy level and coordinating national programmes. Wars, rumours of war, coups, revolutions, anarchy, mayhem, unrests, insurgencies, insurrections, economic meltdowns, leadership ineptitude, ethnic cleansing, pogroms and holocausts are coordinated by the Powers. They invented kakistocracy – government by the worst of the lot. The first and second World Wars, the Congo Wars (First Congo War, Second Congo War and the Kivu Conflict), the Nigeria civil war, the Somalian war – were all managed by The Powers.

The Rulers of Darkness are the restraining forces. They are also the "technologists." They have strategic responsibility for the development of critical technologies, to overcome governments, nations and individuals. Sin, misery, ruin, unhappiness, ignorance and error are deeply associated with Rulers of Darkness. They create domestic and personal trauma. That pastor going through a tragic divorce of the incomprehensible variety that hampers his ministry... That woman going through enormous life difficulties... Every step is blocked... That gifted young man on the verge of a mental breakdown.

That senseless horrific accident that hacks away two feet on the eve of a wedding... These are the works of the Rulers of Darkness. They stop you.

Spiritual Wickednesses are the tertiary deployers. They deal in retail. They are malevolent local administrators. The Wickednesses are in charge of “agent” recruitment – humans who facilitate the emotional destruction of other humans. When jealousy, envy, bile and hatred are directed at you, it is the work of Spiritual Wickednesses. They recruit and control human assets for nefarious ends, turning them into means. That vicious rumour attack that keeps you defending yourself against non-existent facts... These ruinous spirits are tenaciously focused on the Luciferian motto and mission statement: To Kill, To Steal and To Destroy.”

Until you dimension Satan politically you will never understand his psychotic sadism. His sadism is an instrument of fear and political oppression. Satan is not interested in religion. All he’s interested in is political power. The only reason he dabbles in religion is because religion is a tool of mind control. To Satan religion is technology. He uses religion to dilute the exclusive claims of Jesus.

Now, I’m aware I’m saying pretty radical stuff but fact after fact, scripture after scripture, evidence after evidence point to the reality of these declarations. A strong church has to understand her political role, both in the terrestrial realm and in the spiritual realm. A critical examination of the mandate of Jesus shows its political dimension. He famously declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favour has come.” Luke 4:18-19 NLT. He’s talking about poverty, social justice, and oppression. What the ordinary Israelite would have heard when he made that declaration is a concrete political program not a religious program. They were expecting the Messiah. To the Jew the Messiah is a political figure and a military commander, not a religious figure. Salvation is a citizenry program of the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s an amnesty program and naturalisation program for mankind.

If you cannot politically impact your local geography, if you cannot implement social justice programs, fight for the poor in concrete terms; if you cannot fight against oppression in our polity, surely you cannot claim to be a strong church. A church that is heavenly minded but contextually irrelevant is a weak church. The mandate we have is a political mandate. It’s the mandate of Jesus. No church can go beyond it. And the political reality of Jesus is why his titles are all political. He is “King of kings” and “Lord of lords”. Jesus is also

known as the Sheblimini – he who sits on the right hand of Majesty. In other words he's Otunba! If Jesus is a political figure and the church is the body of Christ the church must necessarily be a political organ.

As Isaiah 42:4 says, “we will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago.” There will be improvement in our balance of trade because, “you will feed on the treasures of the nations and boast of their riches” as Isaiah 61:6 prophesies. Concerning our poor image Isaiah 61:7 says, “instead of shame and dishonour, you will enjoy a double share of honour.” That's our mandate for Nigeria. It is time for the church to arise.

Within the context of our definition of strength the Nigerian church is politically weak. Oh, General Overseers, prophets and pastors periodically make prophetic political proclamations, but most of these proclamations are reactionary. If the church were strong Leah Sharibu would have been out of captivity. And there are many Leah Sharibus out there.

Now, here's the irony concerning the Nigerian church. For you to move the dial in a democracy you must have:

- a. numbers
- b. money
- c. intellect
- d. structure
- e. network.

The church has all five elements and yet she's weak. The question is, why? There are a number of reasons and I'm going to highlight some, not all. Some of the factors are structural, some conceptual. Let's look at the factors.

The first problem we have is our model. The model operated by most Pentecostal ministries is conceptually wrong and not in accordance with God's reasoning. We are operating a centripetal model instead of a centrifugal model. Our spokes are radiating inwards rather than radiating outward. The work of the pastor is to train the people to do the work of the ministry. He's not to do the work. Ephesians 4:11-12. In God's scheme those called into ministry are HR development consultants. They're to train people to function OUTSIDE the church. The work is not in church. We're the salt of the earth not the salt of church. Our theatre of operation is society. But we've distorted God's model. And in so many ways. First we give the impression only pastors are called, the people are not called. Which is of course untrue going by several passages of scriptures. Mark 16:17-18, Romans 1:6, Romans 8:30.

In upturning God's model we converted the people to mere enablers. And so the church is limited to a factor of one - the pastor. However in the model envisaged by Jesus the church is supposed to leverage on the totality of her human resources – in order to radically progress society. Where are our economists, where are the strategists, where are the policy analysts? When these talents are thematically purposed the church will gain credible heft.

The second reason the church is politically weak is our disdain for intellectualism. We've managed to label intellectual reasoning anti Spirit, and that's most unfortunate, if not ironical. Strategic political outcomes leverage on intellectual strength. You can't turn the fortune of a nation around without intellectual prowess. Progress is not accidental. There's no nation that progresses without strategic blueprint. Not even the Christian nation. It's why God raised Paul. It was Paul who disciplined Christian theology, gave us rules for reconciling the Old Testament with the New. It was Paul who created the organogram of the church. It's what we're still using today, 2000 years after. Tells you how well thought out it is. Without that organogram the church would not have grown in a methodical manner. The growth would have been shambolic and capped. That organogram created standards. It came accompanied with an HR manual for recruitment to ministry.

Peter could not develop the theology of the church; neither could he develop the administrative organogram. It was way beyond him intellectually. That God made Paul write three-quarters of the New Testament gives us an inkling into God's idea of the church. The message may be simple but the church is a sophisticated institution. Christianity is predicated on the logical sequencing of at least 6000 years of human history. It goes without saying the Holy Spirit is an intellectual. It was he after all who inspired the writings of Paul. Paul wrote like a lawyer. He was the first Christian apologist. He would lay down elaborate schemes of premises to arrive at conclusions. For example he picked up an argument in Romans 1 and ended the argument in Romans 8:1. It's why Romans 8:1 starts with "Therefore." "Therefore" indicates the conclusion of an argument.

And lest we think Paul was the only one with intellectual insight, Apostle John also had. He advanced the concept of the Logos. It was an intellectual leap of faith. The Logos was not originally a Christian concept. The man who first heralded the subject was an eccentric philosopher named Heraclitus. He lived in the 6th century BC, long before John wrote his treatise, and long before Christianity. Heraclitus saw the Logos as "everlasting Word". He conceived

the Logos as an organising principle. And so when John said Jesus was Logos he was referencing Heraclitus. Jesus is the “eternal Word.” Paul also referenced Heraclitus. Heraclitus wrote that all things come to pass in accordance with the Logos. Paul wrote concerning Jesus that by him were all things created, and without him was nothing made that we made. Colossians 1:16-20. The incredible intellectual leap by John was his assertion the Logos was not a principle but a personage. His name is Jesus.

The inability of the church to process her thoughts intellectually has robbed the church of strong say in the policy arena. It has also robbed the church of strategic presentation of her agenda. And that exactly is the agenda of the church? As elections approach politicians seek the endorsement of the church. We know what they want, but what do we want in return?

The third reason the church is politically weak is because of unhealthy rivalry among pastors. There’s no unity. A house divided against itself is structurally weakened. There’s envying, backbiting, backstabbing, destruction of ministries by proclamations... My church is bigger than yours, my congregation is more than yours, my church is more prosperous than yours... These are not God’s indices. We came up with them. There’s so much schism in the body. As pastors we need to put our ego in check. No one owns the church. You may own the building but you cannot own the church. The church is the mystic body of Christ. None of us went to the cross. None of us died at Golgotha. Even if you want to go to Golgotha you won’t qualify. None of us is unblemished.

The fourth reason the church is politically weak is because of moral bankruptcy. This robs us of moral authority. If we must be honest with ourselves some ministers have gone the way of Balaam. They’re blinded by the pursuit of riches. They see ministry as a means to acquire wealth. They foster on the congregation self-serving and unbalanced rules of prosperity. The result is that some young Christians don’t value diligence or hard-work. Their values are messed up. It’s why someone can imagine he can steal from his employer to sow in church in order to prosper. The recent backlash over tithes is a reflection of these issues. There was disappointment over the results of half-baked theology on prosperity. The people are not theologically adept. And now a whole generation is threatening to throw out sound biblical principles.

The fifth reason the church is politically weak is because the church does not appreciate political context. We do not pay enough attention to what's going on in the government. It has pleased God to subordinate the church to political authority. It's why the state makes laws the church must obey. The state has been known to shutter church premises. It is foolhardy not to pay attention to political context. 99% of the prayer points of the average Nigerian is predicated on policy failures. We pray to buy generator because of inadequate supply of electricity. We pray for all terrain vehicles – what we call jeeps, because the roads are bad. We pray for God's protection because our law and order is not efficacious. We pray for money to send our kids to good schools because of the failure of our education policy. We pray for divine health because our hospitals are in poor state. Our doctors have emigrated to other countries. 99% of our prayer points are as a result of policy failure. Our definition of prosperity is attaining what is basic standard of living in other countries.

Yes, we can teach the people principles of Biblical prosperity in church but we need to pay more attention to the issue of public wealth. It's okay to teach prosperity at retail level but China lifted more than 500M people out of poverty by focusing on public wealth. Compared to the absolute figures on poverty in the country we're like people bailing water out of a sinking boat with a soap dish. We need to face the issue of poverty in the larger polity in order to stem the tide. We must stop the boat from sinking. Our poverty statistics are scary. Zamfara is 91.9%, Yobe is 90.2%, Jigawa 88.4%, Bauchi 86.6%, Kebbi 86%, Sokoto 85.3%, Katsina 82.2%, Taraba 77.7%, Gombe 76.9%, Kano 76.4%.

If you've studied history you'll notice the penchant of the enemy to blame the church for the failures of the state. Nero pinned the burning of Rome on the church. Karl Marx pinned the failure of the state on religion. Religion is the opium of the masses he wrote. This is one of the reasons for the backlash over church offerings.

The sixth reason the church is politically weak is because the church does not appreciate her central role in society. Nothing sums this up better than Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "God raised (Christ) from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the centre of all this, Christ rules the church. The

church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence." (Ephesians 1:20-23 MSG). Jesus is not going to reign he is already reigning! What Paul is saying is that the Church is the nucleus of society. The apostles never lived to see that vision fulfilled. They never experienced the political ascendance of the church. If the church is the nucleus of the society what then are Christians doing on the fringes of society? Why aren't our thoughts determining the direction of the nation? Where are the policy documents from CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) and PFN (Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria)?

There is a reason God raised this generation of Christians. The foundation was laid in the 1960s by the likes of Pa Elton of blessed memory, but the work began to bear visible fruit in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The orthodox churches had missed the way by ignoring spirituality. They had reduced the gospel to mere moral instruction. You didn't have to go to church to get moral instruction in those days. The schools were teaching moral instruction. And so church became less relevant to youths. The youths revolted. They wanted something deep, something substantial. They genuinely wanted God but didn't know how to find him. Those agitations were misread by the orthodox churches. They thought the youths wanted "disco Christianity" as they called it – you know, more dance, contemporary music... They thought the kids wanted deliverance from the pipe organ. And so they bought jazz sets and modern musical instruments. Only the youths weren't interested in musical instruments. They wanted the inventor of music - God. There was a hunger in their hearts. Hidden in all these agitations was God's secret agenda. He wanted to purpose that generation for a special work.

The "Pentecostal" movement was a special purpose vehicle. It wasn't a denominational thrust, wasn't meant to be. It was a generational amalgamation. It didn't matter whether you were Catholic, or Baptist, or Methodist, or Anglican. A new tribe came into being. The name "Pentecostal" is a misnomer anyway. Pentecost is a feast under the Law and we're not under the Law. But Pentecost was the day the Holy Spirit became a democratised and distributed intelligence.

Judging by the speed of progression of Pentecostalism in Nigeria there was an apparent urgency to the movement. God seemed to be working on a tight schedule. To meet the timeframe requirement God innovated an entrepreneurial approach to ministry. He had experimented with this in America and now it was being adapted for Africa. God raised autonomous and

semi autonomous individuals to preach the gospel. These ministers were not tethered to the orthodox establishment and so couldn't be bogged down by ecclesiastical politics, bureaucratic wrangling, oppressive tradition, stultifying precedence or ceremonial formalism. The new movement thrived on informalism. The new ministers were "spiritual entrepreneurs." They thrived on innovation and relied on the move of the Spirit. He was the strategist.

But the movement had a technical challenge. It had no nation-wide logistics network on which to travel. The orthodox establishment owned the existing structure and they weren't going to lend their structure to the movement. What God did was ingenious. The movement piggybacked on government policy. NYSC (National Youth Service Corp) became the missionary vehicle. As these young men and women graduated and went on NYSC they were able to take the new movement around the federation. They established fellowships, some stayed behind in the states they served in, establishing the work and starting churches. In this we see the movement making contact with government policy and state departments. That was very significant. As significant as Paul making formal contact with the church at the persecution of Stephen. Just as Paul crossed over and took on a major role in the church, filling in the intellectual gap, taking the church international, these kids were meant to cross over and take over the nation. They were to usher in an unprecedented era of development, redeem the image of the country in international circles. The corroborating evidence for this insight lies in the fact that when these kids were in university they began to intercede for the nation unbidden. They had a burden for the nation. And prophecies poured forth. Many of those prophecies have been fulfilled. A fire burned in their heart for the nation. They had unalloyed patriotism. What God did was to expose them to secular wisdom through the universities, just as Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were exposed to secular wisdom. Like those gentlemen their training was a combination of the secular and the spiritual. This was the Melchizedek generation.

But something seemed to have happened along the way. That generation seems to have lost focus. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches crept in. They didn't understand the reason they were taught the principles of prosperity and became rich was so their word is respected on national issues. A poor man's wisdom is despised. They forgot their purpose. They were supposed to take Nigeria into the enviable league, They were purposed to create a new Nigeria in the image of their calling – a nation where there is neither Jew, nor Greek, nor Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or Ibibio; a nation established in righteousness, predicated on the twin concepts of justice and equity; they were to turn Nigeria into a land flowing with milk and honey, conquer the problem of poverty. They were supposed to leverage their training

and intelligence, and the capacities of the Holy Spirit to proffer solutions to the Nigerian question. They were the first generation trained within Nigeria, the first proof of Nigeria's strength. They were bred in Nigeria. Their father's generation schooled in the backyard of their colonial masters, far away in England. Not having understood the purpose of their calling they disdained politics and governance. They never went into government, which is ironic. These were people praying for the nation who disdained opportunities to serve that very nation. They struggled theologically with the political nature of Christianity. They thought politics was wrong.

There are three types of righteousness in scriptures. The first is the aggregation of man's behaviour with God's expectations. It's a moral code. You do this righteousness. The second type of righteousness in scriptures is devolved righteousness. It is an act of divine donation. We are all donees of this righteousness. It's what Jesus wrought for us. The third form of righteousness is policy righteousness. It is national in outlook and predicated on good governance. This righteousness is government doing right by the people. It's what David was referring to when he wrote, "Give the king knowledge of your judgments, O God, and the spirit of your righteousness to the king's son to guide all his ways. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your afflicted with justice." Psalm 72:1-2 AMP.

The church is very much aware of the first two types of righteousness – moral code and devolved righteousness. It is the third righteousness – policy righteousness, that the church struggles with. If the church will be strong, she will need to purpose the people to go into government and execute policy righteousness. There's too much injustice in the land. The powerful prey on the poor, those in position of authority oppress the people. As we establish schools of theology we ought to establish schools of government. And power will not change hands through the mouthing of phraseologies. Power will only change hands when the people offer themselves for service in government.

It has been my privilege to share these radical thoughts with you this morning. I want to thank you for listening.

God bless!

About LEKE ALDER

Leke Alder (*Strategy, Policy & Brand Consultant; Principal, Alder Consulting*)

Leke Alder is the Founder & Principal of Alder Consulting, Nigeria's premier creative intelligence organisation, with offices in Lagos and London (www.alder-consulting.com). He is a trained lawyer. He is credited with introducing branding as a discipline to Nigeria and has consulted on policy, politics and business at the highest levels at home and abroad. He has consulted on policy formulation for the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Federal Ministries of Information & Communication, Education, Foreign Affairs, Solid Minerals Development, and others. He has also consulted on political strategy and communication campaigns at national and sub-national levels.

He was appointed by the Federal Government to the Board of Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) and was Chairman of the Board Tenders Committee as well as Chairman of the Communications Committee. He served on the Board for 4 years. He served as a member of the Steering Committee of Nigeria's hosting of the World Economic Forum on Africa and the Chairman, Sub-Committee on Media, Host Broadcasting & Advertising. He has served as a panelist at the Annual Africa Business Conferences of Harvard Business School, Wharton Business School and Kellogg School of Management. He was a speaker at the Financial ADFocus Conference, South Africa, the School of Media & Communications (SMC), Pan African University (now Pan Atlantic University), EDS, Pan Atlantic University; the Nigerian Bar Association; Women in Management & Business (WimBiz) Annual Conference and The Platform.