

The Impacts of Revd John Wesley's Life and Ministry on England and Beyond: A Reflection

Uchenna Ebony Amanambu

Abstract

A careful study into the lives and activities of some of the great individuals who have changed the lives and conditions of humanity reveals that they had some striking features. The likes of Martin Luther, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr among others have some things in common. Interestingly, those things they have in common usually serve as the driving force in their struggles. One of those striking features is their thirsts for the upliftment of human person. Unequivocally, Rev John Wesley's life and his ministry can be grouped among these men. He made a strong and commanding impact on the general affairs of eighteenth century England and by extension, the world in general. His life and ministry have impacted so much on the socio-economics, moral, religious and political transformation of the eighteenth century England and the world in general. Nothing has helped bring mankind out of conundrum like men who understood and vigorously pursued their visions and these visions usually translate into their mission.

Introduction

This is an era when myriads of changes are taking place in the world today. While some people applaud it, some other people view them controversial and unwanted. These diverse perspectives often arise when the rightness and wrongness of these changes are difficult to be classified and understood. No doubt with the emergence of corona virus and its likes, there seems to be a

pervading darkness which is rapidly filling the earth. Many People are struggling financially and other aspects of life. Many marriages that were happily and sanctimoniously consummated are close to ending in divorce both in the hearts and law courts. The eyes of many people especially our youths seem to be blinded. Many scientists, economists, social scientists and analysts appear not to be coming up precisely with solutions to all these. Many religious organizations are not functioning sacredly as experiences and events have proved that there is no distinct difference between the worldly and some of the supposed sacred practices. If the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) assigned to prosecute corrupt persons in Nigeria would momentarily excuse the politically exposed persons and objectively delve into the financial dealings of many religious organizations, there would be crises. Like in the era of the ancient Hebrews, our water had gone sour and nothing seems to be working. Virtually everybody is becoming use to structured camouflaged life style and hypocritical behaviour is becoming to be regarded as compliance. Many people appear not ready to take a courageous stand for the truth, defend the truth and walk in the truth. Compromised truth seems to be an acceptable norm. Cruising past the human history, few individuals who are courageous to stand for the truth have never failed to come to the rescue of the society. Hence efforts shall be made to succinctly analyze the lives of Rev John Wesley whose life and ministry stands out as models for those who want to effectively carry out positive changes and achieve their various purposes in life. This study shall also briefly examine the current state of mankind today especially in Nigeria and posit how the life and ministry of Revd John Wesley can inspire some individuals to checkmate today's troubled world. We shall do this by defining first some relevant terms in the study.

Clarification of Some Terms

Impacts

It is the plural form of the word “impact” and it means having a direct effect on, impinging on or striking forcefully on something or somebody. It also means a forceful response that occurs when one thing hits another or when two objects collide. It implies the results, effects and outcomes of something from the positive and desirous perspective.

Ministry

Ministry has variously been defined as a department of governmental work such as education or health etc. The Webster’s dictionary describes ministry as a person or thing through which something is accomplished. Collins English dictionary defines ministry as the work of a religious person that is based on or inspired by his/her religious beliefs. It is needful that ministry is defined within the context of Christianity. Ministry is derived from the Greek word “*diakoneo*”- meaning “to serve” or “*douleuo*”, meaning “to serve as a slave”. Slave in this context implies total commitment or unreserved devotedness. In the New Testament, ministry is seen as a service to God and to other people in His name. Jesus provided the pattern for Christian ministry with the teaching that He came, not to receive service but to render it (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17).

Beyond

It is a preposition which according to Hornby (2010) that is indicated or connected to “the further side of something, something that has lasted further than a particular time, more than something, too far and too advanced” (p. 128). In other words, it implies the furtherance, long lasting and advanced positive results of Revd

John Wesley's ministry from England to other parts of the world including Nigeria.

Reflection

From the Webster's Dictionary, Reflection means a thought, idea or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation and careful consideration. Contextually, the impacts of Rev John Wesley's ministry on the eighteenth England and the world at large denotes the inspiratory and forceful and purposeful effects his ministry has on the socio-economic, political and religious lives of the people of England and the world in general. Therefore, we are analyzing the inspiratory fruits of Rev John Wesley's ministry on England and later humanity in general.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Functionalist theory in explaining the cohesive and progressive functions expected of religion and religious leaders to the society and the dangers when they work to the contrary. Iruonagbe (2013) avers that Durkheim one of the proponents of Functionalist theory believes that social life is impossible without the shared values and moral beliefs that form the collective conscience. The absence of the aforementioned threatens social order, social control, social solidarity or cooperation, development and the unity of the people (p.5). Functionalist theory is employed because religion is one of the factors that a society needs to properly function. Therefore, the society will be in danger if religion and other religious actors refuse to perform or function efficiently. It is used to highlight the dangers of how a dysfunctional religion and its actors can retard the growth and progress of the society including Nigeria.

Birth and Early Life of Rev John Wesley

The Rev John Wesley was born on 17th June, 1703 at Epworth, Lincolnshire, England. He was the fifteenth and second surviving son of Revd Samuel and Susanna Wesley. His father was a nonconformist and a former Rector at Epworth. He did not only raise his children in an atmosphere of Puritan discipline but he also served as an ever present figure for them. Rev John Wesley's birth was an event that had remained miraculously touching and inspiring.

Zavada (2018) states that on 9th February, 1709 when John Wesley was about six years old, their residence was gutted by fire in the night. The fire was suspected to be the handiwork of those in the Epworth parish who did not like his father. All the children were safely evacuated from the house but when they were counted it was discovered that the then little John was missing. Meanwhile, a farmer from a nearby house spotted him looking out of their upstairs window amid the leaping flames.

Rupert (1976) affirms that to rescue John Wesley, several of their neighbours climbed on each other's shoulders until the man on the top was able to put his arms around the boy and pull him out of the flames to safety. A few moments after he was rescued, the entire house exploded with fire. Samuel Wesley said, "Come, neighbors, let us kneel down. Let us give thanks to God. He has given me all my eight children. Let the house go. I am rich enough." For the rest of his life, John Wesley referred himself as a brand plucked from the burning (Zechariah 3:2). In later years as he noted in his Journal, 9th February was earmarked as a day of thanksgiving to God for His mercy.

Education

Wesley's formal education began in 1714, when at the age of about ten years and some months he was sent to Charterhouse School in London. He was a well-prepared student. At the age of sixteen probably around 1720, he matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford. It was a place where, except for a two-year break which he used to assist his father perhaps in the ministry, he spent another sixteen years in the Oxford. In 1724, Wesley graduated with a Bachelor Degree in Arts and decided immediately to pursue a Master of Arts Degree in the same University.

The State of England Prior to Rev John Wesley's Revival

The socio-economic, religious and political state of 18th century England prior to the ministry of John Wesley was to say the least precarious. Cross (1974) emphatically states that it was an era when outreach to the non-Christians was not in existence. Labourers lived in extreme squalor while the nobles lived in luxury. The judicial and political office holders flourished in prosperity, fashionable and refined living but a few yards away from them were the profiteering underworld of thieves, footpads, forgers, beggars and harlots. There was a low spirit among the lower class that consisted of the mass of illiterates, drinkers, diseases, gamblers and England was virtually at the brink of collapse. Bishop Barkley regretted that morality and religion in England sunk into a degree unknown to Christian history. Office of the bishop was reserved for the highest bidders and as rewards to dubious and politically exposed clergy hence several venal primates and prelates lived like nobles amidst corruption. The bishops were law unto themselves (p.1454).

The church and the state found themselves out of touch with both the religious and social problems of the day. Their leaderships

were constituted largely by political jobbers the body of clergy who were riddled without strong moral and spiritual voice just as churchmen of genuine concern were rare. The influence of rationalism and deism even among the few dedicated clergymen caused the Church of England to be unaware of the spiritual needs of the masses. Succinctly, England was in a spiritual dark age prior to the arrival of Rev John Wesley.

Holy Club - The Precursor to the Rise of Methodism

Rupert (1976) continues that in 1727, Rev Charles Wesley joined his elder brother, Rev John Wesley at Christ Church in Oxford on a scholarship. But John Wesley later left Oxford for two years to assist his father in his work. Charles who matriculated along with two other students formed a small group for the purpose of study and the pursuit of a devout Christian life. However, when Wesley returned to the University, they made him their leader and the group increased somewhat in number and most greatly, in commitment. As a visionary and purposeful leader, Wesley churned out rules for self-examination. This group met daily from six until nine in the evening for prayer, psalms and reading of the New Testament Greek. They prayed every day waiting for several hours each day asking God for a special virtue. The Holy Club went radical in their attitude to religious activities and that was because whereas the church in England prescribed that attendance to the church was about three times a year, this group met and took Holy Communion every Sunday. They fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays until three o'clock in the afternoon. In 1730, they began what is today known as the prison ministry-the practice of visiting prisoners. They preached, educated, relieved jailed debtors whenever possible and cared for the sick.

Cross (1974) states that the Holy Club was about twenty-five members in attendance. Apart from John and Charles Wesley, there were many of those who made significant contributions and they include John Gambold who later became a Moravian bishop, John Clayton who also became a distinguished Anglican churchman, James Hervey became a noted religious writer, Benjamin Ignham became a Yorkshire evangelist, Thomas Brougham became secretary of the SPCK and George Whitefield, who joined the club just before John Wesley departed for Georgia to mention but a few.

Considering the low ebb of spirituality in Oxford at that time, it was not surprising that Wesley's group provoked negative reactions from many people especially the authorities. Stuart (1976) and Robbins (1984) said that they were regarded as religious "enthusiasts" and in the context of that time, it derogatorily meant religious fanatics. The University wits derogatorily nicknamed them the Holy Club and Bible moths. The oppositions were heightened when one of their members, William Morgan suffered a mental breakdown which led to his death. They were surreptitiously charged with "rigorous fasting" and in response; Wesley stated in a widely circulated letter that Morgan had left off fasting for a year and six months before his demise. It was in the same letter that Wesley said that to some people who he regarded as "their neighbours" had called them "the Methodists". All these names were meant to be insults but Wesley acknowledged that it was pleasantry and complimentary to them. Therefore, we can adduce to it that the formation of Holy Club actually gave kernel to the ministry of John Wesley and the birth to Methodism.

Call into the Ministry and Ordination

Collins (2003) states that in March 1726, Rev John Wesley was unanimously elected a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. This appointment carried with it the right to a room at the college and regular salary. While continuing his studies, Wesley taught Greek and the New Testament. However, a call into ministry intruded upon his academic career and was ordained a deacon on 25th September, 1725. Wesley started his first mission at Bristol and served as a parish curate for two years though without his desired results. He returned to Oxford in November, 1729 at the request of the Rector of Lincoln College and he maintained his status as junior Fellow. Incidentally, at this point, Wesley subsequently began to keep a daily account of his activities which became a practice that he continued for the rest of his life. He also began a lifelong obsession with the ordering of time, waking up at four in the morning, setting aside times for devotion and eliminating all meaningless engagements and knowledge. As Wesley put it in a letter to his older brother, “Leisure and I have taken leave of one another” (pp. 124-176)

Rev John Wesley’s Mission to Georgia

In 1733 James Oglethorpe a close friend to the father of Revd John Wesley at Epworth founded the colony of Georgia along the American southern seaboard as a haven for imprisoned debtors, needy families and persecuted protestant worshipers from Europe. Stuart (1976), Robbins (1984) and Kimbrough Jr. (2007) concur that he was a renowned soldier and Member of Parliament who led a commission that exposed the horrors of debtors in the prison. The investigation resulted in the release of more than ten thousand prisoners. However, this created the problem of how to cope with many homeless and penniless persons in England. Oglethorpe

proposed to solve this problem by setting up the colony of Georgia. Apart from serving as a refuge for the released prisoners, it would also serve as a bulwark against the expansion of Spain from the Southern end. Oglethorpe obtained funds, gained a charter and won the support of the native Creek and Cherokee tribes.

Collins (2003) notes that at the request of Oglethorpe, on 14th October 1735, Wesley and his brother Charles sailed on the *Simmonds* from the Gravesend in Kent enroute Georgia. Coincidentally, Wesley ran into some of his tribesmen in Oxford and resolved to convert the Indians who were of American decent. At this point, his disillusionment with spiritual decay at Oxford played a part in this decision. Contrastingly, Wesley's major motive for becoming a missionary was because of the hope of having his soul saved. He had hoped that he would learn the true sense of the gospel of Jesus Christ by preaching it to the heathen. In 1735, Charles joined his brother John to become a missionary in the colony of Georgia. Initially, Revd John Wesley served as a chaplain to the outposts while Charles served as secretary to Oglethorpe, the governor.

Get Rid of the Log in Your Eyes First

Meanwhile, Rupert (1976), Stuart (1976) and Robbins (1984) maintain that on his passage to Georgia, Wesley and his company continued with their Holy Club practices which were resented by passengers. On board were about twenty-six Moravians refugees from central Europe and Wesley was touched by the unwavering seriousness of the behaviour of these Moravians. The humane services they rendered to other passengers and their fearlessness challenged Wesley. He later explained that in the midst of a psalm, with which they began their service, "the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship and poured in between the

decks” He went on to say that, “a terrible screaming began among the English, while the Moravians calmly sung on”. Wesley subsequently went among the “crying and trembling neighbours” and pointed out “the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth Him not”.

However, Wesley himself came later under the scrutiny of a Moravian pastor, Augustus Spangenberg, who asked whether he had the “witness” of the Spirit “within him.” Seeing that Wesley was surprised and probably knew nothing to answer, Spangenberg asked again, “Do you know Jesus Christ?” Wesley replied, “I know He is the Saviour of the world. Spangenberg concurred, “True ... but do you know He has saved you?” Wesley answered, “I hope He has died to save me”. Spangenberg pushed it further to him, “Do you know yourself.” Wesley said, “I do” but confessed in his journal afterwards, I fear they were vain words. May be nobody should blame Wesley because it can be humanly impossible for a senior pastor to answer Altar Call in a church. Wesley was no doubt very zealous for the ministry but he was unsure of Whom he was working for. Today, many of the religious leaders are not standing by the truth because they are not sure of whom they claim to be working for and that is why all manners of mess are witnessed in the religious organizations today.

Mission without Satisfactory Outcomes

Wesley laboured strenuously but not entirely successful at Georgia. He conducted services on Sundays at 5 A.M., 11:00 A.M. and 3 P.M. with prayers in-between and children’s catechism at 2 P.M. He visited homes many souls in Savannah everyday between 12 and 3 in the afternoon. However, Rupert (1976) and Kimbrough Jr (2007) observe that his ministerial experience and lack of tact further compounded issues for him. For example, on infant

baptism, he insisted on the total immersion and vehemently denied same to a couple who objected it. He had the colony physician confined to the guardroom for shooting game on a Sabbath day. This action aroused widespread indignation because one of the physician's patients suffered a miscarriage while he was held. Similar to John, Charles had no better success at Frederica which was about a hundred miles inland. Some parishioners fomented a rift between him and Oglethorpe. Charles eventually fell into a nervous fever, then dysentery and was finally sent home as a courier in 1736. Of course, it is almost impossible for any Pastor to succeed in a church where members are practicing sell-out against him or her.

From his journal, it is noted that for all his difficulties, it was the unhappy affair with Sophy Hopekey that proved to be Wesley's final undoing. Wesley founded a small society in Savannah patterned after the ones he formed at Oxford. He did it to cultivate the religious life of the people. However, his path got crossed with Sophy Hopekey, niece and ward of Thomas Causton, a leading merchant and chief magistrate of the colony. She visited the parsonage every day for prayers and French lessons. Though she was fifteen years old younger than Wesley, both of them developed affection for each other. Nevertheless, Wesley went on retreat to find direction on the matter and on his return, he informed Sophy that if he would marry at all that it would be after he had worked among the Indians. Subsequently, being tired with Wesley's delays and diffidence, Hopekey abruptly married another suitor. Wesley subsequently repelled Sophy from Holy Communion with the charge that she did not attend 5AM prayers and laxity in other religious commitments. At this point, the chief magistrate was infuriated and had Wesley arrested for defamation of character. The grand jury returned ten indictments and Wesley's

case dragged on through Autumn of 1737. Evidently, Wesley's ministry in Georgia was at its end. On Christmas Eve, he fled the colony to Charleston from where he set his journey back to England and never returned to Georgia.

Rev John Wesley's Conversion

Rupert (1976) avers that on his way back from America, Wesley wrote in his Journal, "I went to America to convert the Indians! But, oh! who shall convert me?" However, he would have his answer in a matter of months. Five days after he came back from America, Wesley met Peter Boehler, a young Moravian pastor who like Spangenberg, questioned whether he had possessed the faith that saves. Wesley confessed his doubt and questioned whether he should abandon preaching. Boehler asked him not quit and he then asked, "but what shall I preach?" Boehler replied, "preach faith until you have it...." Wesley took Boehler's advice to heart and began vigorously preaching the doctrine of salvation by faith alone in churches in England. However, his exuberant preaching infuriated the establishment and by May, 1738, he was banned from preaching in nine English churches.

Earle (1967) and Rupert (1976) state that on 24th May 1738, Wesley went "very unwillingly" to a Moravian meeting at Aldersgate Street. At that place someone was reading the preface of Martin Luther to Paul's epistle to the Christians at Rome. Wesley recalled, "about a quarter before nine", when he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death". This was Wesley's conversion to which he openly testified to all those present. Surprisingly, Wesley after then

affirmed that he was not a Christian yet and around 4th January, 1739, he said that he did not possess the fruits of the spirit of Christ which are love, peace, joy and that he has not been faithful to the given grace of forgiveness of sin. Hence this experience has been a subject of argument among scholars like Albert Outler who believes that the Aldersgate experience was not the conversion of Wesley but merely one in a series of the turning points in his passage from a theological don to a missionary to evangelist.

Marriage with Mixed Outcomes

John Wesley is best known in history as the founder of Methodism and arguably a founder of one of the vibrant movements in human history. His commitment to the biblical gospel, passion for revival preaching and skill at organizing the building Methodist movement are all notable traits. Nonetheless, his marriage left a different kind of tales. Eke (1984) avers that Wesley and Mary Vazeille, a well-to-do widow and mother of four children married in 1751 but by 1758 she had left him because she grew jealous of her husband's time and was unable to cope with the competition for his time and devotion presented by the ever-burgeoning Methodist movement. To worsen the situation, she became suspicious of the many friendly relationships Wesley kept within the movement. She left him severally and occasionally came back but ended up leaving him until she died.

Indeed, Rev John Wesley's failed marriage stands as a sober warning for any would-be leader, pastor or elder. For those tempted to confuse their God-given priorities, Wesley's example in this area ought to be a remarkable wake-up call. The word of God sets the standard for those who would lead others both in the church and society. One's ability to manage his/her family should be one of the major qualifications to be a leader. Wesley himself

acknowledged that the Sabbath and marriage were two ordinances instituted in innocence, the former for the preservation of the church, the latter for the preservation of mankind. As a responsible leader who would not want those after him to make the same mistakes, he dished out many rules but two of them are very germane to marriage and they are: “converse sparingly and cautiously with women; particularly, with young women and take no step toward marriage, without first consulting with your brethren”. With all these rules, Wesley acted as a role model because he did not pretend over his experiences.

Setting Methodist Structure, Preparation to Leave the Stage and Handing Over of the Baton

Earle (1967), Rupert (1976) and Eke (1984) submit that Wesley had been concerned about the issue of succession as early as 1760 when he proposed the creation of a councilor committee to be headed by a senior ordained minister to lead the church. He organized circuit structure for Methodism and ensured that the preacher's efficiency was promoted by changing them from one circuit to another between a year and two. In 1773, he designated John William Fletcher, one of the few affiliated Church of England clergy to be his successor but unfortunately, Wesley outlived Fletcher. In 1784 Wesley made provision for the governance of Methodism after his death through the Yearly Conference of the People. He nominated one hundred people and declared them to be its members and laid down the method by which their successors were to be appointed. This took place with a Deed of Declaration on February 27, 1784, which empowered a Conference of one hundred to take over the movement's property and direction after his death. The Annual Conference has remained the governing body of Methodism till date though with various modifications

implemented to increase the number of preachers present and to include lay members and women.

To checkmate impunity and rascality for it is a truism that absolute power corrupts absolutely, he organized Methodist Church as a strong central organization yet a lacks a powerful hierarchy in England in respect for the Anglican Church. The central governing body of the Connexion is the Conference which meets in June every year but in Nigeria from time to time. It represents both clergy and Laity who decide on Church policy. Issues may be brought before the Conference in the form of “memorials”, which are formally examined and discussed. The Conference will often publish statements on moral, social and doctrinal issues and is understood to have authority to speak on the Church's behalf. The Conference is presided over by the President of Conference

Death

Rev John Wesley preached his last sermon in Belson's house at Leatherhead on Wednesday 23rd February 1791 and wrote the next day which happened to be his last letter to William Wilberforce urging him to carry on his crusade against the slave trade. He died in his house at City Road on the 2nd March 1791 at the age of eighty-eight. As he was about to die, some of his friends gathered around him, Wesley grasped their hands and repeatedly said, “Farewell, farewell.” At the end, he said “the best of all is, God is with us”. He lifted his arms and raised his feeble voice again, repeating the words, “The best of all is, God is with us” He was buried on the 9th March in the graveyard behind City Road chapel.

The Impacts of Rev John Wesley's Life and Ministry

It has been highlighted how an individual who was seriously committed to his vision and mission led to changes in his society that later cut across other places of the world. At this section, efforts shall be made to succinctly analyze the economic, political, social, moral and religious impacts his ministry made on England and the world at large.

Religious Impact

Unwilling that people should perish in their sins and unable to reach them from the church pulpits, Wesley began field preaching and even resorted to the use of his father's grave as a pulpit with the revered axiom that "the whole world is my parish". Seeing that he and the few clergy co-operating with him could not finish the work alone, he approved the institution of local preachers in 1739. He evaluated and approved men who were not ordained by the Church of England to preach and do pastoral work. This expansion of lay preachers was one of the keys in the growth of Methodism. Through his strong inclination toward Arminianism, John Wesley developed a Wesleyan Quadrilateral. With this method, Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith is revealed in the Scripture and the Bible is the sole foundational source of theological or doctrinal development.

Regarding the theologies of the original sin, predestination and "prevenient grace", repentance, justification, sanctification and the priesthood of all believers, Wesley used his academic prowess, spiritual intelligence and his God given talents to make them plain and sound. His versed knowledge in Greek, Hebrew and Philosophy no doubt brought academic and spiritual aura to theological education many generations after him. What many

theologians got wrong and shied away from Wesley confronted them. He gave a remarkable place to the women in the ministry.

Political Impact

Rev John Wesley affected the lives of many politicians in his time. Burke and Pitt were better men because of their Evangelical friends. They helped redefine their world as those parts of the world where morality plays as significant a role in state policy and administration as do pragmatic politics and practical economics. A further fruit of Wesley's work was the conversion of William Wilberforce—a member of the parliament, lord Shaftsbury and others as well as the development of the Clapham sect. This group of Evangelical Christians included businessmen, bankers, politicians, Colonial governors, members of Parliament, whose ceaseless, sacrificial labours benefitted millions of people both at home and abroad. The lives and labours of the social emancipators during the 19th Century had strong connections with the ministry of John Wesley. Apart from Wilberforce, Wesley also inspired Clarkson who as well joined Wilberforce in spearheading the abolition of slavery. Others were lord Shaftsbury and Sadler who fought for industrial emancipation, Elizabeth Fry and John Howard who championed the prison reform, Plimsoll stood for shipping safety regulations as well as Hannah More and Robert Raikes who piloted the establishment of Sunday Schools.

Moral Impact

The same way he fought against slavery, which was how he deplored the stupidity and futility of war especially Britain's war with the American colonies. Drew (2016) avers that he wrote and spoke vigorously against the use and abuse of money and privileges. He did not show off his influence by appearing

glamorous, he wore inexpensive clothes and dined on the plainest fare. His prudence was so amazing that all he could spend for his personal needs did not exceed £30 a year. Even at that, his clothes were spotless, his shoes always shined. He did not pretend about the evils of the day as he spoke in support of fair prices, a living wage, honest and healthy employment for all. He was more familiar with the life of the poor than any other public figure of his age. He strongly campaigned against bribery and corruption at Election times, the scandal of pluralities and sinecures in the Church of England. He fearlessly criticized aspects of the penal system and prisons which paved the way for the freedom of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry. He depicted the prisons as “nurseries of all manner of wickedness”. He campaigned against the near-medieval practice of medicine and for funeral reform.

Wesley's wide interests and concerns caught across other social issues such as uses of electricity; vocational training for the unemployed; raising of money to clothe and feed prisoners and to buy food, medicine, fuel, tools for the helpless and the aged; the founding of a Benevolent Loan Fund and the Stranger's Friend Society. He believed in God-given nature and therefore, the nobility of work and the qualities such engendered. Unlike the modern day supposed leaders who are so clannish and parochial that when they become presidents and governors, they would work to be succeeded by their stooges. If they are General overseers or bishops of churches, they believe that their spouses or children must succeed them even when they are not inclined to the ministry. Revd John Wesley believes that competence should supersede loyalty hence he had conquered opposition by unwavering patience.

Social Impact

Specifically, Drew (2016) notes that Revd John Wesley established and kept an eye on Kingwood School and opened the first free medical, dispensary for the poor, a rheumatism clinic in London and wrote a treatise on medicine. About thirteen years before the abolition Committee was formed, he had published his work on “Thoughts upon Slavery” which served as a graphic and penetrating treatise that vehemently denounced slavery as vicious and horrid trade. He summed it up as national disgrace. He kept up his attack on slavery until the end of his life. In the last letter he wrote to Wilberforce-a member of the parliament, he enjoined him to continue with struggle. Undoubtedly, these renewal and measures saved England a disaster that could have downed the country and by extension the whole world. This is because; a society where the poor outnumber the rich is in danger of many crises.

The Nigerian Situation

Just like in the eighteenth century England even though Nigeria is richly blessed with human and natural resources, the country has myriads of man-made problems. The socioeconomic, political and religious life of Nigeria has been roundly heated up with agitations and counter agitations until corona virus pandemic seems to have temporarily quieted it.

It appears that the return of civilian rule in 1999 has ignited unwanted heat in the country. For example, immediately the country returned to the so called civilian rule in 1999, some group of politicians churned out the agitation for the implementation of Sharia in Nigeria and expectedly thousands of lives were lost and property of unquantifiable costs were destroyed. The rampaging kidnapping ventures took a wilder dimension beginning from the oil rich Niger Delta. Similarly, ethnic national movements sprouted

in the likes of EGBESU boys, OPC (Oodua Peoples' Congress), MOSOP (Movement for the survival of the Ogoni people), (NDPVF) Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra), later the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and MAFO (Movement against Fulani Occupation). The MASSOB and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) who later took to the street sent shocking waves to the establishments with their countless processions until they were unilaterally proscribed. But the most horrible and dreadful dimension of all these have been the mindless invasion and destruction of farm lands, raping and murderous bloodletting of defenceless and innocent people by the killer herdsmen in Nigeria. Similar to the England before and during the Wesley's ministry, the government of the day especially the federal government seems to be looking the other side as if different laws are made for different people.

Nigerian structure seems to be promoting injustice and that can be clearly seen with the perversion of the Federal system, quota system and federal character principles in appointments into key offices in Nigeria. Many people are of the view that these parochial, clannish, lopsided and provocative appointments are aimed at promoting the superiority and the expansionist zeal of some groups above others. The security apparatus seems to be working optimally and only mobilize their formidability and astuteness in unleashing, harassing, intimidating and even killing armless and poor Nigerians while killer herdsmen (rated the fourth most dangerous terrorists in the world) carry out their nefarious activities unchallenged.

Like Achebe (1983) lamented, the country has only been suffering ignobly simply because of bad leadership (p.1). This leadership menace has also affected the economic condition of the

country causing the horrible experiences like unemployment which according to the Nigerian minister of Labour and Employment, Senator Chris Ngige, would rise unimaginably this year. Expectedly the end result of unemployment is poverty and escalation of crimes and crises. It is horrifying to watch how majority of the youths engage in illicit drugs, alcohol and betting. Owing to this, Nigeria has become a country where people are highly vulnerable, gullible and afraid to ask questions.

The much hyped fight against corruption has lost its acceptability among many Nigerians. For example, to have a glimpse of how the so-called corruption is fought, in the build up to the 2019 Senate presidential election, many analysts projected Senator Danjuma Goje to head the Nigerian Red Chamber. But on 6th June, 2019, immediately he had a meeting with the president, he publicly withdrew from the race and Adebulu (2019) states that the corruption case of twenty billion naira against him at the Court of Appeal in Jos was subsequently withdrawn by the attorney general of the federation, Abubakar Malami (SAN). Unlike some of his colleagues who once ruled as governors that were later convicted of the same allegations of corruption. Instead of fighting against electoral corruption and building strong public institutions to where they can checkmate impunity and corruption, Nigerian politicians are busy deceiving the poor masses with opiated slogans. Nigeria has digitalized some of her modes of payments and taxations but has not digitalized her electoral system simply because politicians corruptly impose themselves on the people through the wobbling system. The worst form of corruption in Nigeria is this unprecedented electoral corruption. This is because it has the ability to enthrone mediocre and bandits in office as leaders.

The country is suffering from a wholesome infrastructural deficit. The deficit ranges from the epileptic power supply and near mortuary as health centres. Majority of the social amenities are only built on radio and television stations. Until the arrival of corona virus, the secretary to the Nigerian government, Boss Mustapha, according to Iroanusi (2020) confessed that he never knew that Nigerian health system was in such “a bad state” (p.8). Nobody should expect Boss Mustapha and his fellow privileged public office holders to know that Nigerian health system is in a shambles since they trot US, Europe and Dubai for ordinary malaria while the poor masses they claim to be serving are abandoned to their fates.

Many of the poor people are not getting justice today from the law court because of the defective nature of the justice system. The wealthy and politically exposed individuals usually hire the services of the best lawyers and through them delay justice and often buy it for the highest bidders. Nigeria can only lay claim to judicial system without justice system.

The agitations for an ethnic presidency seems to be making headline news simply because other Nigerians feel rightly insecure when a politician from other tribe is in the saddle because of the level of impunity and clannishness of some accidental leaders in Nigeria.

Reflections on Rev John Wesley and his Ministry

There are many virtues to be emulated from the life and ministry of John Wesley and it will be pertinent to consider some of them. They are:

Parental Influence

Naturally, a child with the kind of John Wesley's experience enjoys some measures of attention from his parents but that was not the case with him hence when he grew older, he joined his siblings in a special class organized by her mother. Iovino (2016) avers that his mother methodically taught them Greek, Latin and French for six hours every day. When her children especially Charles finally got admitted into the Westminster School, for a whopping thirteen years he spent there, he was not left behind. Susanna was the dominating figure in the lives of the Wesley. Our parents especially mothers should take serious note of this because the society will better off when parents really train their children in the way they should go.

Right Company Matters

There are two factors that can shape an individual in life and they are environment and association. The later came to have strong impacts on the life and ministry of Rev John Wesley. At the inspiration of George Whitefield, he did some things that could be considered despicable and the unthinkable at that time and one of them was to preach outside of Church of England's buildings. He turned down his father's offer of taking over from him at Epworth because of a good company he found at Oxford. The formation of the Holy Club and the rightful really helped the Wesley to maximize his potentialities.

Understanding a Vision Brings Maximization of a Mission

There seems to be irrational competition, emulation with copy and paste mindset among many individuals nowadays and because of this, many giftedness and graces have been abused and left untapped. Many people are not ready to spend quality time in

understanding their visions. But Rev John Wesley understood his calling and this understanding maximized his mission. He did not spend his time and energy copying and competing with his brother Charles who was a gifted singer rather he dwelt on his biblical exposition and writing skills simply because he understood his vision.

Disagreement is not War

Rev Charles was active in Bristol and London but his interference with Rev John's proposed marriage to Grace Murray caused a disagreement between them. Charles withdrew from active leadership of the Methodist societies. Charles at a point continued with the itinerant preaching even though sometimes there was tension with his elder brother, Rev John Wesley, who complained that "I do not even know when and where you intend to go." The most revealing aspect of his apt in John Wesley's management of disagreements was on Sunday, February 1, 1741, when a private letter written to him by Whitefield was maliciously and subtly printed without either of their leaves and a great numbers of copies were distributed to their followers just to aggravate their disagreement and destroy their mission. Having procured one copy, Wesley calmly kept it after preaching, then referred it to the congregation and said, "I will do just what I believe Whitefield would, were he here himself." There he tore it into pieces before them and everyone who had received it did the same and within two minutes, there was not a copy left. May be that accounts for why he warned, "believe evil of no one and speak evil of no one". If only our leaders would understand this strategy in managing disagreements and differences, the society would have been a saner world for mankind. Many corporate, offices, groups and churches are designed to quiescent divergent views even when those views

are making sense. Society benefits more from diverse views than patterned views. There can be disagreement but it should never disjoint or destroy values and goals or lead to war.

Increase Usually Goes with Intrigue

Naturally, every increase goes with intrigues hence from 1739 onward, Wesley and the Methodists were persecuted by the English clergy and magistrates for various reasons. Though Revs John and Charles Wesley were ordained Anglican priests but many other Methodist leaders were not. They held open air ministrations and that irked the establishments who saw them as threats. The body of clergy attacked them through their sermons, use printed materials and at times rented mobs who attacked Wesley and his group. But Wesley and his followers continued to work among the neglected and needy. They were denounced as promulgators of strange doctrines, fomenters of religious disturbances, blind fanatics, leading people astray, claiming miraculous gifts, attacking the clergy of the Church of England and trying to re-establish Catholicism.

Methodism in Nigeria

Like the theme of the study rightly suggest, what began in England as a movement later escalated to other parts of the world including Nigeria. Familusi (1992) avers that in 1842, Wesleyan Methodist Church missionary in response to the request for missionaries by the freed slaves who returned to Nigeria from Sierra Leone sent Thomas Birch Freeman, the African pioneer and two devoted African helpers, William De-grafts and his wife to Badagry. From there, churches were established in Badagry, Abeokuta and the spread to various parts of the southwest. In 1893, missionaries of the Primitive Methodist church arrived from Fernando Po, an

island off the southern coast of Nigeria. From there, the Church spread to other parts of the country, east of the River Niger and parts of the Northern Nigeria. The church in the west of the River Niger and part of the north were known as the Western Niger District whereas the ones east of the Niger were known as the Eastern District. Both existed independent of each other until in 1932 when they joined to become Methodist church Nigeria and in 1962 when the church constituted the Conference of Methodist Church Nigeria. Like the Nigerian country in 1960, she got her independence from Britain in 1962. Administered as corporate episcopacy, the church has strong presence in the Nigeria.

The Impacts of Methodism in Nigeria

To objectively appreciate the impacts of Methodist church in Nigeria, it may require understanding the vision and mission of the church as encapsulated in her 2006 constitution thus, “to consistently win more souls for Christ, develop spiritually fulfilled members and remain very active in serving humanity” (p.11).

Apart from winning souls for Christ, the church has never shied away from contributing in the critical areas of humanity especially health, education and calls for social justice. The church has been bringing critical services closer to the door steps of many Nigerians especially the rural areas and among the poor. She has contributed in checking the rising number of preventable deaths in communities across Nigeria. The church has established some institutions so as to achieve these mandates and they include: The Leprosy Center and Motherless Babies’ Home in Uzuakoli, Bende L.G.A, Abia State, three mentally ill-destitute centers located at Ama-Udo Itumbauzo, Restoration Centre, Abia state, Agboke and Edawu Centre for mentally ill-Destitute, Igede both in Benue State. Others include Methodist Hospital at Ifaki, Ondo State and Dr

Andrew Pearosn Hospital, Igbo-Ora in Oyo State with an orphanage Centre in Umuahia Abia State. The church established the Wesley Guild Hospital Complex which has continued to play a vital role in the training of medical doctors for Nigeria. There are also the Bethesda Hospital and Ugboji Clinic in Benue state, Ultra-Modern Hospital, Royal Cross Methodist hospital in Ugwueke, Methodist Hospital, Uzuakoli all in Abia State. Also Oron Hospital which started as a dispensary but was transformed into a first class hospital after the Nigerian civil war. However, it was later taken over by the Cross River State Government. Similarly, Methodist Hospital Ama-chara now a General Hospital in Abia State was a Methodist hospital. It started as a dispensary in May 1921 and started the training of Grade II Nurses in 1933. By 1966 when the civil war started, more than five hundred Midwives had been trained there and training of Grade I Midwives began in 1970. Others are the Borgu Clinics Wawa, Kiama and New Bussa-Ife, Ituk Mbang Hospital among others. The later was started by the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society in 1929 as a clinic where babies and pregnant women were cared for. Methodist church Nigeria introduces annual one-week Healthcare activities in her different local churches across Nigeria.

Familusi (1992) again notes that the first formal educational institute in Nigeria was established by the Methodist church Nigeria. A large part of Nigeria was dominated before this time by non-formal Islamic and Koranic 'school'. But Warraru and three other Chiefs in Badagry co-operated with Rev Freeman and his group and opened a day school which they called 'Nursery of the Infant Church'. At Lagos, the church established secondary school. It was initially Boys and Girls High school until the Girls High school was moved to Yaba. The church later relocated the Boys High school to Badagry site because of the massive enrolments.

But when Alhaji Lateef Jakande became the governor of Lagos state, he revoked the land and used it for the present Lagos state university (pp.16-24). Across the country, the church has established numerous schools, from kindergarten to primary, senior secondary schools, theological institutions and the Wesley University Ondo (WUNO) located in the south-western area of Nigeria. Eyoboka (2012) stressed that Methodist schools have contributed immensely to the education and training of many notable present and past leaders of the country and beyond and they include the late sage, Dr. Nnamidi Azikwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Alvan Ikoku, Pastor Daniel Kayode Olukoya, Mr. Babatunde Raji Fasola (SAN) and numerous others.

Conclusion

The study has briefly analyzed the life and ministry of Rev John Wesley, the impacts, positive effects and indelible legacies arising from his ministry that was borne out by absolute devotedness, total commitment and selfless services to England and the world in general. The twenty first Century Nigerian state and the Church are no doubt facing challenges similar to the conditions of England prior to the Wesleyan ministry. The state actors and some religious leaders in the present era are characterized by the pursuit of parochial, clannish and selfish agenda hence Nigerians are in dire need of men and women who are ready to grow above parochial, mundane and sectional interests to take the country out of her current mess. These are individuals that must poses the devotedness and unreserved commitment for common good like Rev John Wesley who used his spiritual, moral, academic and oratory prowess to give meaning to the Gospel and restore the fortunes of humanity. We may not count the number of his biological children like most numerous men may boast about but

he left millions of people in the faith through his firebrand ministry.

References

- Achebe, C. (1983). *The problem with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Adebulu, T. (2019). *FG withdraws corruption charges against Goje-one month after he endorsed Lawan*. www. Thecable.ng.
- Adeyeye, V.A (1987). *Rural crisis in Nigeria: increase in food deficits, decline in real income and widespread rural poverty*. Ibadan: NISER
- Adeyeye, V.A (1999). *Designing social safety nets for rural poor: conceptual issues evidence and policy choices for developing countries*. Ibadan: Memio NISER.
- Adeyeye, V.A (1999). *Programming NGOs for sustainable assistance of the rural poor in developing countries: options from evidence*. Ibadan: Mimeo, NISER.
- Ajakaiye, D.O &.Adeyeye, V.A (1999). *Concepts, measurement and causes of poverty*. CBN Economic & Financial Review, Vol. 39 NO. 4
- Anyanwu, J.C. (1997). *Poverty: concepts, measurement and determinants in Proceeding of NES conference on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria*, Dept of Economics, University of Ibadan.
- Atkinson, A. B. (1970). *On the measurement of income inequality*. "Journal of Economic Theory" (2) pp. 244-263
- Atkinson, A. B. (1991). *Comparing poverty rates internationally: lessons from recent studies in developing countries*. "The World Bank Economic Review" Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.3-21
- Berkhof, L. (2003). *Systematic theology*. Pennsylvania: Bath.

- Cobb, J. (1995). *Grace & responsibility: a wesleyan theology for today*. Nashville: Abingdon. Collins, K. (2003). *John Wesley: a theological journey*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Coulter, M.E. (1925). *When John Wesley preached in Georgia* in “The Georgia Historical Quarterly” Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 317-351
- Culp, J.A. (1980). *Dialogue with the process theology of John B. Cobb, Jr* in “Wesleyan Theological Journal” vol. 15. Louisville: Fall.
- Diana, L. Eds. (2010). *Oxford advance learner’s dictionary of current English 8th Edition*. London: Oxford Press.
- Drew, D. (2016). *England before and after Wesley*. <https://www.disciplenations.org>.
- Earle, E.C. (1967). *Christianity through the centuries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Eke, N.O. (1984). *The Methodist church Nigeria: a reappraisal of the patriarchal constitution-1976*. A project submitted to the university of Jos.
- Eyoboka, S. (2012). *Methodist Church Nigeria: 170 years of impacting Nigeria for God*. “Vanguard” October 14
- Familusi, M.M. (1992). *Methodism in Nigeria 1842-1992*. Ibadan: Trusthouse.
- Hanson, D. (2013). *John Wesley's Holy Club- John Wesley moments*. <https://www.sgaumc.org>. Accessed 2/8/2020
- Harper, S. (1983). *John Wesley’s message for today*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Hayward, J. (2017). *The book of religions -John Wesley*. <https://biblehub.com>
- Holland N. M (1892). *A history of Methodism*: London: Publishing House of the Methodist.
- Iovino, J. (2016). *The method of early Methodism: the Oxford holy club*. <https://www.umc.org>. Accessed 2/8/2020

- Iroanusi, Q. (2020) *I never knew that Nigerian health care infrastructure was in such bad state-SGF*.<https://www.premiumtimesng>
- Iruonagbe, T.C. (2013). *Religion and its attendant conflicts in Nigerian: a paradox*. Ogun: Covenant
- Jackson, T. ed. (1872). *The works of John Wesley*. London: Oxford.
- Kaufman, G.D (1993). *In face of mystery: a constructive theology*. Cambridge: Harvard.
- Kimbrough Jr, S.T (2007). *Charles Wesley in Georgia in "Methodist history"*. <http://archives.gcah.org>. Accessed 2/8/2020
- Langford, T.A (1998). *John Wesley and theological method,*" in Randy L. Maddox, ed., "Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism". Nashville: Kingswood.
- Pinnock, C. (1994) *Sources/criteria of christian doctrine*, in Randy L. Maddox. "Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology". Nashville: Kingswood.
- Robbins, P. (1984). *In early Georgia, the founders of Methodism got off to a terrible start*. In "American heritage". <https://www.americanheritage.com>
- Rupert, E.D. (1976). *Methodism*. London: Epworth.
- Stott, J. (1969). *Basic Christianity*. Chicago: Inter-Varsity.
- Stuart, A. (1976). *John Wesley and America* in "History Today" Vol 26 no 6. The constitution of Methodist church Nigeria 2006 The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language. USA: Typhoon, (2010).
- Wesley, J. (2009). *Christian perfection*. Biblio Bazaar; LLC, retrieved 2014- 01-17
- Wesley, (2014). *A plain account of Christian perfection*. G. Lane, 1844, retrieved 2014-01-17

Whitehead, A.N. (1996). *Religion in the making*. New York: Fordham. Nigeria's unemployment rate hits 33.5 per cent by 2020—Minister <https://www.premiumtimesng>.

Uchenna Ebony Amanambu (PhD) is a lecturer in Department of Religion and Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.