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The Lawyer as a Dual Persona: Contextualizing Ebele Nwokoye as a Minister of the Gospel and the Temple of Justice.

The Lawyer as a Dual Persona: Contextualizing Ebele Nwokoye as a Minister of the Gospel and the Temple of Justice

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Abstract

The notion that a lawyer is a dual personality embodying ecclesiastical and secular attributes arises from the appreciation of his role in the attainment and intensification of justice. The doctrine of duality, otherwise known as the hypostatic union, holds that Christ became “true God and true man” through the incarnation as a modality for sharing his divinity with humanity – within the machinery of salvation. The dual role of the lawyer as a secular activist for justice and ecclesiastical minister of the gospel is underscored by the scriptural edict that the civil magistrate or government is God’s minister on earth to exact vengeance and bring punishment on evil doers. Like the lawyer, the effectiveness of the pastor is underscored by the fact that he is required to spend adequate time engaging in thorough and adequate preparation which consists of study, research, discussion, and reflection necessary for him to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the world. Using the doctrinal methodology as its canvas, this article situates the personality of the former President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Samuel Ebele Nwokoye within the ecclesiastical and secular conception of a lawyer. The article finds that in the life of Ebele Nwokoye, the dual status of the lawyer as a secular activist for justice and priest in the temple of justice is amply validated and recommends his emulation.

Keywords: Dual persona, Minister of the gospel, Temple of justice, Ebele Nwokoye, Lawyer.

1. Introduction

The notion that a lawyer is a dual personality embodying ecclesiastical and secular attributes arises from the appreciation of his role in the attainment and intensification of justice.¹ In spite of the fact that the idea of a lawyer

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being a minister of justice dates back to time immemorial, it was given a renewed boost by a Justice of the Supreme Court of India, P. N. Bhagwati when he noted that “the profession of lawyers is an essential and integral part of the judicial system and lawyers may figuratively be described as the temple of justice”². According to justice Bhagwati, the priestly role of lawyers derives from the fact that they have a special interest in preserving the integrity and independence of the judicial system as a purveyor of justice “and if the integrity and independence of the judiciary is threatened by any act of the state or any public authority, they [the lawyers] would naturally be concerned about it because they are equal partners with the judges in the administration of [justice]”³

It is to be noted that what is true of lawyers is also true of judges because as Justice Bhagwati has stated, “lawyers are equal partners with the judges” in furthering the frontiers of justice with the effect that the roles of both stakeholders in the temple of justice are mutually reinforcing. In this regard, Philip Soper of the University of Michigan Law School states the alternative view of the judge as one “that casts him in the metaphorical role of a priest”⁴. Viewed from this perspective, the role of the judge (like that of the lawyer) may be likened to that of a clergyman, because both are oriented to the advancement of law and justice. Accordingly, “the judge’s task is the secular equivalent of the priest’s: both seek the normative standards that govern human conduct in ideals that transcend positive law and positive morality”⁵. This position finds ample resonance in the averment of Ulpian when he stated that “law being the creature of justice, we the jurisconsults may be considered as her priest, for justice is the goddess whom we worship and to whose service we are devoted”⁶.

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¹David Sherwood, “The Pastor as Attorney”, *The Banner of Truth*, 1994.

<https://www.christianstudlibrary.org>article>pastor....>

²S. P. Gupta V Union of India (1981) SUPP SCC 87.

³Ibid.

⁴Philip Soper, “Metaphors and Models of Law: The Judge as Priest”, *Michiagan Law Review*, 1977, volume 75, issues 5 and 6, pp. 1196 – 1213.

⁵ Ibid, 1209.

⁶ Ulpian cited in John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* 28 (London: 1832), 263 – 64.

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This article situates the personality of the former President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Samuel Ebele Nwokoye within the ecclesiastical and secular conception of a lawyer as a social activist and priest in the temple of justice. In doing so, regard is had to the fact that all his life, Ebele Nwokoye as a legal practitioner has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the cause of justice in addition to the corresponding fact that he remains an indefatigable soldier of Christ and Minister of the gospel. The effect is that in relation to Ebele Nwokoye, the notion of dual personality of lawyers as activists and priests in the temple of justice is adorned with the garb of reality rather than a mere figurative expression. The article is structured into five integrated parts. The first is the introduction which lays out the background to this study and highlights its thematic preoccupation. The second part traces the professional and vocation connectivity between lawyering and the priesthood and locates Ebele Nwokoye within that matrix. The third part examines the activist impulse that denominates the psyche of the lawyer as a priest , both being stakeholders in the cause of justice. This part of the article calls in aid, the scriptural exhortations on justice and dovetails to Ebele Nwokoye’s life of activism as a lawyer and as an elder of the church. The fourth part of the article deepens the insight into the theology of duality and connects it to Ebele Nwokoye’s achievements as a touchstone of exemplary leadership at the Bar. The fifth part of the article is the conclusion which is essentially a reaffirmation of the thematic thrust and exigesis of the article.

2. The Lawyer as a Clergyman

In his seminal work titled “The Pastor as Attorney”⁷, David Sherwood stresses that the work of a pastor is in many ways like that of a lawyer and that to be successful, both must function well in two critical arenas: public and private. According to Sherwood, to be effective in both the public and private arena, the lawyer must engage in research, study, writing and reflection in addition to keeping himself abreast of developments in law by way of continuing education. To strengthen the analogy of the lawyer as

⁷(n 1).

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clergy, Sherwood asserts that the effective lawyer “provides a helpful model to understand the work of a pastor-teacher in the church of Jesus Christ”⁸.

In driving home the lawyer-pastor analogy, the writer notes that what the lawyer does for his clients either in his office or in the courtroom is coterminous with what the pastor does for his congregant or parishioner either in his office or on the pulpit. He puts it as follows:

Whether in instructing people in the things of God in private and helping them resolve questions of conscience (analogous to the attorney’s client work) or proclaiming the whole counsel of God before the assembly (analogous to the attorney’s work in court), this is where he makes a difference⁹.

It is essential to stress that like the lawyer, the effectiveness of the pastor is undergirded by the fact of his spending adequate time engaging in thorough and adequate preparation which consists of study, research, discussion and reflection necessary for him to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the world¹⁰. Another scholar and theologian, Donald Baranski articulated a checklist of the characteristics which lawyers have in common with members of the clergy. According to him, one of the similarities between lawyers and religious leaders is that both have confidential privileges which obligate them not to disclose communication with their clients/parishioners¹¹. Other similarities between the lawyer and the clergy is their commitment to guiding their clients/parishioners towards the correct moral, legal and just conduct; the ability of effective communication with clients or lay people; the skill of public speaking and engagement with people to deal with the consequences of not keeping the law-whether divine law or positive law in their daily life¹².

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Donald Baranski, “What Characteristics do trial lawyers have in common with Priests, Evangelists, Ministers, Pastors, etc.” <https://www.quora.com/what-characteristics-do-trial-1...>

¹² Ibid.

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In the light of the foregoing, it is worthy of note that Ebele Nwokoye fits admirably into the mold of the lawyer – clergyman. In this regard, apart from being born into the Christian family of Geoffrey Nwokoye, a civil servant of Umueze village in Amawbia in today’s Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra state on July 12, 1932 whose Christian values he upholds, Ebele Nwokoye later cut his own niche as a Christian by following his inspired path in the search for salvation. This explains his embrace of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and submitting himself to baptism by immersion.¹³ He rose to the ecclesiastical office of elder within the church upon which position he became a model to those around him and remains steadfast in his commitment to Christian values¹⁴. By the force of his personal example, Ebele Nwokoye lends credence to Christine Kraly’s thesis that when the chips are down, lawyers must also assume the role of healers¹⁵.

3. The Lawyer as a Priest and Activist: The Ebele Nwokoye Paradigm

Orthodox Christian theology is based on the notion of duality by which Christ is regarded as a dual persona made up of inseparable spiritual and temporal essences¹⁶. Otherwise known as the hypostatic union, the doctrine of duality holds that through the incarnation, Christ became “true God and true man” as a modality for sharing his divinity with humanity – within the machinery of salvation¹⁷. According to Prof Rodney Chrisman of the Liberty University School of Law, an indepth appreciation of Christ’s salvatory mission necessarily undergirds the search for justice in a world dominated by injustice¹⁸ which draws a tangential link between lawyers and priests. In this regard, God’s strident declamation of injustice and castic warning about its consequences is eloquently proclaimed by the scripture:

¹³ Biographical notes on Chief Ebele Nwokoye, 2024.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Christine Kraly, “71- year Old Lawyer to be Ordained Priest, Prison Chaplain”
<https://www.in.gov.ido>files>lawyertoBeco...>

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¹⁷ Jennifer Murtoff, ‘Two Natures of Christ’, *Britannica* 2005.
<https://www.britannica.com>...>ReligiousBeliefs>

¹⁸ Rodney D. Chrisman, “Lawyers as Ministers of Justice”,
<https://issuu.com>libertyuniversity>docs>110057-5...>

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Woe to those who enact evil statutes and to those who constantly record unjust decisions so as to deprive the needy of justice and rob the poor of my people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and that they may plunder the orphans¹⁹.

Under such state of injustice, God enunciates the messianic mission of Christ as one oriented to human salvation and the establishment of justice on earth. Of this salvatory mission of Christ, He states:

Behold my servant whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise his voice, nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish, he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for his law²⁰.

In the light of the dual personality of lawyers as activists and priests in the temple of justice, it has been noted that lawyers are invested with “the privilege of participating in Christ’s mission of establishing justice in the earth”²¹.

The dual role of the lawyer as a secular activist for justice and ecclesiastical minister of the gospel is underscored by the scripture edict that the civil magistrate or government is God’s minister on earth to exact vengeance and bring punishment on evil doers²².

In the life of Ebele Nwokoye, the dual status of the lawyer as a secular activist for justice and priest in the temple of justice are amply validated. Fired by a passion for justice, Ebele Nwokoye sought legal education as a platform for social activism. Trained at the Council of Legal Education Law

¹⁹ Isaiah 10:1-2.

²⁰ Isaiah 42:1-4.

²¹ Chrisman, (n 18),

²² Romans 13:4.

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School, London between 1959 and 1962, he was called to Bar on 17th July 1962 at the Middle Temple. He was subsequently enrolled in Nigeria on 15th August 1962 as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria²³. He started his legal practice in Kano under the pupillage of Michael Agbamuche in whose busy chamber he etched his name in the annals of law between 1962 and 1966 before he relocated to Eastern Nigeria where he established his practice at Abakaliki²⁴.

In the course of his professional career, Ebele Nwokoye is an unrepentant advocate for justice and an irrepressible exponent of rule of law. Sensitive to the words of the scripture wherein the Psalmist queried: “Can wicked rulers be allied with you, those who frame injustice by statute?”²⁵, Ebele Nwokoye stoutly opposed the repressive decrees churned out by the then Buhari administration. He also boycotted military tribunals that denied parties the right of appeal, insisting that such contraptions were violative of citizens’ fundamental human rights²⁶. A courageous and passionate activist, he led a protest delegation to the then seat of power at Dodan Barracks, Lagos to protest the detention of the ousted President Shehu Shagari and his vice, Dr. Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme²⁷. He also spoke up powerfully against the obnoxious post-war phenomenon of abandoned property which characterized socio-economic relations in Nigeria after the civil war²⁸. Ebele Nwokoye remains a pillar of inspiration to all who make justice their creed and watchword.

4. Ebele Nwokoye as a Consummate Bar Man with Episcopal Character

The duality of Ebele Nwokoye’s personality as a secular activist and minister in the temple of justice characterizes his life of prayer and active involvement in the activities of the Bar. Apart from his leadership roles in the various branches of the Bar during his years of active legal practice, his influence and prominence as a Bar man found expression in his elevation first as the third National Vice-President and later the second National Vice-

²³ Biographical Notes on Chief Ebele Nwokoye, 2024.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Psalm 94:20.

²⁶ Biographical Notes of Chief Ebele Nwokoye, 2024.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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President of the NBA between 1982 and 1984²⁹. In 1984, following the emergence of Prince Bola Ajibola as the National President of NBA, Ebele Nwokoye became the 1st National Vice-President of the Association, a position he held until 1985³⁰. The emergence of Ebele Nwokoye as the National President of NBA in 1985 had all the trappings of providential intervention. This is because although Prince Bola Ajibola was re-elected for second term as National President of NBA during the General Conference of the NBA in Port Harcourt in 1985, his subsequent appointment as the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice led to his vacation of office as NBA president³¹. Following the appointment of Prince Bola Ajibola and his consequential exit as NBA President, the National Executive Committee of the Association summoned an emergency meeting on 20 September 1985 at which Ebele Nwokoye was appointed the National President³². He held the position till 1986.

At the Annual General Conference of the NBA held in Kaduna in 1986, Ebele Nwokoye formally presented himself for election as National President. His aspiration did not go without challenge as two legal heavyweights in the persons of Alao Aka-Bashorun and Debo Akande threw their hats into the ring. The contest was fierce and eventful but Ebele Nwokoye still emerged victorious by defeating his double challengers for which he became the elected National President³³. It is instructive to note that consistent with his life of prayer and faith in God, it was during the presidency of Ebele Nwokoye that the NBA formally adopted what has come to be known as the “NBA Prayer” which is recited at every event of the Association³⁴. The “NBA Prayer” became a standard and standing replacement of the hitherto *ad hoc* arrangement whereby members of the two major religious faiths in Nigeria were usually requested to offer the opening and closing prayers respectively, during NBA events³⁵. The adoption of the NBA Prayer during Ebeke Nwokoye’s presidency represents a secular and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Olanrewaju Akinsola, *History of the Nigerian Bar Association* (Lagos: Asco Publishers, 2024), P. 110.

³¹ Ibid, 111.

³² Ibid, 114.

³³ Badru Atanda Olaogun, *My Life of Law*, (Lagos West African Book Publishers Ltd, 2012), p. 227.

³⁴ Akinsola, (n 30).

³⁵ Ibid, 115.

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spiritual milestone which eternally cements his places in the NBA leadership pantheon and immortalizes his personage as a social activist with episcopal character. Whenever it is rendered, the NBA Prayer reverberates with supplicatory cadence and submission to the will of God which providentially echoes the worldview of Ebele Nwokoye under whose presidency the prayer came into being. It goes as follows:

The NBA Prayer³⁶

Almighty God Our Creator
We pray you to be with us
In all our deliberations
And to direct our endeavours
So that we shall continue in all humility
To glorify Thy Name
And do that which is right
And just for our profession
Its members, our fellow men and our country
Amen.

Among the numerous achievements of Ebele Nwokoye's presidency of the NBA includes the fact that he spearheaded the epochal celebration of 100 years of existence of the NBA in 1986. It was a milestone as historic as the celebrants were legendry. No wonder he came to be fondly known as the centenary president.

5. Conclusion

The conception of the dual personality of a lawyer as a social activist and priest in the temple of justice stems from the appreciation of his role in the attainment and intensification of justice. In his office as a secular activist, the lawyer is committed to the enthronement of social justice and the rule of law. And in his office as a priest in the temple of justice, the lawyer is a tool for the proclamation of the gospel, the establishment of social stability and public morality. In Chief Ebele Nwokoye's professional practice and leadership at the Bar and the church, the notion of the lawyer as a minister of the gospel and priest in the temple of justice receives ample validation. He

³⁶Akinsola, (n 30), p. 115.

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remains, therefore, a beacon of hope and pillar of inspiration to all lawyers
who seek to make a success of their dual investiture as ecclesiastical and
secular emblems.