

# OKOTIE: A FRESH ALTERNATIVE.

Ask anybody who happened to be growing up in the late 1970's about Chris Okotie, you are likely to hear them say of him; that talented singer who redefined pop music in Nigeria with numerous run-away hits. They may proceed further to tell you about his captivating vocals and irresistible compositions and arrangements.

But all that was in the past, even as memories of such spectacles can hardly fade away simply because recorded sound in music continues to trail the very recent activities of the author. Just as the evil that men do lives after them, so does their good deed. It will be very difficult to disentangle Chris Okotie from his past musical performances which in the main brought him into the national consciousness as the Wonder Boy of the Nigerian pop scene at the time.

However, the situation in the present time is quite different with the gentle man who has since jettisoned secular music for the Bible and Cross. Currently donning the cloak as a pastor working in the Vine yard of the Lord, Chris Okotie has over the years, been converting those large concert crowds of yester years that usually thronged his music gigs into what can today, be rightly described as a huge congregation of Christian believers in The House Hold of God.

Although, there are those who will argue that it is still the musical magic and the sensational disposition of his super star stature that have all along attracted people to his Ministry, the fact remains that Okotie has been one consistent and positive-minded personality who has all the time been driven by his belief, conviction and vision.

As a student studying Law at the Enugu Campus of the University of Nigeria Nsukka then, his declaration that he was coming to Lagos to record what would become a ground-breaking musical album, was regarded as the biggest joke of that decade. But it came to pass as the ensuing record album released not only became a huge commercial and artistic success, but also, an anthem of some sort that made it happen at every dance party an social gathering.

Many of his enthusiastic fans could not fathom his decision to quit an art that made him so famous and fortunate while generating joy for them to become a cleric. In fact, many still believe that Chris Okotie will some day return to making the kind of music that made him popular among the youth then. Whether or not this will take place is a matter of discussion for another day. What is real presently is that Chris Okotie has ever since putting his hand on the evangelical plough, has never looked back.

Such is the character and person of this determined and forward-looking gentle man. It would appear that through his Ministry he became more in touch with the realities of the Nigerian youth in a country truly endowed, and wealthy but peopled by an impoverished, deprived and denied population of young people, as well as the aged whose pension

benefits are hardly paid as and when due, women and infants who are victims of neglect and rabid mortality.

It might be interesting to have even a passing glance at some of the other persons intending to jostle for the presidency alongside Rev. Okotie, and probably, their credence and credentials. Alhaji Bashir Tofa for instance, had no known track record either as an industrialist, educationist, or even a cleric for that matter. He had been an unknown quantity until he came into national consciousness in 1993 when he ran against Bashorun MKO Abiola in the annulled presidential election still adjudged the freest and fairest in the history of Nigeria.

Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, a retired Army General and former military Head of State, has no other credential than the fact that he thwarted the democratic will of the teeming populace of this country when in 1983, he, in a palace coup, forcefully snatched the reins of power and enthroned himself as a military president. Apart from that reprehensible act, for which he and his co-travelers should have been tried, accordingly convicted, and appropriately punished, Babangida was a mere soldier in the barracks who had not performed any feat worthy of bringing him to the lime light.

In like manner, Mohammadu Buhari, another retired Army General, had before Babangida in 1983, brutally truncated Nigeria's four-year old second Republic democracy through a military coup d'état. Save for being the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Third Armored Division of the Nigerian Army, Buhari has no record of any spectacular achievement that could make him popular among Nigerians. For employing and applying coercion to bulldoze his way into power as Head of State, which in a sane climate should attract reproach, condemnation and odium, such a man rather believes he is the anointed one to lead the country. What a shame and national embarrassment.

Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is the president. That is all he has to present as his ace. Until he became the governor of his South-South Bayelsa State through providence, he had done nothing splendid enough to caught popularity. Before being picked as running mate to impeached Governor DSP Alameiyesiegha for the State gubernatorial race, Goodluck Jonathan was quite an obscure personality, either eking out a living as a civil servant or a teacher in the University, without any achievement to sing home about.

Bukola Saraki has just one thing going for him, and that is the fact that through the patriarch of his family and father, Kwara State has remained under the stranglehold of the Saraki clan for a long time now. Even as a medical doctor, he is not known to have posted any spectacular performance in the practice. Their role in the failed and defunct Societe Generale Bank which culminated in numerous depositors' funds being trapped is very much fresh in human memory.

Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, is an ex-Customs officer whose service records are anything but appealing. Before his appearance in the Aso Rock Presidential Villa as Vice President, he was not a prominent figure in the national scene. He had in 1999 become a governor-elect of Adamawa State before providence landed him in the office of the Vice President to

then President Olusegun Obasanjo. His stay in that office spun tales of corruption, and unnecessary power tussle with his erstwhile boss which evidently translated into a period of inertia in governance.

None of the above-mentioned characters can be described as possessing Rev. Chris Okotie's kind of pedigree. While it is a fact that their emergence on the national podium either by accident, favouritism or sheer robbery of power by force of arm which is treason, Rev. Okotie has in the last three decades been consistently and continuously in the public domain for the right reasons. He has since quitting secular music scene, like the good shepherd, groomed and grown his Ministry into a formidable evangelical base.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Rev. Chris has over the years remained very relevant in the affairs of this country through his leadership disposition in his Church which is not a government establishment that attracts subvention for its day to day running.

His presidential bid is being pursued for the third time. All along this while, he has provided funds for it unlike those who declare such aspiration, and also execute their campaign with public fund simply because they are in public office. There is no denying that the man of God is imbued with courage, vision and sincerity of purpose in this aspiration govern the country.

Because, rogues, impostors and charlatans have for long (mis)managed our collective wealth, there by mortgaging the future of our youth and that of the country, Rev Okotie is determined to reverse this ugly trend by charting a progressive way forward with a breath of fresh and refreshing leadership style. He understands the pain of the ordinary people, and has the adequate will to reduce it to the barest. As a cleric, the first for that matter to float a political party, he again, called to a higher service to humanity. That is why more than a passing glance should be given him in this pursuit. He is totally involved and concerned about the plight of the citizenry as well as the sad realities of the Nigerian situation.

Rev. Chris pins it all down to the fact of what he calls the failure of a gerontocracy which had for long promoted and recycled the same set people that have misruled the country over the years. In his view there must be a paradigm shift from the morass which has almost infinitely become the lot of the Nigerian state. For this reason he has been throwing his hat into the arena, fighting to get the nod of his compatriots to lead the country as the president.

His belief is that the youth of this nation who possess enormous energy and intelligence must be made to be relevant to the developmental process of Nigeria. In the same vein, Chris Okotie is convinced that it is by harnessing the abundant talent and human capital for the right reason can the country achieve her real potentials.

Even as he is eminently qualified to steer the ship of state, there those who strongly believe that Pastor Okotie lacks the necessary ingredients to lead a nation as large as Nigeria, with her complexities of multi-plural ethnicity, religious differences. The same

group also argues that providing adequate solution to the Nigerian problems does not lie with a well-spoken Reverend gentle man whose influence rivets within his church that has just a branch in Oregun area of Ikeja, Lagos which is absolutely under his control.

But the singer-turned pastor and politician aspiring to be president on the platform of FRESH Party, would insist that Nigeria needs a paradigm and generational shift because the present crop of politicians on the scene have demonstrated their inability to take Nigeria forward. While acknowledging that the final decision lies with Nigerian voters to elect the right caliber of political leaders, Chris Okotie postulates that his mandate is divine which is being pursued with tenacity of purpose.

In his view, “as long as the Nigerian people understand what we are saying, I think we have declared ourselves well prepared”. Although neither him nor his part, FRESH has never won an election since entering the fray in 2003, and 2007, he has remained consistent in continuing to reiterate the ideological position of the party which according to him, has emphasis on the people. To that extent, the approach to preparation for the polls will largely be predicated on his ability to communicate to the people the principle and philosophy.

Interestingly, Chris Okotie is not foreign to connecting with the people at all times. This is a familiar terrain experienced either as a student, performing artiste, or as a pastor. The emphasis on people is what he intends to take to his presidency. That is why his first priority as a president would be to connect the people to leadership for the reason that it is not possible for you to be in leadership without the people. With such a scenario, it will be possible to embark on human capital development, which will in turn translate into such things like education, healthcare, provision of enabling environment for security and other elements that will have to improve the welfare of the people.

He is also proposing messianic governance. This encapsulates the totality of sacrifice by leadership; where by those in governance must sacrifice for the general good of the majority of the people. As a Christian leader, Chris Okotie holds firmly to “what Jesus taught us; that it is the master that will become the servant. That’s why I came into politics; that it’s time for us to make the necessary sacrifice for our people”.

In realization of the fact that since independence till date that it is the masses who have suffered most, even during the civil when their leaders fled, the pastor is considering it expedient to promote leadership sacrifice. His emphasis on sacrifice is indicative of a determined pursuit of the edifying elements lacking in the Nigerian leadership for so many years now. His resolve presently denotes that here is a man that is willing to sacrifice in other that Nigeria and her citizens will be seen to depart from the primordial ways promoted and sustained by leaders whose actions over the years proved them to be anything but dealers and carpet baggers. Time will put him where he belongs.