

THE ALEXANDER RULE

Bible school registration, Term 1, January 2009. Daniel Igili and Chinyere Nonyelu appeared at the compound of *Ministerial Training Centre*, the educational arm of the United Pentecostal Church International in Enugu, Nigeria at the same time. They enrolled together. What are the odds that two years later these two students would both graduate *magnum cum laude* and represent the Class of 2010 as the valedictorian and salutatorian? What are the odds that the valedictorian and salutatorian would come from the same church? Incredible “coincidence.” But the real “miracle” of this 2010 duet was not that they were from the same church or even that they finished one, two in grade point average ranking, the real miracle was that they ever enrolled at *Ministerial Training Centre* (MTC) at all.

When I first saw the name “Nonyelu” appear on the registration list, I was reminded of a former student with the same surname. The memories dating back to the class of 2001 were not particularly pleasant. I lightheartedly mused, “Lightning cannot strike twice in the same place!” The first “Nonyelu,” to attend MTC, Alexander by name, was argumentative, stubborn, and verbally combative. The two doctrines that he most strenuously objected to were the Oneness of God and its corollary, baptism in Jesus’ Name. These are two of the defining doctrines of the UPCI and as such were a common thread woven into every class. Every instructor at MTC engaged in verbal battle with Alexander. Every student, during Alexander’s tenure at MTC, could testify to the ongoing debates over these two subjects until many of them got fed up with it. When Alexander’s hand went up in class, there was a collective groan as everyone could anticipate what was coming next. The principal of MTC in those days, yours truly, was completely exasperated by Alexander. My prayers for him seemed to make little difference and on more than one occasion, I purposed to put him out of the school. But that day never came because we all held out hope that one day he would get the revelation of One God and baptism in Jesus’ Name. Still he graduated without being baptized in Jesus’ Name and without acknowledging that Jesus is the One True God.

I could never understand how anyone could take the unrelenting verbal barrages leveled against Alexander by staff members and students alike. I could never understand why Alexander didn’t just quit school. Was the man a sadist? Did he harbor visions of grandeur that he would change us? Surely if he just wanted a Bible school degree, there were easier ways to get one than to go through the MTC gauntlet as an “unbeliever.” To be certain many other students have enrolled over the years at MTC that disputed these two doctrines, but most of them were baptized in the Name of Jesus before they finished their first term in school.

Alexander’s religious pedigree produced a stoic resolve in him to contend for tradition. Raised in the Anglican Community where he held several posts over the years, Alexander was thoroughly indoctrinated by a system that contended for trinitarianism and infant baptism. Before his arrival at MTC it had never occurred to him that the doctrine of God was viewed any other way than through a trinitarian interpretation or that baptism was anything more than an initiation rite into the church. It was an assault on his spiritual senses to have these two fundamental core doctrines challenged and challenged so forcefully.

Alexander would later testify that he “hated” the doctrine of One God and vehemently opposed a baptism that contradicted the triune formula. Today MTC offers a two year associate degree in theology, but when Alexander was a student, the school had a 3 year training program. For 3 years, Alexander stood as a lone voice in the school and steadfastly opposed the doctrine of One God and baptism in Jesus’ Name.

Upon his graduation in 2001, Alexander left the school. At the time, maybe it was just my imagination, but it seemed like a mutual sigh of relief went forth. The staff, particularly the principal, felt like

a failure. I had 3 years to convert Alexander, but was unsuccessful. I often wondered what more I could have done on his behalf.

To his credit, Alexander pioneered a new church as soon as he graduated. But like the Apostle Paul, it was hard for him to kick against the goads. His persecution of the doctrine had become an obsession, an obsession that led him to a special encounter with God. During an intense time of prayer, the Holy Spirit moved mightily upon Alexander. The Holy Spirit questioned Alexander. "How can you be a pastor and yet you doubt and reject my Word?" It was a stinging rebuke. He knew exactly what God was talking about. Immediately he was convinced of his need to be baptized in the Name of Jesus.

Perhaps a measure of pride kept Alexander from returning to MTC to ask to be baptized, but he did track down a former MTC instructor that agreed to baptize him in March 2004. No one at MTC was privy to this development.

In 2004 Alexander pioneered a church in Enugu, Nigeria. In describing his foray into church planting, Alexander recalls how he "clapped hard" and praised God alone for 8 months. Finally, his enthusiasm and zeal for the Lord attracted the attention of two people. They became his first converts. They had no chairs to sit on when they gathered, but they trusted God and held to a promise that God had made to Alexander in prayer, "I will make a Name for Myself in your midst."

The church needed a home. In 2005 Alexander found an uncompleted building that had an apartment that they could use for service. Imagine if you will the "new" church. There were no doors or windows in place and 3 old abandoned paint cans substituted for chairs.

This was to be a time of testing for Alexander. He was engaged in extreme spiritual warfare as most of his neighbors gossiped about and slandered him. Visitors were discouraged by the environment so they would not continue coming to church. Despair draped him like a heavy cloak. Agonizing before God in prayer and pacing the floor with Bible in hand he clung to the promise of God. Some chided him and told him to get a "real" job. The attacks and mocking were unrelenting. Alexander slept under a staircase because he had no place to call home. He was always hungry. The bleakness of the times gave way to despair and questioning. "Did God really call me? Did God really promise He would make a Name for Himself in our midst?"

A surprise donation of 3 benches was presented to the church in 2006. Amazingly these three wooden benches became the catalyst for revival. Visitors began to come and were more inclined to stay now that they had a place to sit. As the church took on new life, attendance increased. Although the members now use arm chairs, the benches remain in prominent view as a memorial to Jehovah Jireh – God does indeed provide.

Alexander vigorously defends the doctrine of One God and baptism in Jesus' Name with the same zeal in which he had opposed it. He has baptized more than 60 people including his wife, Chinyere, his wife's mother, his wife's brother, his sister and his assistant pastor, Daniel Igili. (This is the same Chinyere and Daniel that graduated at the top of their class in 2010.) He pastors a church where the doctrine of One God is firmly established, and all members are baptized in Jesus' Name. In 2007 Alexander baptized 6 Anglican ministers, former associates of his, in the Name of Jesus.

The "Alexander Rule" was incorporated into the Constitution of the United Pentecostal Church in Nigeria in 2002, the year after Alexander graduated. Article XIX, Section 8 reads, "Any student that is not baptized in the Name of Jesus will not be allowed to enroll in any classes past year one status." This was an obvious reaction to Alexander's rejection of truth.

Perhaps the “Alexander Rule” needs to be revisited. Alexander is now an instructor at *Ministerial Training Centre* earnestly contending for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)!