

# IMAGES OF AFRICAN PREACHERS ON THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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## **Abstract**

*This essay seeks to examine images of preachers—biblical and traditional—on the Nigerian public sphere, with an aim to reflect on what is in the light of what ought to be. It seeks to explore biblical ideals of preachers and attempts to reconcile those with prevalent contemporary reality in Nigeria. To do this, the essay will first explore the concept of public sphere and, after this, discuss how the public sphere shapes perceptions and images people have of preachers. In the end, it will recommend three images that may best represent the biblical ideal while also resonating with the African cultural milieu.*

## **Introduction**

Christian preachers are spokespersons for God. As such, the image they bear among their listeners in religious communities affects the weight of the message they carry. In many African communities, preachers as God's messengers are as important as the message they bear. Any image less dignifying than something in the semblance of

God is usually not accepted. Today, however, these standards are hard to maintain. By and large, our contemporary reality presents us with different images of preachers, who they are and who they ought to be. In the current public sphere, preachers are not only participants, they are also subjects of public scrutiny. The African public sphere is shaped by a communal worldview; no one is above public scrutiny. Thus, the image a preacher registers on the mind of the public largely affects his or her participation in the same public sphere. Preachers have lives to live, while having a message to bear and an example to model for those who follow them.

### **The Public Sphere**

The “public sphere” is a term with relative definition depending on the field of study in which it is being used—be it in education, politics, social science, economics, architecture, urban planning and geography. There is, however, a relationship in the use of the term among various disciplines in respect of space—physical or otherwise—where humans meet, interact, opine, define and possibly influence one another. In such spatial disciplines as architecture and urban planning, public sphere will denote interactions in open spaces of the city like parks, recreational areas, festival spaces, streets, playgrounds etc. In social science, the public sphere deals more with a platform of communication that shapes public opinion. Jürgen Habermas sees the public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.”<sup>2</sup> The public sphere is an extensive sphere, cutting across what some regard as public and private. The public sphere is found in elections, Olympic ceremonies, actions of a commando unit, a theatre debut, childrearing, factory work, watching television and other events and avenues. A more dynamic concept and description of the public sphere is the one expatiated upon by Ann-Katrin Arnold. According to her,

“The public” is an imaginary group of people, and the public sphere is an imaginary place. It is a space constituted between

the state and the private sphere of citizens, households, and private corporations. It is most of all a communicative infrastructure. This infrastructure allows the free exchange of information and ideas, deliberation on issues of public concern, the formation of public will, and the transmission of public will to official authorities. Authorities then have to be accountable for their actions, again through the communication channels of the public sphere. It is helpful - although rather libertarian - to look at the public sphere as if it were a market, the notorious “free marketplace of ideas.” The goods of the public sphere are ideas, and the currency is public opinion.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the public sphere is less a specific location and more a realm of communication. It could be found in literature, in media, in the religious arena and virtually anywhere opinions could be expressed and concerns shared.<sup>4</sup> The product of a functional and effective public sphere is a society where every citizen has freedom of participation, and all strata of leadership—political, social or religious—are held accountable.

If there is a continent that needs a vibrant public sphere, it is Africa. A document by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa articulated comprehensively some of the cogent factors that would necessitate such a vibrant public sphere. These include:

continuing struggles over the role of the state and the place of the market; the technocratisation of (economic) policy and “agencification” of government; the enlarged, perhaps even determinant role assumed by international financial institutions in domestic economic policy making; the intensified pluralisation of the media; shifts in the demographic profile of African countries that favour children and the youth as a proportion of national and regional populations; changes in the spatial distribution of population that speak, on the one hand, to the acceleration of formal and informal processes of

urbanisation and, on the other hand, to intensive internal population movements that pose various challenges; increased organisation and activism for the rights of women and girls, and for greater gender equality; a widespread revival of religion and the emergence of new religiosities; multiple transitions and transformations in the domain of (popular) arts and culture; continuing struggles for the democratisation of national political systems; the rebirth of electoral pluralism and the restoration, nominal or otherwise, of elected national parliaments; an apparent demilitarisation of politics side-by-side with a reinforcement of the security moorings of the state and the expansion of the remit of the policing authorities; the transformation of old social movements and the emergence of new ones as part of a generalised redynamisation of associational life; an increased investment in sub-regional and regional cooperation, integration and even unification processes; an intensified refraction of global influences into the local/domestic arena; and a revival of reciprocal interest and engagement between Africa and its Diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

Christians are active participants in the public sphere, and the place of preachers is critical because they bear the message of the church and largely represent both the voice of God and the voice of the body of Christ in the public sphere. On the other hand, they are also subjects of discussion in the public sphere because of their leadership responsibility and assumed proximity to political leaders and leaders from other spheres of life. In fact, preachers who are also the teachers of the church are creators of visions for the public sphere. According to Richard Voelz, the preacher-as-teacher in the context of what he called critical pedagogy, “enacts the kind of ecclesiology, where preaching functions as (and encourages) the transformation of culture, social action and social change.”<sup>6</sup> He further opined that,

Preaching becomes both critique and resistance of the prevailing cultural pedagogies that enact oppression,

marginalization, suffering, and/or suppression of particular histories, cultures, and identities. This kind of ecclesiology honors the multiplicity of experiences of the gathered community and encourages those participants to shape a vision of the world together that promotes justice and equality (or righteousness, *shalom*, etc.). Critical pedagogy would ask Christian preachers to be very specific about what they mean when they interpret the *basileia tou Theou* (variously defined as the kingdom, reign and rule, or realm of God) of Jesus in current contexts.<sup>7</sup>

The image with which preachers engage the public sphere is critical to the whole idea of preaching as a divine call with a transformative goal, and to that, this paper turns to address.

### **Traditional and Biblical Images of Preachers**

Several images appear in the Bible as to who preachers are and the way they should be viewed in the public sphere. Some of the Greek words used to describe preaching gives some insight. Michael J. Quicke offers a long list of some of these words.<sup>8</sup> A few among them will be discussed here. First, there is *kerysso* (Romans 10:14-15) which translates “I herald.” This is suggestive of a town-crier in a market square. Preachers are heralds of the King who disseminate information to the people under the authority of the King who sent them. Second is *euangelizomai* (Act 14:7). It means “I bring good news”, “I preach good tidings”, “I instruct concerning the things that pertain to Christian salvation.” Thus, preachers are evangelists burdened with the salvation of souls. Third is *didasko* (Act 4:2; 5:25) meaning “I teach or hold discourse with others in order to instruct them”. Preachers are teachers and instructors. Then, there is *dialegomai* (Act 17:17; 18:8; 19:8; 20:9 24:25) meaning “I converse, discourse one on one, argue, discuss.” Preachers are, therefore, people who engage in conversation, discourse and argument based on their conviction of the word of God and the need of the hour. All these terms and actions

define preachers in the public sphere. Preachers herald the kingdom message, share the good news, teach the saints and engage in discourses that affect both private and public life. As teachers, not only do they set the stage for public discussion as earlier observed, they also motivate actors in the public square. As people engage in discourse, they resemble Paul's engagement with the marketplace in Athens as described in Acts 17:16-21. The work of preachers is not confined to the pulpit of their local assembly. The biblical image they carry is beyond that.

Thomas Long, in his book *The Witness of Preaching*, observes that "preachers have at least tacit images of the preacher's role, primary metaphors that not only describe the nature of the preacher but also embrace by implication all the other crucial aspects of the preaching events."<sup>9</sup> While these images vary, Long put together what he called the "organizing metaphor of ministry" and painted the images of preachers as a herald, pastor, storyteller/poet and witness.<sup>10</sup> As heralds, preachers are messenger of God who is their King.<sup>11</sup> As pastors, preachers are therapists and healers.<sup>12</sup> As storyteller/poets, preachers balance what the scripture says with what the community is experiencing, doing so rhetorically.<sup>13</sup> As witnesses, preachers testify to what they have seen and heard in the scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

In a more recent work, Robert Stephen Reid edited a book putting together thoughts of some scholars in homiletics on what should be considered the contemporary images of preachers' identity. In the book, James F. Kay described the preacher as a messenger of hope. His assertion is that sermons ought to bring hope from God to the contemporary community as exemplified in the book of Hebrews.<sup>15</sup> Lucy Lind Hogan paints the picture of a lover. A sermon and its preacher should live and preach God's love for the world.<sup>16</sup> Andre Resner pictures the preacher as God's mystery steward. The preacher creates an awareness of God's great mystery which is the end of this present age, ushering in a new world.<sup>17</sup> For Charles L. Campbell, the preacher is "a ridiculous person." To the sensibility of a contemporary on-looker, it is ridiculous to see a preacher leave the pulpit and liturgical assembly to do street preaching, where he or she openly

confronts and invites their listeners to a gospel response. Yet, that is a reality of their call.<sup>18</sup>

In the same book, Lincoln E. Galloway described the preacher as a fisher. He draws on the concept of Jesus' call to his disciples to be fishers of men and on his own life in Montserrat in the Caribbean to describe how the language of fishing may impact the perception and work of a preacher.<sup>19</sup> John S. McClure sees the image of a preacher in a host and guest. A preacher is best understood within the framework of hospitality. He or she hosts the congregation and is a guest of God. The congregation also hosts the preacher. Preachers are not isolated individuals with absolute authority over their listeners. They are rather "a member of a community that is searching together for an adequate interpretation of God's purposes."<sup>20</sup> Anna Carter Florence pictures the preacher as "one out of your mind." She drew this from the response of the disciples when Rhoda gave them the news that Peter had been released from prison in Acts 12. A preacher has the choice to believe in "Rhoda's news" or believe Peter is still in prison. Preachers are also called to help their congregation choose between the two.<sup>21</sup> Finally, Robert Stephen Reid, the editor of the book, projected the image of a preacher as "one entrusted." Preachers are entrusted with the responsibility of eliciting a faithful response from their hearers. They achieve this by a theologically appropriate use of rhetoric.<sup>22</sup>

The works of Thomas Long or Robert Stephen Reid are not exhaustive. Whether self-identified or tagged, images are important to the functionality of the public sphere. According to Voelz,

It has become an almost commonplace exercise for preachers to examine and re-examine their fundamental assumptions about the practice of preaching through "identify[ing] the trope, the imaginative figure of thought which best captures what they believe they are 'up to' in preaching." Through this work, homileticians, preachers, and students of preaching are engaging in the kind of critical reflection by which an image comes to represent a system of beliefs about the preacher's role

and identity, the work of God in preaching, the role of listeners, relationships with sacred texts, the human situation, and a host of other entailments.<sup>23</sup>

The question that arises at this point is, who do Africans consider their preachers to be? Would they fit the image of a herald, sharer of good news, teacher or persuasive speaker? Where would they fall in Reid's classification of the preacher as a messenger of hope, a lover, God's mystery steward, a ridiculous person, a fisher, host and guest, one out of his mind, or one entrusted? If these are to be regarded as biblical ideals, then every normal preacher should bear these images. But the public sphere in Africa may provide a mixed reaction to the assessment of their preachers. In preparation for this paper the writer posted on his Facebook wall:

*"Hello, friends, I am working on a paper presentation titled, "Images of African Preachers in the Public Sphere in Africa: Separating the Ideal from the Real." From your experience and others who have shared with you at one time or the other, what is the public image or perception of people about preachers in Africa (both positive and negative)? Your input will be appreciated."*<sup>24</sup>

In a few days, responses (positive and negative) filled the page from participants on this social media. In a positive light, African preachers are great communicators of the gospel who have taken the gospel beyond the continent to the entire world through their teaching, preaching and writing. They are men of signs and wonders through whose ministries many have come out of bondage mentally, socially and spiritually. According to one of the commentators, Stephanie Adejoke Henry, "The African preacher is seen as that preacher who has a conviction about the wonder-working power of God, having experienced the power of the gospel and is eager to shine this light to his brethren as well as impart them for a ripple effect."

The basis for the African preachers' zeal for the gospel is the love for God's word and the belief that it is as relevant today as it has even

been. John Wesley Zwomunondiita Kurewa explicated this fact when he wrote,

African preachers have long been able to move and inspire their congregations through the use of the Bible in their sermons. Therefore, biblical proclamation is not a new thing in the life of the African Church. Rather, it is the only way of preaching that we know; and it is the only way of preaching that was ever effectively introduced to the African church.<sup>25</sup>

While it is argued that preaching from the Bible may not necessarily amount to authentic biblical preaching, the first step of loving the word of God is established, and all that is needed to be built upon is the right handling of the text. Altogether, African preachers must be appreciated for being instruments in the hands of God to bring the phenomenal growth that Christianity has encountered in the continent. Churches are planted daily at every nook and cranny of several African societies as the continent becomes increasingly open to the gospel, and people flock to these churches for weekly fellowships, Sunday worship, mass crusades, conventions, and occasional or continuous prayer vigils. The media in several African countries has been literally “taken over” by preachers of God’s word. Several denominations now have their own satellite Television stations where the word of God is preached day and night with evidence of miracles, signs and wonders, and massive response to the call to salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> God is working in Africa, the preachers are instrumental to this, and many in the public square have come to admire and appreciate this.

There are, however, few negative impressions that some African preachers have left on the psyche of the society which needs to be redeemed. Some African preachers are regarded as materialistic, habitual fundraisers, not vocal enough on national issues, exploitative and competitive. Quite a number are not text-driven in their preaching. One commentator actually wrote, “I have witnessed discussion by some preachers where many of them, friends in ministry, were

equating the success of their ministry to what they have acquired through it.”<sup>27</sup> Some writers have also corroborated these negative remarks in their works. Gary S. Maxey and Peter Ozodo wrote about *The Seduction of the Nigerian Church*.<sup>28</sup> The cry is that the presumed revival in Africa, especially in Nigeria is losing its cutting edge due to doctrinal errors. The church is being more and more powerless to halt the social and moral decadence in the society because it is not getting its own acts right. The preachers are implicated in this decline. According to Maxey and Ozodo, a fundamental shift in the popular teaching and belief of the Nigerian Church is largely the reason behind its current failure. The large-scale loss of holy lifestyle among church membership is the most obvious result of this theological flaw.<sup>29</sup> The picture painted by Olowale Gbadamosi in *This Prodigal Church* is dire:

Some of our men of God have become so powerful that even the politicians would be green with envy. Some have unending protocols, long retinue of aids and officials in addition to having security cordons thrown around them. Of course, there are reasons that appear plausible adduced for some of these positions, but if we are honest enough to appraise them in the light of the gospel and eternity, we would discover that these are sure signs of some spiritually fundamental problems that are urgently begging for attention. Worse still some have even become so detached from the reality in their congregations: the poverty stricken people, the weak and the poor as long as they are getting their own huge ‘cut’ from the Gospel.<sup>30</sup>

In another work, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, Femi Adeleye added that there is a crisis in the church where “Jesus and the proclamation of the gospel keep being squeezed into oblivion by ‘more important matters’- blessing the minister, celebrating a birthday, commemorating a car or building and multiple appeals for fund (sic).”<sup>31</sup>

While there are quite a number of things to appreciate and celebrate about preachers in Africa, some of the negative images, arising from the African public sphere, can be inimical to the preachers’

participation in the same public sphere when they ought to be salt and light. The image of a preacher does not affect the preacher alone; it impacts the boldness with which their congregational members would address issues in the public sphere. In Africa, people are not isolated from the family or community they belong to. Each person represents his or her community, and the church member is as good or as bad as the church or pastor is.

How, then, is the ideal image of the preacher separated from the reality that is seen daily? What likely images can be suggested for African preachers as both the ideal and a potential model that could be pushed to be a perfect representation of Christ in the public sphere? To this, the paper now turns.

### **Separating the Ideal from the Real**

The ideal image of any preacher is the scriptural ideal. This is connected to the theology of preaching itself. Biblical preaching is all about the inspired scripture, an acceptance of its authority, inerrancy and sufficiency, and an acceptance of that same scripture to be the standard for the preacher.<sup>32</sup> Several of these ideal and scriptural images of preachers have been enumerated. Preachers are proclaimers or heralds, bearers of good news, encouragers, witnesses or testifiers, discussants, debaters, those who impart divine truth through teaching, biblical interpreters, and defenders of the faith. In contemporary biblical parlances, they are messengers of hope, lovers, stewards of God's mystery, naked street preachers, fishers, host and guest, faith motivators and people entrusted to seek a faithful response from others. These are the ideals, and there are preachers who portray them in Africa.

However, there is a contemporary reality that paints some African preachers in a negative light. It, therefore, becomes necessary at this juncture, to cast a vision for African preachers to repair some of the dented images that represent them in the public sphere and move boldly to shape the same public sphere. This requires suggesting few images that are representative of the biblical images so far studied,

but arising from an African theological perspective and rooted in an African socio-cultural milieu. Three familiar African images are offered: father/mother, priest(ess) and prophet(ess).

### Father/Mother

The image of a father is a strong one among Africans. Among the Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria, a pastor (often a synonym for a preacher because preaching is assumed to be his major responsibility) is often called *Baba wa ninu Oluwa*, meaning “Our father in the Lord.” A father is a leader and the head of the family. In the context of this discourse, a father is a speaker and a counsellor. He confidently represents the family with dignity and integrity in the community and protects the same. Paul painted this fatherly image of a preacher in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (NIV).

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

A preacher–father or preacher-mother is a hard worker who would not desire to burden his or her children. Today, some preachers in Africa have become a burden to their listeners because some of the sermons end up in fundraising to meet the needs of the preacher—even when the church members’ needs are not met. The preacher–parent, is devout, upright and blameless. Integrity is their watchword. They are also exhorters and encouragers. When a preacher–father image is projected, the church and the society where its members are

found will be a disciplined church and society. God's kingdom and glory are the ultimate goal of the preacher-father's sermon.

It also interesting to note, however, that earlier in the 1 Thessalonians passage, Paul has used the image of a mother to describe their ministry. He stated in verse 7-9, "But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." This a unique way to describe the nature, temperament and duty of a good preacher – a gentle nurse who cares for her flock and nourishes them with the word of God. The image of motherhood in Africa is not just that of childbearing and nurturing. In the words of Remi Akujobi, "with motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologized."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, whether the preacher is a male or female, they ought to bear the image of blessedness, respect and godly, but humble veneration.

#### Priest(ess)

Priesthood is a powerful figure and image in the African worldview. This is a carryover from African traditional religion. In the words of Kodzo Mawusi, the priests and priestesses act as leaders of the cult.<sup>34</sup> People expect them to be "custodians of the moral codes and all that are righteous in the society. That is why, as people in a position of leadership, they expect of them that they must by themselves, be people of honour, virtue and integrity."<sup>35</sup> The priests in African traditional religion also have other functions such as guarding the community's customs and traditions and passing them on to the next generation. They confer blessings to members, (for example) before going for a battle, serve as intermediaries between the people and God, preside over sacrifices and offerings, and advise people on proper ways of social living. They also carry out cleansing rituals to enable a member to be accepted back in the community and reconcile various warring parties.<sup>36</sup>

In relation to preaching, Eben Kanukayi Nhiwatiwa identified

images of African preachers using the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. The images include *varimumhepo* (medium who brings the message above), *svikiro* (spirit medium), *mutumwa wa Mwari* (God's messengers), *muparidzi* (one who proclaims the message), *mushumairi* (the one who presents God's word to people), and *mufudzi* (shepherd).<sup>37</sup> With particular reference to *mushumairi*, Nhiwatiwa noted that "the root of the word goes back to *shuma*, to "represent, report (to higher authority)," and at times it means work has been done. The preacher is *mushumairi* in that he/she introduces the word of God to the people for deliberation."<sup>38</sup> Though preaching goes beyond an informational activity or just introducing the word of God to people, this suggests the representational, teaching and guiding responsibility of the priesthood.

The preacher-priests in African paradigm would, therefore, be people of honour, virtue and integrity. They would be intercessors and custodians of customs and tradition of the community—the preacher-priest is also a preacher-teacher. All of these resonate with the biblical image and functions of a priest as a teacher. The role of priests as teachers was highly acknowledged each time Israel went astray. It was the lament in 2 Chronicles 15:3, "For a long time Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach and without the law." When Jehoshaphat was to restore Israel, he engaged the priests in going around the towns of Judah to teach the people (2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Ezra was a priest-teacher per excellence. It was boldly said of him "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." (Ezra 7:10). The revival that occurred in Nehemiah 8 was a product of his (and other priests' and Levites') exposition of God's law. One of the problems with African pulpits is a lack of sound exposition of God's word.

When preachers see themselves as priests, they see their role as not just proclaimers but explainers and expounders committed to sound biblical exegesis and expositions. That is what roots the word of God in people's heart. Jesus, the great High Priest, was mostly known as the Teacher while on earth. The image of a priest would really bring sanity and depth to the African pulpits and engender

revival in the society. Stephen Olford affirmed this when he stated, “I believe that the expository preaching of God’s infallible Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit, concerning Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, is the ultimate hope for humanity’s deepest need, church-wide renewal, national righteousness, and social justice in the world.”<sup>39</sup>

### Prophet(ess)

The image of a prophet resonates with the African culture and with biblical revelation. In a traditional African society, the prophets are mediators between God and the people, they lead people in worship, they act as spokespersons of their communities, foretell future events in the community, warn people of impending danger, and interpret messages from the spirits and ancestors. They pray to God on behalf of the people, act as judges and preside over disputes, advise people on religious matters, bless the people who undertake special missions in the community, carry out cleansing rituals and are the guardians of the community’s customs and traditions.

The prophets’ importance is what makes African Independent Churches place a high premium on the office and title of “prophet” in their movement. There is a contemporary challenge with this, too. Some preachers assume the role of prophets and bear the title, but play negative roles in the public square. Whether the prophetic ministry is to be foretelling or forth-telling is a critical issue among African preachers. In the opinion of Nhiwatiwa,

One image of the preacher that indicates the African congregation’s conflicting expectations is that of the prophet. While Africans do not see the preacher as a prophet, they expect her or him to play that role occasionally. Unlike in the West where *prophecy* means proclaiming a courageous message without exception to persons and institutions, in Africa *prophecy* means the powers of seeing through an individual’s life and foretelling the future.

Prophecy consists of the two dimensions of foretelling and forth-telling. But an assumption that a prophet is known by a long white garment or braided hair or long beards (in an attempt to perhaps simulate the biblical Old Testament prophets) is not helpful. Getting back to the ideal is, therefore, required. The preacher-prophets are simply the mouthpiece of God for their generation. They foretell, and they forth tell. They declare the counsel of God for the now and for the future. Contrasting the contemporary reality from the ideal, Olawale Gbadosi inquired,

Is there any similarity between the prophets of this generation and the prophets such as Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel and John the Baptist? Not much! Or the condition in the church and the nation has become so good and godly that there are no stern words from our prophets? These prophets hardly ruffle feathers. Both sinners and saints alike are perfectly at home with them. They have no tough words for the chronic and hardened sinner on the need for him to turn from his wicked ways and go back to God. They rarely carry a burden on their hearts and certainly not a tear in their eyes – which were the distinguishing emblems of prophets of old. They purport to be acting for God while their interests and motives are actually the driving forces. Unlike Elisha who shunned the gift, like Balaam who loved the wages of righteousness and perverted God's gift because of love of money, these men would stop at nothing to reap material gains from that office. Some will even cajole and deceive saying, "Thus saith the Lord" when the Lord has not spoken."<sup>40</sup>

The preacher-prophets are those who will speak the mind of God without any desire for material gain. Anywhere they are, God is not silent. They speak truth to powers and challenge the status quo. McMickle stated that "when the preacher has the courage to speak truth to power not only inside the church building but also in the streets and boardrooms and jail cells or the secular order" he or she is

into prophetic preaching.<sup>41</sup> The preacher–prophets are in the order of such preachers like Martin Luther King Jr., Mojola Agbebi and Simon Kimbangu.<sup>42</sup> In the words of McMickle,

We must be willing to do this if we are to be faithful to and worthy of following in the footsteps of Samuel who confronted Saul, Nathan who confronted David, Amos who condemned Jeroboam, Jeremiah who challenged both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and John the Baptist who did not grow mute or meek in the presence of Herod Antipas. In a time of “patriot pastors” and the belief that critiquing the leaders of the nation is both ungodly and unpatriotic, it is time for prophetic preaching. It is time to hear the words, “This is what the Lord says.”<sup>43</sup>

However, the prophetic image in Africa will remain that of a miracle-worker and a problem-solver, whatever that might denote. An African preacher cannot brush that aside as his or her image, too. Jesus is the solution to all human problems, and wherever the word of God is preached, the truth is re-enacted in the life of the hearers. Spiritual gifts may differ, and each preacher must recognise their limitations in this regard. Whether through the grace of God upon the preacher’s life or a teamwork with other genuine servants of God who are so gifted, African preachers cannot shy away from the expectation of their people to see God meet their needs and solve their problems through such preachers’ ministry.

### Conclusion

The public sphere has taken a dimension beyond the definition of Jürgen Habermas to be virtually everywhere opinions are shared about the welfare of a people—formal and informal meetings, books, print, electronic and social media, and practically everywhere. The ideal image of a preacher is the one found in the Bible. What is observed occasionally is a mixture of the biblical model and what some African preachers have assumed, and which is not portraying well, their image

in the public sphere. The public sphere is both a place for assessment and contribution. Some preachers have done well, and some have not. The public assessment of some needs improvement, and the contribution they need to make needs to go beyond the shadows of compromise. This paper has, therefore, postulated three images that African preachers can assume if they will do well in the public sphere: father/mother, priest(ess) and prophet(ess). These are powerful images arising from African tradition and culture and equally rooted in the scripture. With these images embedded, African preachers should be able to effectively participate in the public sphere and bring the needed transformation to the continent through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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  2. Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article." *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55.
  3. Anne-Katrin Arnold, "Defining the Public Sphere." <https://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/defining-public-sphere-3-paragraphs>. (Accessed on May 28, 2019).
  4. A good example of analysing literature as a realm of public sphere is the work of M.S.C. Okolo in "Contesting the African Public Sphere: A Philosophical Re-imaging of Power and Resistance in Ngugi's Wizard of the Crow." *Africa Development* 2, no. XXXIV (2009): 59-80. Other attempts at presenting alternative public spheres include Teresa Cruz e Silva, "Public and Private Domains and the Social Role of Universities in Africa." *Claude Ake Lecture*. Yaoundé, Cameroun: CODESRIA, 2008. 1-13; and Barasa Janet Nasambu Kassily and Kennedy Onkware, "Struggles and Success in Engendering the African Public Sphere: Kenyan Women in Politics." *Kenya Studies Review* 3, no. 3 (December 2011): 74-86.
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