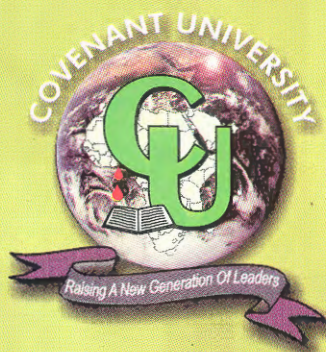


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The Public Relations Function And The Challenges Of Democratisation In Africa

by

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SERIALS

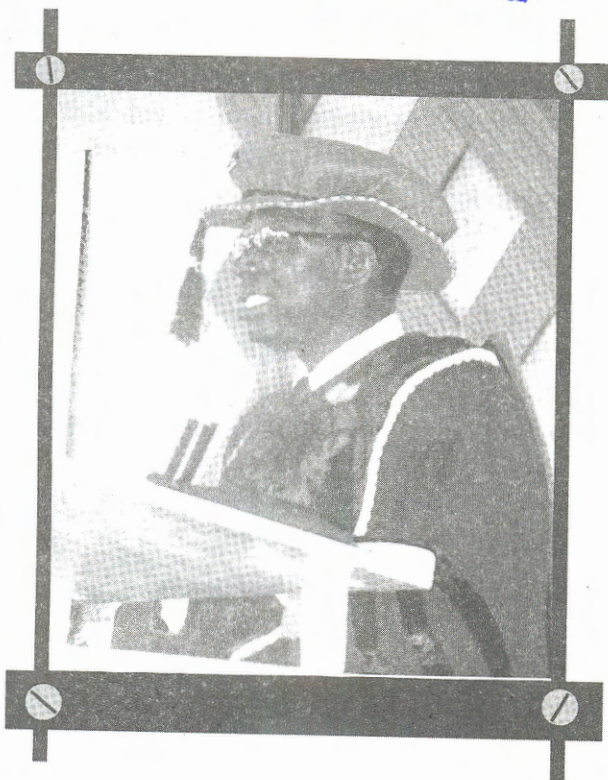
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THE PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTION AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATISATION IN AFRICA

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SERIALS



1.1 Introduction

It's a day of the Lord's glory and for it I feel enormously grateful, first to God Almighty who has made this occasion possible, and then to the authorities of Covenant University, especially to God's servant, the Chancellor, Bishop Dr. David Oyedepo, for setting this day apart, certainly in obedience to God's leading. May the Lord Himself preside here, and make the occasion be a glorious celebration of His goodness. Amen.

1.2. A necessary explanation

I am aware, Mr. Chancellor, that I owe this august and expectant assembly an explanation as to why I have chosen to deliver a public lecture on Public Relations and not on mainstream journalism, both print and electronic, or on broadcasting, with all that it is currently going through, or Development Communication, in view of its relevance to our development situation, or, in fact, Information and Communication Technology (I C T) which has taken centre stage in the information society that our rapidly shrinking world has become. I chose Public Relations because I was and am still painfully aware that after about a century of its teaching, learning and practice, and in spite of its demonstrated capacity to engender and foster or restore mutual understanding and goodwill in a variety of otherwise embarrassing situations around the world, it is still the least understood of the mass communication disciplines and progressions, and the least respected in certain quarters. Even on these hallowed grounds where human relations (an aspect of public Relations) are or

should be accorded a high priority, I have heard Public Relations referred to in less than endearing terms. But that should not be unduly surprising. In the United States where modern Public Relations was more or less inaugurated (as a profession, by Ivy Ledbetter Lee, and as a University discipline, by Edward Barnays) roughly a century ago (precisely in 1919 and 1923 respectively), the general level of contemporary understanding of the essence of the Public Relations discipline and profession is scarcely anything to write home about. Thus, a distinguished Professor of Public relations, Otto Lerbinger of Boston University College of Communication, in whose classes the present speaker sat for subsidiary lectures in Public Relations in the latter part of the last century (or last millennium) had this to say during his pre-retirement engagements in the summer of 2004.

I've been subject to abuse for fifty years. I'm so used to it that it doesn't bother me any more. If there are stereotypes attached, then that's bad. But we're fighting by trying to create greater understanding of what PR really is.

Otto Lerbinger, who had taught PR since 1954, had earlier recounted his gratifying experiences in teaching and counselling on Public Relations including the satisfactions of seeing his products put to successful practice what they had been taught on "how to extinguish fires", and more important, "how to prevent them from starting". It was after that that he conceded "the other side of the story", rattling off pejorative terms often associated with his life's work. Sometimes, he says, he wasn't even sure he should keep the title, "Professor of Public Relations", since to some skeptics, that's akin to being a "Professor of puffery". But he decided he should do what he does

best: teach people about PR. Similarly, I have received the evangelistic commission to preach Public Relations and all I need is the necessary anointing, and more anointing.

1.3. So, What is Public Relations?

I think that question touches on one great challenge that Public Relations has had to confront: it is blessed with so many definitions, a circumstance that has turned out to be a double-edged blessing. On the one hand; the plethora of definitions can always be cited to show what a dynamic discipline cum - profession Public Relations is. On the other, the plethora of definitions may be partly (but only partly) held responsible for the confusion of the uninitiated about the true essence of Public Relations. The ignorance or confusion was at one time so much in Nigeria that some funny employer had the guts to advertise and some funny communication medium was ready to carry the advertisement for a female "Public Relations officer" with excellent spoken English = which was unexceptionable but also with, guess what? Good Legs! Oh Good Lord, forgive us! All this probably explains why virtually all those who have tried to put pen to paper on the subject of Public Relations in Nigeria usually begin with a long list of what Public Relations is not. But even my long-serving, highly respected, retiring teacher, Otto Lerbinger, was constrained to emphasize in some of his disquisitions that PR is not just about seeking good publicity, which is a common perception.

According to him, that may have been true when he started teaching and when most People working in PR were former journalists lured by higher paying jobs. But now, says he, PR people, who typically have communications degrees, are involved in marketing, management and policy-making. They

also manage crises, which many organizations don't handle well, he says, because they don't listen to their PR people. The hardest part of PR, according to Lerbinger, is to convince those in power to do the smart thing and acknowledge that there is a problem, an impending crisis. 'Often, management won't listen'. [By the way, everywhere we mention 'management', we can also add 'government' ---which 'manages' the affairs of a nation]. Let us for now clinch our search for endorsement from this acknowledged expert by citing his view of public relations as an interdisciplinary field, encompassing management, economics, psychology, sociology, and politics that is, besides the mainstream communications disciplines. [This is similar to the view espoused by a Nigerian professor of PR/Marketing, Julius Onah, following the International Public Relations Association [IPRA] in its Gold Paper No.4 of 1982]. Further, according to Lerbinger, Public Relations persons are trained to listen to people, to seek input, and to study social trends. According to him, PR reflects what happens in the world, and that's what makes it always vital and interesting. We'll have reason to return to Lerbinger later.

Now, returning to the issue of multiple definitions, I have a partiality for definitions proffered by groups of experts or associations, in keeping with the age-long adage that two[or more] heads are better than one, provided of course that they are mostly good heads. There is a set of four definitions that comes in handy from that perspective. By far the most succinct and most popular of those group proffered definitions is the one by the British Institute of Public Relations [IPR] which presents public relations as;
--- the deliberate and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.

The American Public Relations Association, on its own part, once described public relations as;

--- the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

The earlier mentioned International Public Relations Associations [IPRA], meeting in the Hague in May 1960, arrived at a definition of PR as;

--- a management function of a continuing and planned character through which public and private organizations and institutions seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned, by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate as far as possible their own policies and procedures to achieve by planned and widespread information more productive co-operation and more efficient fulfilment of their common interests.

The final of our four group definitions of Public Relations is the one that has become more or less immortalized as the 'Mexican statement', because it was fashioned at the World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico in 1978. It projects public relations as;

--- the art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programmes which will serve both an organization's and [its] publics' interests.

Much as I prefer definitions forged by groups to those

emanating from individual reflections, one must at the same time acknowledge the efforts of a British expert, Dr. Rex Harlow who, presumably eager to put some restraint on the label of extant definitions, is reputed to have studied 472 definitions and interviewed 84 PR professionals, mostly veterans, to arrive at his own definition which, as you must have rightly guessed, was for the purpose of his Ph.D thesis. At the end, he states that;

Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lives of communication, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

From all these group - evolved and 'Harlowin' definitions, it is possible to extract certain facts about the principal preoccupations and attributes of public relations, some, just some of which are that;

- ! Public Relations is preoccupied with establishing and maintaining mutual understanding and good will between an organization and its public, a government and its subjects, a ruler and the ruled, a statesman and his compatriots, etc.
- ! Public Relations is largely a communication discipline or profession with its tentacles in various other branches of knowledge or, put simply, it is an interdisciplinary field.

- ! Public Relations is at once a science and an art.
- ! Public Relations is primarily a management function, even though-like other management functions-it has its technician operations.
- ! Public Relations activities are planned and deliberate, not whimsical or fortuitous.
- ! Public Relations activities are sustained or continuous, not adhoc or tied to the expedient: in other words, they help to build a constant reservoir of goodwill which we can readily tap in times of need.
- ! Public Relations is essentially proactive and predictive, though it is often compelled to be reactive and backward-looking.
- ! Public Relations thrives on dialogue and persuasion but is antithetical to social monologue and whimsical.

1.4. Democracy and Democratization

Having dilated this long on the concept, principles and characteristics of Public Relations, let us- in the spirit of firmness-now pause a while for the consideration of democratization. We are all familiar with the simple, traditional western definition of democracy as "government of the people by the people for the people" a definition which has always made the idea of democracy so attractive to all reasonable people. Some not-so-flattering characterizations of democracy also exist but, since our goal is the noble one of enlightenment and not of disputation, we shall do business here with the simple, universally acclaimed definition cited above. Again we all know too well that it is not possible in any kind of political system, for all the citizens of a nation to be directly involved in the job of governance. So, democratic societies select representatives on the basis of universal adult suffrage

and select some on personal merit to carry on the job on their behalf. Most of those involved in the job of governance are called politicians and, in some of the more stable democracies, politics has taken on the nature of a profession. In North America, for example, one can point to politician-legislators with upwards of twenty years' experience in congress. Most of these have distinguished themselves over the years and are highly respected for their political acumen.

Now, because human nature is subject to corruption by power, and because the power attaching to politics has about the greatest potentials and tendency to corrupt men, politics has come to acquire some unedifying connotations. Ideally, the most convenient means of catering to society's welfare, politics can also become, and has in many known cases become the most available means of exploiting and dehumanising society. So, as Agee, Ault and Emery remind us, democratic societies do not leave their elected and selected representatives to govern as they like. In the first place, they are made to govern in accordance with the demands of a social contract called the constitution. Second, and with particular reference to a Federal Presidential Democracy, their areas of operation are delimited by the concept of separation of powers among the three conventional arms of government, viz the legislative, the executive and the judicial. Third, checks and balances are instituted to enable the three arms of government to exercise constraints on one another. Thus, while the legislature combines with its law-making business the mandate to guide, scrutinize and approve or denounce the activities of the executive, the latter holds the mandate not only to ratify and sign into law all acceptable bills passed by the legislature, but also the power of veto involving the withholding of the president's signature where he feels that the legislature has overstepped

the bounds of constitutional appropriacy. Needless to point out that the legislature also holds power of veto over the executive's veto. The judiciary, on its part, holds the ultimate power of interpretation of the constitution, an interpretation which the other arms of government as well as the citizens are in principle, obliged to accept and comply with. However, since judges have to have their appointments proposed by the executive and ratified by the legislature, a considerable number of them usually cannot afford in their interpretations, to utterly disregard the contemporary inclinations of both other arms of government. How far a judge goes in pandering to the known or assumed inclinations of either or both of the other arms of the government depends on the calibre of his own personality and the level of his integrity. Hence, the occasional public vilification which the judiciary is rightly or wrongly subject to, in spite of its traditional recognition as the last hope of the common man for justice and fair play.

A careful look at the foregoing scenario with regard to contemporary Nigeria would show that the country is not lacking in major tangible structures and paraphernalia of Democracy, especially the political structures and paraphernalia of the Legislature, the Executive and Judiciary. Also clearly in evidence are supporting structures such as a virile press; a professionally conscious military; a police that would become the pride of Africa indeed of the world-the day it becomes successfully purged of corruption; and of course a civil service structure that is heir to some of the best administrative heritages known to the profession the world over. Here some reminders would come in useful to convince those who may wish to be seen as skeptical about these claims.

However it would be naïve to assume a full-blown democracy just because we have in place these tangible struc-

tures which may be seen as the “hardware” of Democracy, or as fulfilling the mere letter of the constitution. They must be properly fed with the “software” of Democracy and have the true spirit of the constitution breathed into them, so that they can become “living”(democratic) beings” (of Genesis 2:7). And this is where the Public Relations Function-encompassing PR education and training, PR practice, PR counselling and PR regulations-comes handy. But, just before we go into a full discussion of the Public Relations-Democracy relationship, let us pause a while again to consider the significance of the idea of Democratization as contained in the title of the lecture. I surmise, Mr. Chancellor, that most Nigerians born from about the time of Independence have never seen true Democracy nor do they even understand true constitutional governance, no thanks to an inordinately prolonged military occupation that initially surfaced in the guise of a military salvation. The largely spineless civilian interregnums that have materialized in the course of our 40-year wilderness experience so far, have failed woefully to restore the sense of liberty, order and the dignity of man that was rudely punctuated in the mid-1960s. That is the only justification that anyone has to speak of democratising Nigeria, or even Ghana or Togo in the third millennium Anno Domino. To a large extent, it is a matter of making strenuous efforts to restore the badly militarised and bastardised psyche of a nation which could in any case have continued its normal democratic development but for an exuberant and ill-executed though, maybe, originally well-meant military putsch. From hindsight, it may justifiably be said that there was nothing that happened in Nigeria-politically, economically, socially and otherwise - that had never happened in the history of the now more settled liberal democracies. So, the process we've been going through in the past few years is one of a re-democratisation of a polity whose progress to a full-fledged

Democracy was rudely cut short and which was therefore condemned to a forty-year democratic wilderness experience which we are about to complete. I prophesy that our wilderness experience will be over very soon, because the Dayspring from on high will visit Nigeria and raise up from among those we are now preparing leaders, including genuine, Public Relations-oriented ones, through whom Nigeria's, nay Africa's, democratic salvation will be speedily realized.

Imbued with divine wisdom, such leaders will not fail to correctly diagnose the democratic challenges we are faced with as a nation. For example, they will not gloss over two circumstances- one fortuitous and the other of our own making-, which helped to hasten our fall over the rocky democratic precipice. I refer, first, to the efflorescence of black gold in the early 1970s which distorted the national economy as well as our own sense of values, and, in effect, shielded us from the chastening necessary to a polity just emerging from a not unavoidable civil war. We became, in effect, a nation without an economic sense of responsibility (or sense of economic responsibility?) since we felt that money was not our problem but "how to spend it". In effect we chose, like the prodigal son, to spend it in riotous living. But whereas the prodigal son eventually came to himself and returned to his father, one is hard to put to it to find any shred of evidence that we have, as a nation, come to ourselves but by God's grace, we'll do so very soon! For now, I have never seen where a debt-ridden nation engages in so much extravagance and so much "bigness"!

The second circumstance that helped to turn our redemocratization process into such a drudgery was our presumptuous plunge into a new form of democratic governance after the civil war, without giving ourselves time to analyse and assimilate the intricacies of (executive) presidential democracy, and to try- at least in an experimental regime- to adapt

the system to our own circumstances. As I had cause to observe in a recent lecture, most of those who acceded to power in the new dispensation were attracted more to the awe of their positions than to the awesomeness of the responsibilities attaching to those positions. The executive menace spread like wildfire and soon choked the underlying idea of democracy. While the prolonged militarization of the national psyche and the constant intrusion of the self-proclaimed military geniuses into the political space maybe cited as a third force bedeviling our redemocratization process, I believe that the menace from that direction could have been effectively neutralized by any group of civilian politicians with adequate understanding of the system they are operating, with adequate courage, with adequate sense of responsibility, and of course with adequate integrity. I believe that presidential democracy is ideal for our pluralistic polity, but I do not believe that it had to begin here on the gargantuan scale on which it did and has continued to operate. The American Presidential System has existed for roughly four centuries, so the current bigness of its government did not materialize overnight. Even then American complaints are quite audible over the cost of inordinately big government to national well-being.

1.5. Public Relations and the "Conversation" of Democracy

I seek indulgence here to borrow some ideas from Dr. Joseph Duffrey, erstwhile USIA Director, in his speech titled "The conversation of democracy" delivered at the William E. Simon School of Business Administration in Washington D.C. Taking his bearing from Adam Smith's equally historic work, *THE WEALTH OF NATIONS*, and from Thomas Jefferson's historic draft of the (American) Declaration of Independence, Dr. Duffrey argues that democracy is much more complex form of

government than it is popular assumed to be. According to him:

Democracy requires patience, wisdom and deliberation from all citizens, not just a few leaders; it demands that citizens learn to persuade and to accept persuasion from others. It is a conversation, not a one-way argument: a slow and exacting exchange of viewpoints demanding of us what Smith terms "other regarding vision" (mine own emphasis).

Duffey had earlier drawn attention to Smith's recognition, a rather serendipitous one for Smith's authoritarian era-of the need for the citizenry in a liberal democracy to become capable of critical inquiry and informed political judgement, so that they will not be disposed to judge rashly and capriciously concerning government. Smith's declared desideratum underscores the importance of favourable public opinion for the viability and survival of government in a liberal democracy. Here again, Duffey's speech becomes relevant to that insightful observation by Professor Benjamin Barber of Rutgers University that:

Democracy ...is (after all) not a natural form of (human) association; it is an extraordinary and rare contrivance of cultivated imagination: the capacity to see in others human beings like ourselves and to regard them with tolerance, respect and, sometimes, even affection.

It would seem that much of the headache that democracy suffers in Africa results from a generalized failure to recognize:

- i. that democracy is a conversation not a monologue or dictation exercise conducted by some all-knowing teacher(s); and
- ii. that it is a contrived form of association, acculturation into which requires induction such as can usually be inculcated

by the public relations strategy as profiled in this lecture.

1.6 Three Modes of Social and Political Communication

The command mode:

Most of the social and political communication that has hitherto taken place in Africa (in recent times) would conveniently fit into this mode. It assumes that the source is superior to the receiver; it proceeds in a one-way direction, mostly from top to bottom, on the assumption that the governing class has all the answers to society's problems, and the role of the citizens is simply to listen and comply. It is impatient with dialogue but prefers monologue and dictation. It is not only the military but even most of our civilian leaders who seem to be in love with this mode of communication with the citizenry.

The Service Mode:

Compared to the other two modes, this communication mode could be construed as relatively amoral, except that it can produce immoral, consequences when it is not operated according to the rules. It proceeds on the basic assumption that the source can provide a good or service (or goods or services), which the receiver can purchase if he finds the terms acceptable or after the terms have been agreeably negotiated. In the "information society" and in the age of programmed mass production, this mode of communication has come to depend more and more on the mass media. The intellectuals who hold specialist positions in the media (editors, producers, managers, etc) are thereby thrust into social prominence, and in the process, "big media" and "big business" tend to become inseparable while the normally amoral role of the media intellectual becomes neutralized or to put it in a Nigerian Slang, "settled" out of significance by successive military and civilian

The Public Relations Function And The Challenges Of Democratisation In Africa
governments and/or by astute business tycoons.

The Associational Mode:

The most significant feature of this mode of social and political communication is that it assumes equality between source and recipient (e.g between the governors and the governed). It is further predicated on the understanding that the communication event involves mutual benefits for both source and recipient(s). It is a two-way, cyclical communication mode that accords primacy to feedback and to the "completed communication circuit", featuring initiation, feedback, and acknowledgment of feedback. In the context of national development, "associational" communication is participatory and consultative. It may not be invariably horizontal, but it is never invariably vertical.

It would be naïve to expect this mode of communication to operate without interruption in any society, however liberal. Crises of various dimensions (war, famine, plague, diplomatic rupture etc) may provide varying levels of justification for a suspension or modification of the associational mode of communication in a liberal democracy- but only temporarily. At the same time, the virtual absence of it in any society which claims to be democratic or democratizing is to be lamented. It is a moot question how many African countries today can confidently claim to be operating the associational mode of communication in any significant degree; yet it is this mode that constitutes the pivot of the conversation of democracy.

1.7 Public Relations, Public Diplomacy And Image Laundering

Image laundering is public diplomacy gone awry. It is counterfeit public diplomacy. Like money laundering, it

involves a substantial amount of illegality and needless secrecy. But what is public diplomacy, of which image-laundering is a counterfeit?

From the political angle, public diplomacy is government-sponsored public relations at the international level. It seeks to make use of corporate and individual rather than official channels to disseminate and diversify public policy into the international communication arena. As Haastrup (in Olumideko: 1897) points out, public diplomacy is an invention of the West. But leaders in other parts of the world have tried to employ it with varying degrees of success and failure. Public diplomacy normally includes all the information and communication that enhance mutual understanding between the government and people of one country and those of another with which it has relations. It also includes such activities as would project a favourable image and maintain a fair reputation for the country in question. Public diplomacy can also be practiced between two states in a multi-state country like Nigeria.

Today, every country of the world needs public diplomacy. Every country has its fair share of crises, disasters and wars, be they physical, psychological or spiritual wars. Relative to the rapid expansion in world population, the world's resources are becoming more and more inadequate, thus encouraging rapid competition. The dizzying communication revolutions have made it impossible for any country to remain an island unto itself. There is also a pervasive wind of democracy blowing across the world and demanding openness, humaneness and accountability from all countries, and thus making international public relations a *sine qua non* for any country that wishes to remain relevant in the global scheme of things. Public diplomacy/international public relations enables each country to project its crystallized interests and also minimize

damage resulting from bilateral or multilateral conflicts. It is countries that are not equipped for proper public diplomacy or whose activities cannot bear open public relations that resort to image-laundering, even though they do not themselves give that name to their own activities.

1.8 Problems Encouraging Image Laundering

Again as Haastrup(*op. cit*) points out, some of the problems that confront developing countries today can be traced to an unfavourable international environment, but most of such problems are of these countries' own making. In the former category must be included:

- I. high rate of debt repayment,
- ii. lack of international goodwill
- iii. pervasive self-interest among nations and a general decline in foreign/international aid.

The more or less self-inflicted problems include:

1. poor human rights records
2. drug trafficking, money laundering, "419" and other fraudulent practices,
3. inadequate care of the environment,
4. declining standard of education, and
5. declining productivity in all sectors of the economy.

How to cure the plague of image laundering

While proper public diplomacy with public relations are crucial to positive image building, public relations is not the panacea for all our image problems. In particular, public relations practitioners should avoid the temptation of being flat-

tered or of flattering themselves into thinking that they can create any image that does not exist in reality. Their goal should be to contribute to the efforts on ground to build an image worth projecting to the outside world. They must also help in training every citizen to see himself/herself as a public relations ambassador for the country. It seems that the ongoing but non-descript programmes of national orientation and national rebirth would achieve more obvious progress if public relations persons and strategies are more consciously involved. These can more carefully identify and rank their target publics, including the international media, the creditor and donor countries and, not least of all, Nigerian citizens abroad.

Being experts, public relations practitioners would also not overlook the internal publics at home, since "charity begins at home". They are trained in appropriate message design and proper application of existing information and communication technologies. They know how to elicit feedbacks, to acknowledge such feedbacks, and offer sound advice on decisions affecting communication with national and international publics. Through their training in issues management, they can help to fore-stall avoidable crises and to manage crises that occur in spite of preventives strategies. Above all, they can help to train leaders to think globally while acting locally. But there is very little they can do to turn bad news into good news, or to remould a consistently bad leader into a good leader in the eyes of the world.

Leading public relations practitioners in Nigeria bluntly refused to be employed as image launders in the early 1990s and told government point-blank that no amount of image-laundering can redeem a badly battered international image. Unless genuine effort are made to remould that image, public relations cannot sell a bad product.

PR people also advocate disclosure where necessary. As Professor Lerbinger points out, if the U.S. government had released the photos of prisoner abuse in Iraq before the media did, the pertinent crisis would have been mitigated. Similarly, if the Carter government had released photos and other known details of incredible atrocities by CIA and the last Shah of Iran in that country, before the Mike Wallace team did in the CBS "60mins" slot and before David Ford, a former CIA Chief did in a belated personal confession in a March 1980 edition of the New York Times, the Iran hostage crisis could have been averted. On the other hand, President John F. Kennedy did the smart thing and put out a threatening fire by admitting responsibility for the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, just as Johnson and Johnson did in 1982, not only by admitting wrongdoing but by going on to recall all of its Tylenol capsules from the market after some bottles were found to have been laced with cyanide. At the same time openness and disclosure is a good strategy to influence public opinion. Exxon Mobil scored a point in this regard when it invited several environmental groups and the media on board a particular twenty-year-old oil tanker which GreenPeace, a leading environment group, had stubbornly insisted was due for retirement, and allowed them unfettered access. The guests reported that the tanker was indeed sound. All the above are products of professional counseling by PR persons who have been taught how to extinguish such fires, and more important, how to prevent them from starting.

1.9. Public Relations and Spirituality

I believe that distinguished God's servants, and indeed all conscientious Christians, must have seen here a close

connection between Public Relations and Spirituality. The Bible says that he who covers his sins will not prosper {Proverbs 28:13}. By the same token it can be said that he who confesses his sin and turns a new leaf will prosper. And the Bible endorses that view

{1 John 1:9}. There are personal confessions and, indeed, national confessions. In the case of leaders a personal confession can help to avert a national crisis. Bill Clinton displayed that admixture of Public Relations with spirituality in the Lewinsky affair, and averted a looming crisis for himself and the United States. Richard Nixon displayed neither Public Relations nor Spirituality in the Watergate debacle and thereby subjected himself and his nation to avoidable political and sociocultural stress. South Africa's Truth Commission, at once a personal, group, and national confession must have been a significant factor in the relatively smooth transition from the horrible regime or apartheid to a democracy that is currently teaching the world some lessons, in spite of acknowledged pockets of accustomed violence, which will certainly go away with the passage of time and with consistent, genuine redemptive programmes by the government. By contrast, the Nigerian equivalent of the Truth Commission has so far remained a blind alley! Are Nigerian leaders listening? (Perhaps the inestimable contribution of the towering figure and Christ-like personality of the first African President, Mandiba Nelson Mandela, to peace and democracy should be the subject of a separate disquisition) Are Nigerian leaders listening? What kinds of Public Relations / Public Affairs counseling are they getting? Equally important, are we all Nigerians, nay all African, listening? How much PR and Spiritual input are we contributing towards democratization in our countries, nay on our continent.

Let me bring this lecture to a close on this note of spirituality in Public Relations by citing a to me surprising statement by an undergraduate PR class even in a conventional, public university. According to them:

Professionalism without spiritualism (sic) is like tea without sugar,

Flesh without blood, head without brain, or marriage without love.

They had been asked to conduct and record a "focus group" session on the subject of professional integrity in Public Relations, to demonstrate that they had assimilated a lecture on the distinctions and connections among the "personal (or spiritual), the intellectual, and the "status" levels of the vocation. I must say that I learnt a lot from the record of their proceeding. The record has persuaded me that catching them relatively young as we are doing here under God's guidance can go a long way in paving the way for a God fearing, Public Relations-oriented democratic dispensation in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, I see a better tomorrow and a greater Nigeria in the horizon there, as I did roughly twenty-three years ago when I had the opportunity for my maiden crusade on Public Relations in governance. I see several routes leading to that horizon. But somehow I still see, as I saw on that occasion, a lot of debris to be cleared, a lot of icebergs and cataracts to avoid and a lot of potholes to be filled, on the routes to the horizon. I see a frantic search for true men and women- typified by our projected Covenant University products- to do the clearing work. At first the search seems hopeless. But, sooner than later, I see a stream of patriots lined up by the social machine ready to work. Among these I see several Public Relations persons, who take time off to lubricate this engine here, that machine there, and that caterpillar yonder, besides taking their normal

share of the clearing work. I also see them providing mental lubrication for their fellow workers and wayfarers on the routes to the horizon. I see occasional tiredness, frustration and doubts as to whether they will ever reach the horizon. At a point I see a frightening pall, an ominous darkness, sufficient to discourage even the most determined. But I see these men and women who cannot die consistently chipping away surprising chunks from that terrible cloud with their glorious lights. And very soon, just behind that deceptively invincible but now conquered darkness, Lo! The horizon! The better tomorrow! The greater Nigeria, nay Africa! Hallelujah! The task has been arduous! But the prize is well worth the effort!

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, especially Ladies and Gentlemen of the Public Relations orientation, in fulfilling your roles in this arduous but worthwhile task, I wish you all (in descending order) Divine Guidance, continued vitality, and an abundance of good luck.

It remains for me, Mr. Chancellor, to render appreciation and honour unto whom they are due. And I would like to do it in the following order:

- ! First to God Almighty for his creation of me and for all his miraculous interventions in my life, including the one that brought me to, and has sustained me in the land flowing with milk and honey- Canaan land.
- ! Then to the Chancellor and the Board of Regents for their inspired governance of this institution and, in particular, for the Chancellor's compassionate consideration of any issue that has gone before him concerning my person.
- ! To the Vice-Chancellor for having been truly to me "A mother in Canaan land" in ways too numerous to

enumerate. I am grateful!

- ! To the Registrar, whom I have found to be such a compassionate, caring, and even friendly person in spite of the tough exterior that his position and responsibilities constrain him to put on most of the time. I believe, Sir, that high-level administrators deserve special allowances for all the camaraderies and social niceties that their positions oblige them to sacrifice.
- ! To my colleagues- Professors, lecturers and Administrators- with whom my vocational and other commitments have brought me in contact at different times, with pleasant outcomes.
- ! To my fellow- students, Kings and Queens of Hebron land, who have kept me both inspired and entertained by their demonstrations of good behaviour as well as by their pranks.
- ! To our Prophets in the house- from top to bottom- for their outstanding commitment to their responsibility of shepherding us and keeping us within the secret place of the Most High. May God continue to bless your ministries.
- ! To my family, especially my dear wife, for taking with unusual grace the constraints and deprivations to which they have all been subjected, as a result of the unique scenario of my own life.
- ! Finally to you all, distinguished guests, distinguished ladies and gentlemen all, I thank you very sincerely for your patience and kind attention.

May the Almighty God watch over you all as you return to your various destinations.

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