

By Innocent Anaba

THE news of the setting ablaze of some members of Christian Prayer Assembly (CPA) by the General Overseer of the church himself, Rev Emeka Ezeugo King, sent shocking wave to many Lagosians, who could not fathom why the self-styled God of our time, could decide to set his followers ablaze.

At first, it appeared like a wild rumour, though Rev King himself denied the allegation, but admitted that he did flog his followers when they did something wrong. But the news of his arrest, gave some credibility to the news, that after all, the allegation may be true. His subsequent arraignment in court, proved beyond doubt that Rev King knew more than he had admitted to newsmen.

On August 2, 2006, appearing before an Ebute Metta Magistrate court sitting in Lagos, alongside two other members of his church, Donatus Chiazor and Kelechi Chikere Queen, King were docked on a four count charge of conspiracy and attempted murder. The charge preferred against him and his co-accused read:

●That you Emeka Ezeugo 'alias' Dr Rev King 'm', Donatus Chiazor 'm', Kelechi Chikere Queen 'f' on or about July 22, 2006 at about 8.30am, at 6B Canal View, Ajao Estate, Lagos in the Lagos Magisterial District did conspire together to commit a felony to wit: attempted murder and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 516 of the Criminal Code Cap. C17, Vol II, Laws of Lagos of Nigeria, 2003.

●That you Emeka Ezeugo 'alias' Dr Rev King 'm', Donatus Chiazor 'm', Kelechi Chikere Queen 'f' on the same date, time and place in the aforesaid Magistrate district did unlawfully attempt to murder one Ann Uzoh King (2), Olisa Chiejina 'f' (3), Onuorah Chizoba (4), Uche Chukwu Iwoba (5), Vivian Ezeocha (6), Bunmi Olisa (7), Nwere Jessica and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 320 (1) of the Criminal Code Cap. C17, Vol II, Laws of Lagos State of Nigeria.

●That you Emeka Ezeugo 'alias' Dr Rev King 'm', Donatus Chiazor 'm', Kelechi Chikere Queen 'f' on the same date, time and place in the aforesaid Magistrate district with the intent to main, disfigure or cause some grievous harm on (1) Ann Uzo King, did pour a jerrycan full of petrol on her and set her on fire, thereby causing her grievous bodily harm and thereby committed an offence punishable under section 332 of the Criminal Code cap C17, Vol II, Laws of Lagos State, 2003.

●That you Emeka Ezeugo 'alias' Dr Rev King 'm', Donatus Chiazor 'm', Kelechi Chikere Queen 'f' on the same date, time and place in the aforesaid Magistrate district did unlawfully wound (1)Olisa Chiejina 'f' (2), Onuorah Chizoba (3), Uche Chukwu Iwoba (4), Vivian Ezeocha (5), Bunmi Olisa (6), Nwere Jessica (7) Ann Uzoh King by pouring petrol and setting fire on them and thereby committed an offence

In the name of God

●Lagos pastor faces murder charges as burns victim dies



Rev. King, accused of setting church members ablaze



Miss Kelechi Chikere, alleged to have poured fuel on victims

punishable under section 332 of the Criminal Code cap C17, Vol II, Laws of Lagos State, 2003.

After the charges were read, they pleaded not guilty, following which their counsel made an application for bail. The presiding Magistrate, Mr Teslim Elias, granted the suspects bail in the sum of N2m each and one surety each in like sum. According to the court, the surety must own landed property within the jurisdiction of the court and be a Director in a reputable company. The Ebute Metta court adjourned further hearing till August 11, 2006.

The following day, being a Thursday, Rev King was again charged for the second time before a Yaba Magistrate Court sitting in Lagos on a two-count charge of murder. King's counsel did not allow the charge to be read to him, arguing that the court (magistrate's court) has no jurisdiction to hear the charge. After the accused was walked into the dock, counsel to the accused objected to the charge being read to the accused person, arguing that the charge, as framed is a capital offence, which the court lacks the

jurisdiction to hear. The presiding magistrate, Mrs Adesola Ikpati while ruling on the objection by the defence matter, upheld the argument, noting that "yesterday's (Wednesday) charge (against the accused) is different from today's charge (Thursday) and the prosecution should have withdrawn the yesterday (Wednesday) charge".

The court condemned the prosecution for the fresh arraignment of the accused person and consequently struck-out the charge. The court said it lacked the jurisdiction to hear a murder charge, since it is a capital

offence and asked the Police to take the accused person back to Ebute Metta Magistrate court, Lagos, where the accused was first arraigned.

The fresh charges had accused Rev King of conspiracy and murder of one Ann Uzo King, who suffered first degree burns, having been allegedly doused with petrol and set ablaze by King. The said Ann was reported to have died at Faith City Hospital, Ajao Estate, Lagos on Wednesday.

The fresh charge according to a Police source who spoke to *Saturday Vanguard* was informed by the fact that one of the victims had died in hospital. But with the striking-out of the charge, it is now open for the state (Lagos) to take over the matter and arraign the suspect before a high court, which has jurisdiction to hear murder cases.

Rev King's men have however, stepped up their defence of their leader, as they have compared King's ordeal as the "trials and travails of any other messenger of God, who passed through thorns and rough edges to spread the good news".

According to Rev King's men, "the man of God (Rev King) has touched many with his numerous miracles and deliverances that have made his members even more faithful notwithstanding his present travails. He is widely known all over for the succour he gives people with HIV/AIDS diseases and divine immunization crusades he organises all over from time to time all over the country. His present trials and travails are similar to any other messenger of God, who will pass through thorns and rough edges to spread the goodnews. Narrow is the way and in the believer's kingdom, confirmed in the Holy Bible.

"King's travails started sometime in 2004 when a group of church members, who claimed they were stakeholders in the church and were instrumental to the increase in the church fortune wanted to hijack the church. Incidentally, the rebellion was led by a cousin of the pastor, one Timothy Ezeuko. The man of God was able to withstand the rebellion simply for the fact that all his congregation look upon him as their spiritual leader. Then,

naturally these rebels left the house of God and started fighting from outside since 2004 through various scandalous publications.

"The publications continued due to the church's tradition of not joining issues in the press. Firstly, they started with the allegation that the man of God fornicates and after a long while, the allegation only succeeded in making the man of God popular by increasing the strength of his congregation. They went further to sponsor Area Boys to attack church members and thereby creating the impression that the congregation is a violent congregation and once again this did not work. Then, they held out one man (name withheld) who has been estranged with his wife and the wife stays with her elder brother and her little children between one to nine years old to paint pictures of kidnapping and abduction and that did not work. Upon all these, the congregation was swelling and they went further to fabricate stories about imaginary deaths in the church. "All these did not work and they were convinced that it is no use fighting from outside that it is better to fight from inside. That was when they infiltrated some of the pastor's domestic staff.

"Coming to the issue at hand, the pastor has said for the umpteenth time that he was alerted by the cry of Miss Ann, the lady that was burnt (and mind you, she is the only person that was

burnt and no other). He came down and made sure the light was put out and the other witnesses (conspirators) who claimed they ran away when the pastor wanted to set them all on fire were all there pretending to be putting out the fire and on enquiry they told the pastor that it was generator, which he very much doubted and immediately he anointed the girl with holy oil and drove her to the hospital himself and with the others behind him in a separate car driven by Kosisoehukwu (the man they falsely alleged that is dead). This has been confirmed by the hospital.

"It came as a rude shock that these people disappeared into the thin air and resurfaced the next day on air at Galaxy Television with bandages all over claiming they were set ablaze by the Pastor. The most surprising thing now is that they work around freely with no scare or burnt to justify what they portrayed on air at Galaxy Television.

"We know that the innocent will not suffer, that is why one of the conspirators hid somewhere and claimed that he is dead has been confirmed by the police that he is alive and some church members have seen him at various point and confirmed that nothing happened to him.

"We still maintain that Rev King is innocent, and Miss Ann who is the principal victim and who is the only person with burns injury will be in a better position to state what happened to her and not impostors and she has said continually that the pastor is innocent", they said.

Unfortunately, Ann will not be able to talk again, for she died from her injuries on Wednesday. Where does all these take the pastor and his flock?

It was tough for us while the market remained shut

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family?

It was a double-headed effect. In a situation when you go out and come back with a polythene bag in your hands and suddenly those things were not there anymore it will have negative effect on you. In a situation where your children run to you to welcome you home, it is because you have something in your hand, so when you can no longer provide that, you know what the effect is. When I was in the house my children were asking me "Daddy what are you doing in the house today?" Honestly, we would not like a repetition of this situation and appeal to the government to consider the immediate and remote effect before taking such decisions.

Mr. Amadi Emmanuel of Shop No 50.

I started trading in this market in 1995. Unlike before the market has witnessed a great transformation, now interests have started emerging both from individuals and government. I lost several thousands of naira to the closure. If I must say here I think the rough estimate of how much that must have been lost to this cause by all the traders should be about N10 billion. On the state of our environment, we have a standing committee known as environmental committee that takes care of the market to make sure that it is clean at all time and it has been doing wonderfully well, doing what they suppose to do. The moment there is an instruction here, what you will see is matchets and guns by the hoodlums. The problems are being caused by these hoodlums. Our primary aim of coming to Lagos is to find our means of livelihood. Touts and hoodlums are the problem here because light and darkness can not meet and be in the same place.

How did you survive the trying period?

I exhausted my savings, but I must say that my wife was of a great assistance, she supported the family all through without any grumbling from her whatsoever. I commend her for her courage and understanding. This market seems to have been neglected in the past few years but government has suddenly developed interest in it and their interest has no human face, because in a property you have interest, what you always want to come out from there is peace.

In this case government through the council is pushing hoodlums here, they are throwing weight behind the hoodlums. When there was a slightest misunderstanding between members of KAI and our traders they went and hired thugs to attack us. How can this kind of people be working with the government? It's just unimaginable.

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