

CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS: A MORAL CONCERN IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the abundance of economic resources, attempts to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development have not yielded the desired fruit in Nigeria. Lack of political will and non-participation of Christians in politics has given ill-willed men the opportunity of monetizing politics and predentialism in Nigeria (popularly known as God-fatherism and God-son syndrome). The objectives of this paper are: to examine the level of Christian participation in politics considering the moral concerns in contemporary Nigeria; to examine the factors limiting Christian participation in politics in Nigeria and to determine the prospects of Christians' active participation in politics. In order to effectively analyze the issues raised above, the author used available materials in the library including journals and the internet to plumb the sources. Oral sources were also employed to supplement the written records in bringing about a better understanding of the essence of Christians' active participation in politics. Findings showed that the level of anti-social behaviour portrayed by politicians has hindered most Christians from participating in politics, the participation of Christians in politics will really help to reduce the level of corruption in Nigeria, cultural belief and tradition limits the participation of Christians in politics in Nigeria, level of God-fatherism and God-son syndrome has been a major impediment for Christians to participate in politics, and the level of occultism and witchcrafts' practices played within the corridor of politics has posed a great challenge to Christians. It was recommended that the leaders of various Christian denominations must encourage their local churches to organise seminars and workshops on the political situation in the country and the need for Christians to get involved, the Church needs to envision taking up the responsibility of producing Christian politicians who will make positive impact on the society, the Church must encourage and sponsor those who are gifted and have the right potentials for leadership to go into politics to enable them use their gifting in serving the people especially the marginalized and oppressed.

Introduction

Politics and Christianity are two different entities that help in the growth and development of human existence. Despite the fact that both have parallel practices, they share some common goals which are beneficial to man. As Christianity is important to human life so also politics even though some religious extremists do see politics as a dirty practice and abstain from it and also preach the same to their followers, yet the importance of politics to them is tremendous. Abogunrin (1984) in his paper titled “Towards a Unifying Political Ideology and Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria: A Christian View”, opines that Christianity and politics are two inseparable institutions in the human social psyche and structure. Political involvement is a vital tool for the development of every society. Any society that has good (moral) people representing them in the political circle, i.e., Presidents, Governors, Senators, House of Representatives, House of Assembly, Local Government Chairmen, Federal Ministers, Commissioners, Councilors, Heads of Government parastatals and agencies, etc. is bound to experience development and growth; while those societies that are unfortunate to have bad representatives (i.e. those that do not have the society at heart) do not experience development or the level of growth expected. Hence, concerned citizens are motivated to advocate for Christians to get involved in political processes howbeit with meticulous care especially during the electoral process, such that credible representatives with good reputation and ambition are elected. This is because development and growth of any society lies in the hands of those elected to represent the people.

Politics is about the acquisition of power and the use of such power. The Oxford *Dictionary of Words* define politics as “matters concerned with acquiring or exercising power, within a group or an organization”. It was Lasswell (1958) who defined politics as “who gets what, when and how”. Onyekpe (1998) defines the term politics as the struggle for power which itself is the authority to determine or formulate and execute decisions and policies, which must be accepted by the society. It can also be seen as the struggle for power of governance, especially executive authority (Onyekpe 1998). Onyekpe, (1998) however gives a caveat to the first part of his definition. According to him, the struggle for or the acquisition of power and the reaction of the society to it, depends greatly on the level of political development of the country. In an undemocratic society, it does not really matter whether the decisions and policies are accepted by the society. Thus, the value of political power or politics leaves little or no room for the people to have input, except where democracy has already been entrenched.

Ironically, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) had declared, “the missionaries did not impact to us the technique of governance. For anyone to be interested in the governance of the country was “blasphemous,” a Christian should not be interested in

politics; we were reminded that politics is a dirty game and true Christians should distance themselves from it” (p.viii, undated). Jakonda (2001) echoed this by saying “Christians were also discouraged by the missionaries from participating in partisan politics of any kind...Thus, the Christians for a long time were not able to articulate the relationship between their faith here on earth to the political situation of their countries.

Even though Christians in Nigeria do not wish to get involved in politics, the fact remains that Jesus Christ did not discourage political participation for the faithful(s). The reason for this unwillingness could be based on the fact that politics in Nigeria have been marred with corruption, violence, immorality, and even murder which are against the Christian ethics and believe. This and other morality issues have been limiting the participation of Nigerian Christians in politics. Looking at the antecedents of the Nigerian democratic experience, one is likely to conclude that the undemocratic practices in the polity are the results of the moral decadence in our society. These have grave consequences for the national development and it is therefore the responsibility of the church to attempt to transform the Nigerian political culture. (Dawari, 2014)

Christianity and Politics

There have been a wide variety of ways in which thinkers have conceived of the relationship between Christianity and politics, with many arguing that Christianity directly supports a particular political ideology or philosophy. The relationship between Christianity and politics is a historically complex subject and a frequent source of disagreement throughout the history of Christianity, as well as in modern politics between the “Christian right” and “Christian left”. Along these lines, various thinkers have argued for Christian communism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, Christian libertarianism, or Christian democracy. Others believe that Christians should have little interest or participation in politics or government.

Christians have always presented arguments based on the statement of Jesus Christ thus: “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:17-22). The first school of thought argues that this phrase has often been used to exclude from participation, Christians and clergymen who want to venture into politics. It should be noted that this argument is hinged on the belief, perhaps based on experience, that politics often corrupts Christians. Also, that political leaders use Christianity as a platform to deceive the people. (Kukah, 1998). Kukah, (1998) however, disagrees with this school of thought, with an exegesis on this passage. He wrote explaining that Jesus never meant that Christianity and politics should not mix, nor did He mean that Christians should not participate in politics rather the coin was a representation of the power of Caesar and that was why the coin had Caesar’s face. In the case of God’s kingdom, His authority is over

and above the realm of Caesar's empire. In this sense, both Caesar and his coin are under the aegis of God. It therefore follows that separating Christians from participation in politics is an aberration (Kukah 1998). Again, Alford (1981) suggests that there is a possibility of effective and successful governance if Christians actively participate in politics.

In Judaism, which provided background to Christianity, the God of Israel, Yahweh, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20ff), economy (Ex. 16) and God of obedience and moral virtues (Num. 21:4-8). Yahweh is all in all in Judaic traditional thought and politics. According to Leicester Webb, these societies are united by certain political values, closely associated with Christian doctrines and ethics as it relates to justice, morality, freedom, equity, etc. (Alford 1981). One of the great tragedies of the Protestant Reformation was the failure of the great Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther to develop a doctrine of law, politics and the state upon truly reformed and biblical lines. The Reformers did not bring about any radical departures in the spheres of political science, statecraft and jurisprudence for the simple reason, as the German scholar August Lang has shown, that they were so involved in theological disputes, religious controversy and the very struggle for survival that they simply did not have any time left in which to develop a reformed and biblical theory of politics and government. This and many other reasons have a great impact on the way Christians are viewing politics today. Dukor (1998)

Religion, of which Christianity is seen as one, seems to play a role in global politics. A number of recent conflicts have had strong religious dimensions. Think, for example, of Northern Ireland, where the divisions between the two conflicting sides broke down along the Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations of Christianity. For more than twenty years, Sri Lanka has seen a civil war putting Hindus and Buddhists against each other. In the former Yugoslavia, much of the bloodshed in the 1990s was explained in terms of ethnic rivalries between Catholic and Orthodox Christians as much as between Christians and Muslims. While many of the participants in these conflicts did not define their actions and motivations by direct reference to religion, the religious factor was important because it allowed the leadership of certain parties to raise the stakes by appealing to a greater cause. Religion is also present in world politics in ways far less dramatic and violent. For example, millions of Roman Catholics around the world recognize the spiritual authority of the Pope as the final arbiter, globally, of matters relating to Church doctrine. We can also see today the role of various religious groups in seeking to build new bases of mass popular support, such as the recent upsurge in conversions to Pentecostal Christianity in Africa.

Biblical perspective on politics

Many Christians have approached politics as if it lies outside their primary realm of responsibilities. Politics is often viewed as part of the "world" that we ought not to love. Often times our Christian life becomes confined to personal godliness, church activities, attending liturgies, youth meetings, and bible study. From this point of view, a Christian's involvement in politics is seen as a step into the secular world. From a biblical point of view, this dualistic distinction between the church and the world, between the sacred and the secular, is mistaken. The purpose of government is to enforce the Law... "Government is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:4), since most people cannot be ruled by love, they must be ruled by law. That is inevitable in an imperfect world. So God has ordained that there should be ruling authorities to keep law and order.

Government is an institution designed by God (like marriage) "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves" (Rom 13:1-2). Daniel had said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His...He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding'" (Dan 2:20-21).

You, O king, are a King of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all" (Dan 2:37-38).

One of the biblical injunctions to Christians over their rulers is to pray for them, thus: "Therefore I exhort first of all those supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" (1 Tim 2:1-3). Believers are also urged to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men (Tit 3:1-2). Christians are citizens of two kingdoms: One temporal and earthly, the other eternal and heavenly. We are called to participate in both the culture and politics of The City of Man, as this world was called by Augustine, while primarily focusing on the City of God. While our focus and heart should be directed to where our bridegroom is (heaven), we cannot neglect that we do have a role in the world which is to: "Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28c); "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15) and we are called by the Lord Jesus as preserving salt(s) and illuminating light(s) in the world. (Matt. 5: 13-14). Certainly, there

are places where the light of the gospel cannot illuminate unless there is participation in the polity; hence, Christians cannot shy away from politics which is the very determinant of the authority in power.

Factors militating against Christian participation in politics

It is important to consider some of the factors that appear to have prevented Christians from participating fully in politics.

1. *Do-or-Die Politics*: Political actors of all political persuasions in the country have been seen to undertake acts of violence in the quest for political position. Many aspirants are ready to do anything including killing their perceived political opponents to ascend to positions of leadership. Politically motivated assassinations are therefore common occurrences during electioneering campaigns.
2. *Politics of bitterness*: A situation where politicians begrudge one another is a common practice in the country. As a result, many politicians exhibit pseudo-loyalty. You will often hear the common phrase, "I am loyal" when indeed there is no measure of loyalty in the one speaking. Some politicians backbite each other; exhibiting high level of malice and revenge, thereby denying the poor masses the privilege of benefitting from the dividend of democracy; preventing them from enjoying social amenities like good roads, electricity, security, pipe bore water etc., because one of their opponents is from a particular area. Some leaders use their political offices to punish those they feel are not subject to their government or regime, those they feel are not in support of their missions especially when their missions and motives are not always right. Peradventure, anyone speaks up against them, that person will be in trouble.
3. *Money Politics*: It is a generally held notion that money answers all things. This view as applicable in politics mean that votes can be purchased with money. As a result, politicians exploit the economic downturn in the country to offer money for votes. It is no longer on one's credibility but the amount of money one shares to the people.
4. *Politics without Ideology*: Politics is supposed to be practiced based on ideologies. However, this does not seem to apply in Nigeria. The political parties in this country can hardly be distinguished by meaningful ideological persuasions.
5. *Politics of God-Fatherism*: There are those who have been elevated to positions of demi-gods in the political arena. These persons break the rules of engagement with impunity and single handedly determine those to be appointed into positions of authority with no consideration for the tenets of democracy. When their

benefactors get into positions of authority, they are made to pay “royalties” from the common wealth of the masses to the end that development is jeopardized.

6. *Emilokan Politics*: Emi (lokan) is a philosophical foundation of greed, selfishness, avarice, egoism and egotism of the average Nigerian politician. The above-mentioned are the true underlying motivation and drive of the average Nigerian politician. Obviously, the philosophical basis of political corruption in Nigeria is “Emi” Lokan, which reflects the extreme psychological egotism of Nigerian politicians. Their behavior is entrenched in Emi, Me, I, My, Self or selfishness, rather than Ours, Us, We, or Selflessness. The average Nigerian politician from Councilor to President is motivated by greed and selfishness. The concept of egoism is derived from ego, the Latin word for “I” in English, and represented in Yoruba etymology as “Emi”. Though egoism could be differentiated from psychological evaluation of one’s importance -egotism, the average Nigerian politician is egoism and egotism rolled into one. Corruption in Nigeria is largely personified in its politicians and senior civil servants. There is an attitude of collective greed among them and selfishness motivates their ambition to be president, motivates their ambition to be governor, senator or even councilor. They are all adherents of Emi (lokan) philosophy.

For instance, during the 2023 general elections, Tinubu infamously declared Emi (lokan) “it is my turn”. Atiku disgracefully pronounced, “I have paid my dues”. Turn by Turn mentality is an avenue for enrichment. They are greedy egotists who see themselves as self-enriching mini gods in society. They are everything but altruistic or patriotic. They act for themselves and in their best interests and their interests in the presidential seat are devoid of any altruism or sense of communism. Their political acts are self-regarding and all assuming. They have proved this repeatedly. Go and verify in Lagos, where one of them illegally acquired properties and money from the masses’ treasury. Their political life is grounded in psychological egoism, built on self-centeredness. They are devoid of psychological altruism, which is community centered, others-centered, and portray selflessness.

Nigerian politicians subscribe to Thomas Hobbes’ argument that “no man giveth but with intention of good to himself” (Hobbes, 1961). By agreeing with this mantra, they have reduced the rest of Nigerians to mere atavistic remnants of the anthropoid, ape. Ethical behavior and altruism are myths to them. They are not benevolent political actors. The modicum of values they have, thrives and survives on egomania and conceitedness. They have no sense of Kantian duties, and hence have no reason to

pursue any actions that do not benefit themselves. Their self-indulgence has led to an underdeveloped Nigeria.

Why should Christians be involved in Politics?

Government or politics is not the invention of power-hungry, self-seeking men and women. This was God's idea. In Romans 13: 1-4, Paul makes it absolutely clear that God has put the governing authorities in place. There is no authority except that which He allows, and His intention is that it should serve Him. It is a Command from God for His People to be involved in ruling the World. The word of God command man to rule and have dominion over creation under heaven –Genesis 1:26; Psalm 24: 1; II Corinthians 2: 10. The citizens of the country are looking for security, good legal system, equity, peace, integrity, honesty and transparent governance. This could only happen through a godly government that will ensure justice for all. For “when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: But when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. (Prov 29:2). Godly government will suppress evil, stand against abortion, homosexuality, lesbianism, gay-marriage, money laundry, killing, kidnapping, thuggery, and praise the wonderful works of upright citizens and other works.

Many have questioned: why do Christians pray for the bad economy to get better when other major countries of the world like England do not pray or seek God as much as we do, yet they prosper economically? The truth is if we are mindful to trace the history of the success of those countries like England, for instance, we would see that their roots were in Christianity. All their laws and policies were firmly rooted in the precepts of God and when the foundation is right, every other thing becomes right. This is why they all obey their laws and their leaders lead aright because they had their roots in Christianity where they were taught to do the right thing. Christians should enter into politics and point to God's righteous laws that can bring good benefit for the populace and lasting happiness as well.

In addition to the above stated reasons why Christians must participate in politics, consider the following,

- i. *Spiritual obligation to God.* Our spiritual obligation to God involves being active in politics. To be a Christian involves being a good citizen. Being a good citizen is a logical conclusion when you are first mature as a Christian. Jesus in His sermon on the mount pointed out that Christians are the “salt and light of the world.” (Matt. 5:13-14) Notice that Jesus was not saying what we “ought to be”. He was telling us what we are! True Christianity is not “trying” to be “salt and light”, true Christianity is salt and light. He encourages us not to “hide our lamp under a

bushel” but rather to display it in such a way that it has the maximum amount of exposure! (Matt 5:15) The researcher believes for us not to be involved and vocally heard is treason against God and His Word.

- ii. *Social obligation to others.* This means that to be a good citizen involves being willing to run for public office especially as God has endowed us with the right potentials and ideologies. So many a times we think of the government as “those people” in Abuja, whereas, they are our representatives. But we as a whole, the people of Nigeria, are the government. And the people who serve us in Abuja will only be as bad as those ill-willed men who run and whom we elect to public office! We are losing our best representative government not because of revolt or rebellion but by *default*! Leaving unrighteous and unprincipled men and women to lead Nigeria have landed the Nation to the type of laws and policies we have. Each of us as Christians has a social obligation to our families, our children, our communities and our future generations, to be engaged and involved in our political process. Are we so selfish that we don’t care what kind of country we will pass on to our children and our grandchildren? Is it not time again to say with the prophet Isaiah, “here am I, send me.”(Is. 6:8)
- iii. *Moral Obligation to Truth.* This infers that those who run for public office must stand for something true! It’s been said that “if you do not stand for something, you will fall for anything!” The problem we have today with “politics” and “political parties” is that we have unprincipled people who will say, do and confess anything to get elected and stay elected. It is clear that we have too many “politicians” and not enough “statesmen”. Rogers once gave the difference between a politician and a statesman, he said “a politician knows the truth but tells you what you want to hear but a statesman knows what you want to hear but tells you the truth anyway.” Ayubi (1991) Christians, especially in Nigeria therefore, must rise as true statesmen to stand for the truth so that God’s righteousness will rule over the earth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Participation in politics is a duty for Christians because; therein they can shine and give the universal salting test. The Nigerian contemporary society and the world needs change and only the elect (the called, the Christians) can exhibit that change. The bible says in Deuteronomy 28:28, that if we do not obey “the Lord will afflict us with madness, blindness, and confusion of the mind.” The world and Nigeria in particular, is in a state of madness, blindness and confusion because the states are ruled by the mad, blind, and confused people. From the research work, I was able to discover that many Christian politicians in Nigeria are not what they portray themselves to be; in bringing about

positive changes in the political system and governance of the country. This is because they are faced with many insurmountable challenges; therefore the tendency for Christian politicians to give up and instead sinks deep into corrupt practices. It was also observed that the church has not provided the necessary support that is required to enable Christian politicians become effective.

Findings showed that the level of anti-social behaviour portrayed by politicians has hindered most Christians from participating in politics, the participation of Christians in politics will really help to reduce the level of corruption in Nigeria, cultural belief and tradition limits the participation of Christians in politics in Nigeria, level of God-fatherism and God-son syndrome has been a major impediment for Christians to participate in politics, and the level of occultism and witchcrafts' practices played within the corridor of politics has posed a great challenge to Christians.

Although it is difficult to be an effective Christian politician in Nigeria given the way politics is played, it is not impossible. The researcher firmly believes that Christians whom God has called to go into politics can be effective and make a difference in the society. Christian politicians themselves must be willing to change their perceptions, attitudes and behaviour for them to be effective. The church in Nigeria has a very important role to play in enabling Christian politicians to be effective. Above all, Christian politicians need to be completely dependent on God to enable them overcome the challenges they face.

The paper recommends that the leaders of various Christian denominations must encourage their local churches to organise seminars and workshops on the political situation in the country and the need for Christians to get involved, the Church needs to envision taking up the responsibility of producing Christian politicians who will make positive impact on the society, the Church must encourage and sponsor those who are gifted and have the right potentials for leadership to go into politics to enable them use their gifting in serving the people especially the marginalized and oppressed

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