

NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE OF AFRICAN PRACTICING CHRISTIANS PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.18679.91041

Abstract

Many practicing Christians especially in this part of the world see participation in politics as a sin or an abomination rather than seeing it as a responsibility that every good practicing Christian needs to fulfill for the betterment of mankind generally and Christians in particular. Here in Nigeria many strong practicing Christians see politics as a worldly thing; a business that is very dirty, alas, all their civic rights are being denied, even their freedom of worship and their right to life and perpetration of every other ill in the society against them and rest of the citizenry. Their apathy towards politics is based on their ignorance of the distinction between liberal theology and liberation theology. Presently, another opportunity has been provided for Christians to right this anomaly by 2023 here in Nigeria. It is in lieu of this latest opportunity that the researcher wishes to explore on the title 'Christians in Nigerian Politics'. In other to prove that it is neither a sin nor abomination for one to participate in the governance, in as much as, it will lead to the glory of God and salvation of mankind starting here on earth (earthly paradise); as the bible made it clear to us in both the books of Apostles Peter and Paul that every government is ordained by God. In other to execute this task the researcher will apply both analytic and expository methods in order to substantiate his beliefs and opinions why practicing Christians must not shy away from politics; rather embracing and seeing it as their own contributions and continuation of Christ's salvific mission which was started from Calvary for the good of mankind.

Key words: Christian, personality, politics, political participation, liberal theology and liberation theology

Introduction

One of the major problems with most believers (practicing Christians) in this part of the world is that they always love to manufacture sins for themselves and for others while they have not successfully observed the Ten Commandments that are widely accepted as the laws of God. It is their love for manufacturing new sins that made most of them to consider politics and political participation as one of the cardinal sins, hence, their shying away from it; forgetting the biblical injunction that says that all power belongs to God; including political powers. As heir to the kingdom they ought to possess everything belonging to their heavenly father including political powers, but they often run away from it, thereby failing in their duties as the salt of the world.

This is because salt is expected to give taste to a tasteless food, so if Nigerian politics is not tasty or sweet as expected Christians are expected to go into it to give it the necessary taste that is expected of it, instead of shying away from it. Christians ascribing to themselves the light of the world should live up to their illuminative responsibility by lightening up the darkness in the Nigerian politics by participating and taking over from the unbelievers in order that things will be made right. For the bible says "Let your light so shine on earth so that they may see your work and glorify your father who is in heaven".¹ One's light is not to be seen shine in isolation, rather in whatever one does including politics. One cannot imbibe all the virtues in the bible without practicing any of them. It will be like a person that lit a light and hid it under the bushel instead of placing it on the mountain or table top for men to see with it. The bible made it very vivid that "faith without work is death in itself".² Reading all the verses in the bible that is needed to correct the ills in the society without participating in politics which is the paramount ways through which one can be involve in impacting in the society is not just a sin but an abomination. So Christians can now see that politics is not a sin but not participating in politics is a cardinal sin. For it is written "when one knows what is good and fails to do it, one has committed sin"³, therefore, when a born again Christian knows the bible so well and fails to execute it, he/she is wanton in the things of God for there is no area that the virtues that are learnt from the bible are restricted to, including politics which many born again are shying away from.

Moreover, born again Christian apathy towards politics has taken so many tolls on Christianity in Nigeria. It has led to so many unfavorable decision and policies taken against Christianity. It has also led to the depriving of Christians fundamental human right and other sorts of marginalization and discriminations mated against Christians and Christianity in Nigeria. The latest choice of Muslim-Muslim ticket by the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) party as we are gearing up to 2023 presidential election is one among many tolls that Christians have to pay for their apathy towards political participation and the worst things are yet to come if Christians do not retrace their steps and embrace political participation by being very active in politics in all its levels, spheres, shapes and forms.

Conceptual Clarification

For us to understand thoroughly our discourse it is imperative that we classify some of our concepts so that ambiguity and complexities will be minimized and exactitude and comprehension will be achieved.

Christianity: This is one of the two major religions in Nigeria. It is the religion or faith of those that believes in Christ, that is, the sect that believes that Jesus Christ is the only son of God; one of the Trinity that came and died for the sake of mankind. For them Jesus Christ is the lord and true saviour of mankind. The practitioners of Christianity are known as Christians. Christians in Nigeria are categorized into two, namely: nominal Christians and practicing Christians.

Nominal Christians are those that go to church on Sundays and those that see Christianity as a social group or association. For these people too Christianity is a religion that is in vogue that replaced the archaic African Traditional Religion (ATR) which is also known as paganism. On the other hand practicing Christian according to Osho is/are the Christian(s) “who see their faith as a way of life and living. It could also be said to be any individual who is a ‘born again’ in the sense Jesus meant in John 3 verses 3”.⁴

Political participation: hereunder we shall be making a brief clarification of political participation, but before doing that it is pertinent that we know what politics is. Politics in the context it is used here is the process, act and all the activities that are involved in selecting and electing the managers of every organization, association and society at large. One can simply say that politics is life because anywhere it is lacking anarchy will be the order of the day. However, politics means different things to various individuals, Dung affirms:

Politics mean different things to different people. To some it could mean the government, to some; drawing others to join a political party, to some it means sharing and looting government resources, to some; exercising power and authority over others while to some it is a civic responsibility, and to some; politics is a dirty game.⁵

Political participation is all the political activities and processes which people engage in, to bring about change in the polity and development in the society. The change may be positive or negative in form. Dabesaki opines that political participation typically takes various forms it:

Ranges of activities in which...people could be involved, which are potentially directed at the individuals who get into political office and the kinds of decisions they make. Such activities may include: voting, voter education, taking part in protests and membership of political parties. The ends which these efforts seek are varied, but the global goal is to achieve social change and development.⁶

Political participation from what has been said above is not restricted to only none Christians or nominal Christians but practicing Christians too in the sense that it involves “people’s responsibility concerning their lives”.⁷ Therefore, any way one practically impacts positively to the polity or the society is known as political participation.

Liberal and liberation theology: Theology as we know it is the study of/about God(s) and other supernatural/metaphysical entities/beings. However, for the purpose of this paper attention will be given briefly to liberal and liberation theology because it is part of what will guide the thorough understanding of this paper. Moreover, people often misunderstood the difference between the two and many do not know about them at all.

Liberation theology is the type of theology that is against “the tenets of evangelicals, it does not believe in the apostolic creed and miracles”.⁸ Jehovah’s Witnesses is an instance of those that practices this type of theology. Liberation theology on the other hand believes in freeing the society, the oppressed and those

discriminated against, it believes in the goodness of the people and society at large. Jesus Christ is one of the chief proponents of liberation theology for he always sought for the good of the people. Politics is part of liberation theology; hence, we have political theology. Political theology according to Gutierrez is “a theology of liberation and is a theological reflection born of experience of shared efforts to abolish the (*any*) unjust situation to build a different society, freer and more human”⁹ (*italics mine*) which ought to be the ultimate goal of every good practicing Christian.

Why Christians shy away from politics

Many practicing Christians avoid politics because they believe that it is a dirty activity/game, thus everyone engaging in it is invariably dirty. And the bible declares that we should stay away from iniquities by not having anything to do with unbelievers or sinners. It was also stated in the bible that evil company corrupts good manners. As St. Paul puts it, “Do not be deceived for evil company corrupts good manners.”¹⁰ And practicing Christians do not want to be corrupted, because associating oneself with politics invariably, involves dealing with politicians which they assumed are all dirty because they engage in a dirty activity which is politics; thereby going contrary to the teachings of St. Paul which also is the word of God that is contained in the bible. Osho corroborates; “most Nigerian Christians still fear politics like death. Many of them hate politics like shit. Their beef with politics is that politics is dirty and should be avoided like a plague. They claim that politics is so bad that it will be very difficult for any genuine or practicing Christian to successfully navigate the terrain of politics without soiling their hands in sin.”¹¹ Furthermore, there have been many cases of broken homes after a couple has occupied a political office. It has also been noticed that many people, become miserable after been involved in politics. It is believed by some politicians that those who participate in politics must arm themselves with charms else one will be dethroned or killed by their political opponents or colleagues, hence, practicing Christians disinterest in politics.

Similarly, most practicing Christians in Nigeria shun politics as a result of their belief that politics here is covered in darkness and operate in a cult-like manner.

To select candidates for available positions in some instances, for example, they may decide to consult their oracles just as a good Christian would consult the Holy Spirit. To secure loyalty from members and ensure their investment is not

jeopardized by over-ambitious or rogue beneficiaries, they force new entrants or aspirants vying for political offices to swear oaths of allegiance to the investors and the cause in the name of their god.¹²

This is because here in Nigeria politicians “see politics purely as a business, so they invest heavily in it expecting to reap back heavily when they or their candidates and political party triumph at the polls. As a result they run their political business in a cult-like manner”¹³ thereby making diabolism and occultism evident in Nigerian politics. Practicing Christians observing such practices distance themselves from Nigerian politics.

Some practicing Christians in Nigeria have cited corruption as part of their reasons towards political apathy. The fact remains that every section/sector of Nigerian society is corrupt but it seems that politicians are the harbingers and corruption personified. They are seen as the mirror through which other countries of the world see the types and levels of corruption in Nigeria. It is the activities of Nigerian politicians that made it possible for the country to be placed among the most corrupt country in the world. Because of this, practicing Christians in Nigeria abhor politics.

Nigerian Christians none interest in politics could also be traced to colonial masters’ role during the colonial era. Kore held on this point that:

When the colonial master came to the country (Nigeria), they established schools, but the Muslims would choose to read courses that are more of leadership and they would tell Christians to embrace sciences. This he affirmed that, the Muslims always seek civic position who would rule while Christians always worked under them. Till this day in most tertiary institutions in the northern part of Nigeria, Christians are being denied to read leadership and administration courses. He sums it that the Muslims yearn for power but the Christians neglect such.¹³

Dung concludes, “Many Christians found sciences more important than participation in politics”, up till this moment.

Instances of political participation in the scripture

Practicing Christians believe in the scripture; the bible. They believe in it and every bit of what it says but one wonders if they have not come across where he gave man the right and power to participate and partake in everything in the world. God gave man, practicing Christians involve, charge of all things in the universe including politics. Right from the book of Genesis God after creation of the world gave man the exclusive other to rule over them and control all of them. That was the first place that God gave practicing Christians order to participate in politics. This is because politics is one of the ways through which one can rule and control.

Again in the book of Mathew 6 in the Our Lord's Prayer there are verses that say, "thy kingdom come....thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".¹⁴ Implications of the above verses are that God is a king and for any king to emerge there must be politics and God is the model which we look up to. That is, the reason the bible says that we must be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect. Then if God our heavenly father who is perfect is a politician, who are we mere mortal not to participate in politics. It has always being said also that there is hierarchy in heaven; meaning that there is politics in heaven. So, if it is the will of God that politics should be allowed in heaven, then, why does one as a practicing Christian abhors it here on earth? While we demand every day that the will of God should be done on earth as it is in heaven. Does it mean that practicing Christians do not know what they are asking for or that they are asking it for asking sake? Therefore, if politics is practiced in heaven as has been shown here, practicing Christian here in Nigeria should partake in it, to give it the touch that it lacks. Little wonder St. Paul in his letter to the Romans declares that, "Government derives its authority from God to promote good and restrain evil. This mandate is expressly stated in Romans 13:1-7. Paul again urges that prayers should be made "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life".¹⁷ If politics is evil as some practicing Christians perceive St. Paul would not have said such.

Practicing Christians in Nigeria should not feign ignorance of God's rule of his people Israel in the ancient time through theocracy.

Here, God governed His own nation Israel and exercised the ecclesiastical duty on them. Moses, a prophet, a priest and ruler instituted the representative government by "making rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (Exod 18:21, Remnant Study

Bible). The men of Israel asked Gideon to rule over them and their sons (Judges 8:22, Remnant Study Bible). King Saul and David ruled over people of Israel respectively (1 Sam 9:1-26, 16:1-23 NKJV). For instance, Daniel interpreted king Nebuchadnezzar's dream for him where he was rewarded and ruled some subjects in Babylon (Dan 2:36-45, NKJV).¹⁸

Apart from the above instances there are also other cases, such as: the case of Joseph son of Jacob in Egypt who as a deputy to Pharaoh was able to save his family from famine. We know the cases of Queen Esther, Modecai, King Solomon, Meshach, Shedrack and Abednego, Nehemiah, etc. All these people were able to contribute to the development and transformation of the fate of the people of Israel both at home and in exile because they were all politicians.

Therefore, for Nigeria to be saved, practicing Christians in Nigeria rise from their political slumber and come forward to wrestle the country from the hands of political predators we have here. They should do this successfully by becoming very active in politics and eschew their apathy towards politics and governance. "It should be noted that one circular or the creation of a department of politics and governance by any ministry cannot by itself change a deeply entrenched mentality. Teachings, programs and announcements to uproot the old mindset must be introduced and sustained".¹⁹

Consequences of Nigerian Practicing Christians Apathy towards Politics

Practicing Christians have paid dearly for their apathy towards politics. They have paid dearly in so many aspects that a whole text book cannot contain the toll that it has taken on them talk more of this paper. However, some of the prices practicing Christians have to pay for political apathy are as contained below.

Christians in Nigeria has being systematically excluded from the hotspot of policies and decisions making in Nigeria. Most a times none of them is included when policies that matters and affects them negatively is being made. Dung corroborates, "because of Christian's refusal to participate in the civic roles; laws would be imposed on them, whether positively or negatively".²⁰ For instance, in Nigerian constitution the world Sharia and Islam is mentioned so many times and there is nowhere that Christianity is mentioned at all. It could be observed that Christians are suffering from legislative minority syndrome. From the above one

could see that Nigeria is made up of Christians-Muslims mainly and some other religion, but currently Nigeria is gradually and systematically tilting towards complete Islam backed by the constitution. In 2016 for instance, a bill was passed in the national house of representative and on a second reading to enact 'Sharia law' to be a 'criminal law in the country.

Again, legislative minority syndrome experienced by practicing Christians due to washing their hands off politics has led to hopelessness and despair of the poor, the powerless and the down trodden today in Nigeria. This is because there is no one to speak for them. The most affected by this act of none believers' callousness in Nigeria are Christians who always:

Groan and receive the consequence of their refusal to participate in the civic exercises. This is true because, Christians ethics and values are denied, resulting to insurgent killings of Christians, Churches being bunt and demolished without questioning its perpetrators. Furthermore, Christian girls are forced to marriage, some are converted to Islamic religion forcefully while their parents have nothing to say or do anything on it. Christians have being denied employment opportunities they are qualified for, Christian students are not admitted into certain universities, and denial of worship among other disfranchised rights.²¹

This is akin to Sarma's observation that, "Christians are experiencing silent persecution and death, because they have refused to join politics and consider it as evil. According to him, the greatest hindrance to advance God's kingdom here on earth is that the people of God have refused to lead in the public square".²² In addition, according to Gado, "churches have suffered demolition, confiscation of property, abduction, forceful marriage and conversion to Islam of young Christian girls, and discriminatory employment against indigenous Christians. The Church has also been denied renewal of expired land titles in many northern states with threats by the government to recover the land which the Church had occupied for over 60 years".²³

The most nauseating and annoying toll Christians are paying currently for their nonchalant attitude and total abhorrence of practicing Christians from politics in

Nigeria, is that all the strategic positions in government are being occupied by the Muslims; from presidency to heads of service, from central bank to Nigeria National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) even the so called new NNPC, from education to health, and others so numerous to mention. The heads of legislative, executive and judicial arms of government in Nigeria today are all Muslims. To add salt to injury and to mock Christians as Nigerians are building up for 2023 general election the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) decided on Muslim-Muslim ticket, something that has not been heard of in Nigeria before, considering the fact that Nigeria is a religious sensitive nation. They were able to conceive of it because of lack of interest in politics by practicing Christians in Nigeria.

Why Should Practicing Christians participate in politics in Nigeria?

It is now crystal clear that Nigeria is at the brink and that Christians are at the receiving end. The first law of nature is law of survival and as humans which Nigerian Christians are first, before becoming Christians they need to do anything legitimate to survive and politics is the phenomenon. That is to say they need to participate in politics to rescue themselves and remedy the nation, so that the people will once again rejoice. For it is stated in the bible that, “when the righteous rules the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule the people groan”.²⁴ When practicing Christians participate in politics, they will be able to be among the parliamentarians that will make the laws that favour the people.

In a system that works the legislative is the first arm of government that is saddled with the responsibility of formulating laws that govern the people at national assembly in the case of Nigeria (comprising the houses of senate and representatives), state assembly (known also as the House of Assembly) down to the local councilors at the local government level. Since this is the case in Nigeria, practicing Christians need to participate in politics because the Nigeria legislative system makes their decision by the majority rule with the phrase, ‘let the I’s have it’. The implication according to Dung is that, “the fewer the Christian representative in the legislative arm, the quicker their bills and decisions are trashed in the dustbin”.²⁵ Bodunrin added, “if Christians refused to partake in politics then they will have themselves to blame when the unbelievers took the power and promulgate laws against them. It is not a good reason to get out of the race if some men have abused its privilege; in fact it’s a challenge to be involved”.²⁶ The American Presbyterian magazine in Dung also subscribes to the notion, “when Christians are rightly informed and motivated, they change the character of political debate. They will bring the moral standards of God’s kingdom into the

civic realm of Nigerian politics, and thereby become agents of His common grace for His provision for those who believe as well as those who do not”.²⁷ This is in line with what the scripture enjoins us that when the righteous rules, the people rejoice and when the wicked rules the people groan. “Instead of groaning against bad governance, Christians need to participate in the political affairs”²⁸ Dung concluded.

Again, it is said that desperate situations need desperation actions; the actionable thing now in the current terrible political situation of Nigeria is that practicing Christians and people of good will should eschew political apathy and embrace politics; to lead the way to a godly and sane nation. Osho looking at terrible state of politics in Nigeria invites “all people of good and living conscience to step in and show the way”.²⁹

He further avers that:

Christians can join politics to uproot all the vices and redefine how the game is played. Darkness shines when the light refuses to shine. Christians can create a new pathway in politics in Nigeria by establishing a new party based on Godly principles and foundations. They can sanitize the system also by pouring into an existing political party in their large number as an army of occupation to subdue all the evil elements. The reason Christians haven’t been able to step in to change the narrative is that the average Nigerian Christian loves to fast and pray more than getting involved in the system. Many prefer to fold their hands and watch instead of rising up to support what is obvious to everyone as a good and desirable thing.³⁰

Currently Nigeria is operating a system of government called by Olagunju ‘cryptocracy’. Cryptocracy Olagunju opines implies “secret government; hidden government or invisible government”.³¹ A government that is controlled by shadows; a government operated by people that are not known by the people that elected them. It is clear that today Nigeria is being controlled and governed by none government actors or terrorists who determine what happens. In most part

of the country it is the terrorists and outlaws that call the shots; tax are being paid to them and they determine which days people are to go out and the days that they should not; and anybody that flout their orders pays dearly for it. Unfortunately, these terrorists hide under the cloak of Islam to execute their dastardly act. Considering the above it is pertinent that practicing Christians join politics to restore sanity and wrestle the nation from the hands of bandits and terrorists that are currently in charge. This they could do by venturing and fixing themselves in all aspects of governance where they will be able to implement all the ethics and principle learnt from the bible in administering and discharging of their duties and responsibilities as politicians, for the betterment and sustainable development of Nigeria. To bring about the required and desired positive change that everyone longs for. This is because neither prayers alone nor angels that bring about change in any nation but only men of good will and good conscience do.

Solution to Practicing Christians Apathy towards active Politics in Nigerian

Practicing Christians' apathy towards politics in Nigeria is a problem that is costing body of Christ a lot today in the country; only remedy is what is needed now. Amongst the solution to the problem are:

- i. There should be orientation and re-orientation by the church leaders and other stake holders in the body of Christ to their followers by letting them know that there is no biblical backing for political apathy rather, the bible supports it (Romans 13: 1-7; 2 Timothy 2: 1-2).
- ii. The scripture must not be interpreted literally rather it must be interpreted in a way that it must meet the existential need of the people. This will enable the body of Christ see the need to join politics. The people of Israel demanded for a leader when things did not go the way it ought to and the leader was choosing among them. Therefore, as Nigerian Christians including the practicing ones are looking for a leader; they should be ready to give themselves up for leadership.
- iii. Civic education should be as a matter of urgency made to be part of the Sunday school. This will encourage Christians to see that it is part of their heavenly race to participate in politics; by making them know that it is a sin of omission for them to be complacent towards politics. Good work is counted as one of the criteria for Christians to make heaven. "Engaging in "good works" should include participating in the political process because of the legitimate and significant role of government. The decisions made by government have a substantial impact on people and

- the way we interact with them. A Christian's worldview should include a political theology that recognizes every area of life that must be included in the "good works" of believers, especially politics, an area with significant real-life implications for people".³²
- iv. Practicing Christians in Nigeria should be made to know that most changes in the world today were made by Christians. For instance, "outlawing infanticide, child abandonment and gladiatorial games in ancient Rome, ending the practice of human sacrifice among European and African cultures, banning pedophilia and polygamy, and prohibiting the burning of widows in India. William Wilberforce, a committed Christian, was the force behind the successful effort to abolish the slave trade in England. In the United States, two-thirds of abolitionists were Christian pastors. In the 1960's, Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian pastor, helped lead the civil rights movement against racial segregation and discrimination".³³ Practicing Christians in Nigeria should be made to know that they can achieve more than these if they join politics where they can easily influence the decisions and policies of the government.
 - v. Finally, practicing Christians should involve and engage themselves in all forms and levels of politics which involves: voters' registration, voter education, taking part in protests against bad government, creating of political awareness, membership of political parties and being vote and voted, etc.

Conclusion

When a good man is on the throne the people rejoice, but when a bad man is on the throne the people mourn. It is high time that practicing Christians come out and participate in active politics so that the people will rejoice and the kingdom of God will for real come on earth as it is the wish of the body of Christ.

It is also pertinent to remind everyone that is a Nigerian including the practicing Christians that Nigerians have no other country except this one. Nigeria is ours to plough and not to plunder. Today Nigeria is being plundered; but all the men of good will want it ploughed. It is not the dead people neither the angels nor God in heaven will plough it for us but we mortals. Evil is perpetuated in the land not just because of the activities of evil men but majorly, because good men and men of good will refuse to act. Therefore, practicing Christians should not expect any

miracle to happen aside themselves, they are the change that will happen; they are the change the people of Nigeria are waiting for. Thus, practicing Christians arise!

Endnote

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