

Formation of Christians for Participation in Democratic Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article emphasises the need for the formation of Christians for participation in democratic elections as many Christians are apathetic towards the process. Samples of turnouts from few Christian dominated states during the 2023 presidential election from the North, South, East, and West of the country demonstrate this apathy. The article highlights certain predispositions that constitute obstacles to the commitment of Christians to civil elections. It identifies theological pointers to God's respect for the democratic freedom of choice of leaders. Hence, Christians are to avoid viewing politics as dirty. Instead, they are to go into the political arena and participate by voting and coming out to be voted. The article argues that such participation will ensure the election of credible leaders that will respect human dignity, promote the common good and bring about the desired peace and the development for which the country dearly yearns. The article, therefore, proposes the urgent need for conscience formation for democratic participation.

Key words: *Formation, Conscience, Christians, Participation, Democratic, Elections, Nigeria, Predispositions*

1. Introduction

World over, democracy, which involves elections, has become the most accepted method of electing leaders in society. The Church prefers democracy above other systems of government because democracy respects the rights of the people to choose who governs them and how they are governed. Yet, many Christians are apathetic towards the processes of elections in Nigeria. Samples of election turnouts of few Christian dominated states during the 2023 presidential election, from the North, South, East, and West of the country demonstrate this apathy. Plateau State recorded only 39.83% voter turnout, Benue State witnessed only 28.72%, Rivers State had only 15.66%, Akwa-Ibom registered only 24.92% turnout, Anambra State witnessed only 23.51%, Abia State had only 18.00%, Ekiti State saw a 31.10% and Ondo State had only 28.62% turnout (Amata, www.dataphyte.com. 20.04.2024).

In a research, “An Assessment of Factors Responsible for Low Voter Turnout in Nigeria: A Literature Review”, Rashida Adamu Oyoru, of the Department of Politics and Governance, Kwara State University, Nigeria, points out that poor voter education, high incidence of corruption, weak political parties, lack of trust in the electoral umpire, failure of elected officials to fulfill their campaign promises, as the leading causes of low voter turnout in Nigeria (2023, p. 300-301). A PREMIUM TIMES report of 5th March 2023, from election observers, written by Kabir Yusuf, further states that the late deployment of election officials and materials by the electoral umpire, failure of democratic leaders to deliver development to the people, violence, and voter suppression, are some of the reasons responsible for the low voter turnout.

In addition to these factors, the apathy could be attributed to a number of predispositions held over the years by many Christians towards political engagement. The first is the “pious predisposition” which regards the political arena as muddy and dirty. Christians with this predisposition consider politics as a dirty game or something that is mundane and *ipso facto*, antithetical to values of the Christian faith. Hence, their position is that a good Christian must keep away from the political arena if he wants to conserve his Christian purity.

The second is the “abdication predisposition” where some Christians entirely shifts their responsibility in the choice of a political leader to God due to the believe that God is the sole giver of power. This believe is from a theocratic mindset that God alone appoints who become the leader of the country. This predisposition gives rise to the thinking that their involvement in democratic elections does not count. So, they resign from participating in the elections because they believe that whether they vote or not, God decides who becomes their leader.

The third is the “end-time predisposition” fueled by the eschatological Parousia syndrome also known as the end time syndrome. This predisposition explains negative events of the moment and experiences of bad leadership, in the light of the eschatology. They believe there is nothing they can ever do, including participating in elections, to bring about a change in governance and towards building a better society. The fourth is the “our votes do not count” predisposition. This predisposition is powered by a feeling of helplessness in the face of the activities of corrupt politicians. Such Christians believe that their votes do not count. They believe that no matter how people turnout to vote, Nigerian politicians will always have their way by manipulating the process in their favour. Christians with this predisposition, therefore, feel discouraged and do not see any need to come out and cast their votes on election days.

The article discourages the lethargic attitude of Christians towards participating in democratic elections. It argues that participation in democratic elections is an obligation for Christians because by their participation, they entrench good leadership for a just society. Christians are not to be indifferent

towards the electoral space. They are to always come out to vote and should also present themselves to be voted so that they can permeate the society with their good Christian values. Christians who fail to participate in democratic elections should know that they are culpable. Christians who fail to exercise their God-given democratic franchise lack moral standing to complain when they suffer under a bad leader that emerges due to their negligence.

2. The Moral Problematics from these Predispositions

Christians who have the pious predisposition see the arena of politics as a gutter, where anyone who ventures into, gets muddled up in the “*poto-poto*” of sin. This predisposition is traceable to the vestiges of dualism where the material is counterposed to the spiritual. It makes many Christians put up cold shoulders towards issues of politics and civil rights in general. This mentality makes Christians lukewarm because of the feeling that they have no sense of obligation to engage in the political affairs of the nation.

Those with the abdication predisposition, believe that God alone grants power. Hence, they act from the conviction that there is nothing they can do that will affect the political decision on who governs them. Only God does. Hence, theirs is just to pray to God to choose a good leader for them. However, this category of people believe that God could decide to reveal to them, beforehand, who could be their leader. So, they pray and rely on some “men of God” to receive some esoteric knowledge through visions or prophecies on whom God has appointed to become their leader.

This is the predisposition that generates the oxygen that gives life to the activities of some zealous Christian clerics in Nigeria, who crown themselves electoral prophets. At every electoral season, they come up with claims of divine revelations on whom God has anointed to be the next president of Nigeria. They assert themselves as functioning in the pattern of the biblical prophets of old. Such Christian clerics usually make their so-called prophetic declarations in favour of different candidates. After a winner is declared, those whose so-called prophecies came true celebrate while those whose so-called prophecies did not come true, attempt to proffer justifications for why theirs did not come to pass (Bala, July 2022. p. 16).

Christians with the “end-time” predisposition try to convince people that the bad governance we are suffering is a fulfilment of the happenings preceding the second coming of Christ which he had foretold as recorded in the Holy Bible (cf. Mt. 24; Lk. 21). Those with this predisposition, perhaps, forget that it is in this same “end time” that the modern-day United Arab Emirates became the world center of attraction, where a desert of Dubai has been turned into a world class city. Theologies flowing from this “end-time” mentality cow the people into accepting our governance woes as unavoidable woes to endure instead of doing something to overcome them. It fits sufferings arising from challenges of poor leadership into the context of eschatology. The people are made to see the things

happening as normal, thereby developing a quasi-hopeless attitude towards the hope and possibility of a better society.

The fourth predisposition of “our votes do not count”, is a thinking of helplessness in the face of the activities of corrupt politicians. This has led many electorates into a collective self-pity, despondency, hopelessness, and loss of confidence in the nation's electoral process. People with this predisposition, do not seem to realise that Nigerian politicians have gotten away with such manipulations in the past because electorates left the electoral space to the politicians. It can be seen that recent efforts by Nigerian electorates through civil society groups and other coalitions of political groups are putting the politicians on their toes. Through the efforts of these groups, a number of the antics of these corrupt politicians are exposed before or after the elections.

The four predispositions above have made Christians to treat issues of politics with cold shoulders and election matters with levity. This has led to the situation where Christians shrink and compromise their political space thereby making their political impact less felt. Sadly, some Christians compromise their electoral right based on the above predispositions, only to later engage in sharing write-ups accusing others of rigging the elections. Or, they stay away from elections, only to run to God when hit by the effect of a bad governance.

The different predispositions have left Christians in a pool of confusions, complications and apparent contradictions created by self-acclaimed electoral prophets, thereby raising a dust of problematic questions crying for answers. Does our Christian God contradict himself or is he a God of confusion? Do those clerics really understand the relationship between theocracy and democracy? Do such clerics and their followers really understand the power of freedom and choice which God endowed human beings with? Are they aware of the progression in the Church's deep rich insights on the exercise of civil rights?

3. The Church on Participation in Civil Elections

The mind of the Church on Christian participation in civil elections is contained in her Catholic social teaching also known as Catholic social thoughts or Catholic social doctrine. This is “a branch of moral theology that addresses contemporary issues within the social structures of society: political, economic and cultural” (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022). In her social thoughts, the Church officially lays down principles or parameters for social engagement by her children. Catholic social teaching draws its arguments from reason, natural and divine laws. Its arguments are on values that are in accord with the nature of every human being (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28). In her social teaching, the Church's prophetic voice has spoken very loudly on democratic participation.

As mother and teacher (*Mater et Magistra*, no. 3), the Church offers a Catholic vision of reality as the foundation for decision making. Through this vision, the

consciences of her children enable them to evaluate social issues and be able to take informed decisions that are at the service of the human person. The Catholic social teaching is a body of faith-based criteria for prudent judgements on social, political, and economic issues. These Catholic Social Teaching stand on a tripod of the principles of human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022).

Although the social teachings of the Church have roots in the Old and New Testaments, it has found expression in its modern form in Papal encyclicals, conciliar documents, and statements from Bishops' conferences in the past 100+ years (<https://socialconcerns.nd.edu>. 13.11.2022). These are reflections on the social issues of the day in the light of faith and natural reason, throwing light on how to evaluate and address particular social issues in the areas of politics, the economy and culture.

By her social teachings, the Church has identified the kind of government and economic systems that best promote human freedom, convince her children on why the Christian faith must be brought to bear in the public space, to rebuild our good cultural values, place businesses at the service of human dignity, and many other vexing issues facing our modern society (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022). In her social thought, mother church calls on her children to live out her faith in practical terms since that faith calls them to love God and to love their neighbour in every situation, especially those living under the shackles of poverty. They are to trade on the footsteps of Christ our Master, to make the justice, love, and peace of God tangible in an unjust and broken world (13.11.2011).

The social thoughts of the Church are an integral part of her evangelizing mission. They are about human promotion. Explaining the link that exists between the social thought of the Church and evangelization, Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, writes:

Nothing that concerns the community of men and women – situations and problems regarding justice, freedom, development, relations between peoples, peace - is foreign to evangelization, and evangelization would be incomplete if it did not take into account the mutual demands continually made by the gospel and by the concrete, personal and social life of man (*Compendium of the Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church* no. 66).

This explains why Catholic social teaching has clear cut objectives and stands on solid principles and objectives which need to be clearly understood. Pope Saint John Paul II lamented that the Catholic social thoughts were often being cited by some groups as an “instrument” to promote their own agenda. He pointed out the need for children of the church, especially lay leaders, to form their consciences on the tenets of the Church's principles of her social thoughts. By doing this, he believed that the teaching will be understood in a “precise, clear and comprehensive way” (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022).

According to Cardinal Nichols, the Catholic social teaching is not an economic or political programme but seeks to apply the essence of Christian moral principles to human life in society. It offers a solid way of thinking about what the common good requires, and how structures in society can promote human well-being and the requirements of justice (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022).

Catholic Social teaching “is a service to truth that sets us free” (Wright, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. 11.11.2022). Pope Benedict XVI explains that the Catholic social thought addresses the political, economic, and cultural issues of the day in the light of the Gospel of Christ. Its aim is to help purify reason and to contribute here and now, to knowledge and the attainment of what is just (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 28a). The objective of the Catholic social thought is anchored on Human dignity which is the prime principle that must always take precedence in all decision making in human society (www.firstthings.com. 13.11.2022). Pope Francis laments the denial of this primacy of the human person in political and economic decisions of governance as 'profound human crises' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 55).

4. Major Themes in Catholic Social Teaching

Modern Catholic social teaching has its origin in 1891 with the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*. Since then, the Church has been consistent in her wise teaching which has continued to give new life to the teachings of Scriptures on social issues, thereby continually shaping the Church's response to our modern world. From these social teachings of the Church, seven principles have emerged which inspire the entire social thoughts of the Church.

The Dignity of the Human Person

The Church believes that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27), who loves each of us infinitely (Psalm 136:26). Consequently, the Church teaches that God is present in every human person, regardless of his religion, culture, nationality, orientation, and economic standing. Hence, we are to treat each human being with the same respect we will accord God (Mt. 25:40).

Solidarity with the Poor

This is the awareness in the human family that we belong to each other, see ourselves and Christ in the sufferings of the poorest among us, and work hard to alleviate their pain. Inspired by our common humanity, but especially by our faith, solidarity spurs us to stand with our brothers and sisters under bondage of the shackles of poverty. On the international scale, solidarity imposes on all human beings, in different nations, the obligation to think about our global neighbours (www.cafod.org.uk. 13.11.2011).

By sharing in the pain of our poor brothers and sisters and alleviating their situation as Christians, we practically live out the Holy Eucharist which we celebrate and partake in. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches; “The

Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth, the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognise Christ in the poor" (CCC 1397).

The Principle of the Common Good

Common good means that the goods of the earth belong to everyone and should be equitably distributed. In the encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI educates that the common good requires that no one should be excluded from the resources of this earth. He states strongly that it is criminal for an individual to accumulate the wealth of this earth to the exclusion of others (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 23).

Option for the Poor

This principle of Catholic social thought is a reminder of God's preferential love for the poorest and most vulnerable persons in society. The principle has its origin from the Liberation Theology Movement in Latin America where people live in slums in abject poverty, with Bibles in their hands, imagining a world that is free from injustice. The Church insists that those endowed should reach out to those in need.

Promotion of World Peace

The cornerstone of Christianity is peace. Christ, the Prince of Peace, offers his peace to the earth; "Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives" (John 14:27). Out of love, he sacrificed himself on the cross in order to give the world the desired peace. In 1963, Pope John XXIII, wrote the encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, at a dangerous time for humanity; the rise in the amassing of nuclear weapons, the face-off between the US and the Soviet Union over the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the building of the Berlin Wall (www.cafod.org.uk, 14.11.2011). The Pope wrote to urge the world to seek peace (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 1). Undeniably, the world still longs for this peace even today. For instance, the Israeli - Gaza Strip crisis, the war between Russia and Ukraine, etc. Nigeria is not left out in the thirst for peace. We have the Boko Haram crisis, the invasions by Bandits and criminal Armed herdsmen, kidnapping and the activities of unknown gunmen, etc.

Care for Creation and the Environment

This principle derives from the first charge of God to man in the garden, to; "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, in 2015, calls on God's children and all people of good will, to have a rethink on how our actions affect the earth negatively and the impact of our actions on the poorest people. (*Laudato Si*, no. 10). He pointed out that everything on the planet is interconnected as all of creation is united in praising God (*Laudato Si*, no. 12). According to Pope Francis, the care for creation is a special vocation of the Christian. He made a passionate appeal for the protection of the earth, which is our common home (*Laudato Si*, no. 13).

The Dignity of Work and Participation

This principle is part of God's injunction to man; "to subdue the earth" (Gen. 1:28). It is a key principle in modern Catholic social teaching since *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII of 1891. Herein, he shone the light of faith and reason on the injustice and the exploitation of workers by the wealthy in the wake of the industrial revolution in Europe and America. Leo XIII argued that work is an essential part of human dignity which every human being has a right to participate in, earn just wages, to spend time with their families and rest (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 5). He urged workers to form forces to fight such injustices (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 56). The Pope urged government and employers of labour, to make the dignity of the human person the center of their decisions (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 40).

Based on these seven principles, the Church invites her children, and all people of goodwill, to get involved in the creation of a just society. Governance, surely, plays a central role in setting the agenda for a just society and the equitable distribution of the goods of the earth. This is the essence of democracy and politics. Therefore, Christians must be actively involved in the determination of who will govern them in fairness and justice. They must make efforts to understand the underpinnings of democracy and elections in Catholic social teaching.

5. Democracy and Elections in Catholic Social Teaching

The attitude of many Christians is a pointer to a lack of understanding of the relationship between theocracy and democracy. Some Christians, including some Christian leaders, sadly appear to be confused on their place and the role they are supposed to play in ensuring the choice of a good leader in a democratic Nigeria. The task here is to identify some common elements of democracy which are not in contradistinction to faith, and thereby, help Christians to appreciate the rich wisdom of the Church in impressing on them the need for democratic participation.

Democracy

It was Abraham Lincoln who defined democracy as; "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (www.dictionary.com. 18.11.2022). In a democracy, the state is controlled by all peoples, and citizens share equally in the privileges, duties, and responsibilities and each participating in person in the nation's governance (Bala, July 2022. p. 18). Pope St. John Paul II attests in unambiguous terms, to the preference of the Church for democracy because other systems of governance, like totalitarianism and authoritarianism involve the dominance of force over reason. The principles of these political systems are ruler-subject oriented and compel subjects to submit by compulsion.

The Pope argued that democracy recognises the right of the human conscience and choices, in line with natural law and revealed truths (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 29). The Church prefers democracy because it guarantees the rights of citizens

to participate in the political choices of who governs them. Hence, they are able to hold their political leaders accountable and to replace them by a peaceful means through elections. Here, the Holy Father emphasises authentic democracy where the rule of law is the guide (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 46). In simple terms, democracy is about respect for the voice of the people in determining who governs them through the exercise of their freedom of choices at elections.

Election

Election is “the formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting” (Bala, July 2022. pp. 20-21). In an election, the people express their opinion or choice of a leader by means of balloting, ticketing, raising hands, casting of dice, lining up, etc. (www.newadvent.org. Accessed on 19.11.2022). It is worthy of note that in some instances in the Holy Bible, God showed respect for the voice of the people in the choice of their leaders.

In the Old Testament, despite being a theocracy, God respected the demand of the people for a king (1 Sam. 8). In zealous defence of God's kingship over Israel, the prophet Samuel declined granting the people's demand for two reasons. First, he considered Israel's demand for a human king as a rejection of God's personal kingship over them. Second, a human king was going to demand loyalty from them, and the implications were going to be burdensome (vv. 11-18). God, however, told Samuel to listen to the people and give them a king (v. 7) (Bala, July 2022. pp. 20-21).

The New Testament also has instances where there were no objections to some people's exercise of the freedom to choose the leader they wanted to follow. Andrew and another unmentioned disciple, freely abandoned John the Baptist, their former master, to follow Jesus (John 1:35-37). A large number of Jesus' followers freely decided to stop following him (John 6:66-69). In these cases, Jesus respected their free choices (Bala, July 2022. p. 22).

Perhaps, more categorical, was the use of election in the choice of the apostle Mathias as replacement for Judas Iscariot, through the casting of lots, after they had prayed (Acts 1:12-20). The seven deacons were also chosen by election (Acts 6:1-7). It is worthy of note that the casting of lots was a commonly acceptable conventional way of balloting in ancient times, especially when deciding on extremely difficult matters (cf. 1 Sam. 14:40-42; Psalm 22:18; Prov. 16:33) (Bala, July 2022. p. 22). St. John narrates:

When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So, they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it' (19:23-25).

The evidence above, from the Bible, are pointers to God's respect for the right of the people for elections in both civil and religious instances. Colson's article on St. Augustine's 'Two Cities' throws light on the obligation of Christians, in our day, to their civic responsibilities in the earthly city.

St. Augustine's Two Cities

In an article; "Two Cities: St. Augustine's City of God", Colson explains how St. Augustine argued that Christians are citizens of two cities - the City of God, the kingdom of God, which is eternal, and the City of Man, the earthly city, on which we live for only a while. Life on the earthly city is a sojourn to the City of God. Hence, whatever man does in the earthly city, must be guided by the values of the City of God (Colson, www.virtueonline.org, 18.11.2022).

Augustine, however, posits that being sojourns in the city of man should not be a reason for Christians to withdraw and become disinterested in the affairs of the City of Man. He argues that since we enjoy God's blessing in the City of Man, like the protection of our fundamental human rights, our sustenance, and our security, we must take responsibility of the citizenship of the earth, for as long as we live on it. Colson clarifies that being responsible citizens entails obedience to God and love of neighbour, and the exercise of our civic duties during elections (Colson, www.virtueonline.org, 18.11.2022).

Drawing from St. Augustine, the Church teaches her children that the exercise of our civic responsibilities is a participation which is an implication of the principles of her social thought, especially the principles of subsidiarity and participation. In the exercise of their civic responsibilities, either as individuals or groups, directly or indirectly, children of the Church, God's City, contribute in the cultural, economic, and political life of the community where they belong (*Compendium of the Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 189. See Can. 227).

6. The Voice of the Nigeria Church on Participation in Democratic Elections

The Church in Nigeria has never relented in calling for a just democratic country and sensitizing her children to participate in civil elections. In their 2nd Plenary of September 1982, in Makurdi Benue State, on the eve of the 1983 general elections, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) reminded Nigerians to come out and vote freely and responsibly (Schineller, 2002. p. 117). At their plenary in Lagos, February 1983, the Bishops urged Nigerians to think well and choose their leaders well (Schineller, 2002. p. 120). In 1998, the CBCN issued a statement, putting the burden of the choice of good leaders in the hands of the electorates on the eve of the 1999 elections. The point is that the people are to use elections to select leaders with probity and integrity (Schineller, 2002. p. 392).

At the end of the 3rd National Pastoral Congress with the theme; "Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission", the Church in Nigeria, made a very strong statement for her children; "Citizens should use

their PVCs to vote candidates of credibility and integrity who have demonstrated the capacity to pilot the affairs of this nation in a responsible and corrupt-free manner" (3rd National Pastoral Congress. Benin City, 8-11 November 2022).

Nigerian Christians need to work hard to conquer ignorance on issues pertaining to democratic participation. Way back in 2002, the CBCN identified ignorance as the greatest enemy of democracy in Nigeria. An ignorant person does not know his rights. Hence, s/he is an easy prey to exploitation and manipulation even when s/he is not conscious of it. Ignorance is the window mostly used by the Nigerian political class, who often whip up the ethnic or religious sentiments of the poor and ignorant masses for their selfish political advantage (Schineller, 2002. p. 440). They use ethnic, religious, and regional sentiments, as blindfolds to sway the ignorant electorates. Hence, there is the urgent need for the formation of the consciences of Nigerian Christians on democratic participation, beginning with civil elections. This duty is very compelling as democracy, though slowly, makes gains in Nigeria.

7. Formation of Conscience for Participation in Civil Elections

The universal Church and the Church in Nigeria has given direction unambiguously by her prophetic voice, in her social teaching on the right and obligation of her children to take their place in the democratic space. The Church teaches that politics finds justification in the fact that it is for the common good (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 74). In her wisdom, Mother Church does not identify with any particular political party, and forbids her clerics from doing so (Can. 287#2). out of respect for all her children. However, the Church is not indifferent to the political community ("*The Threshold of a New Dawn*". cf. *Mater et Magistra*, no. 180). She is interested in what happens in the political space that will bring about entrenching good governance.

Therefore, Christians are to ensure the formation of their consciences for democratic engagement and participation. They need to understand that by conscience, God has endowed every human being with the capacity to listen to God's voice of truth and justice. It is man's secret inner core, the sanctuary where wo/man is alone with God and hears God speak to him or her (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16). According to O'Neil and Black, conscience is God's voice speaking to man. It is the tool that guides man to act right (O'Neil, & Black, 2006. p. 56 & 58). A conscience that is formed and is informed is able to evaluate the candidates vying for offices and discerning the best among them.

The formation of conscience on civil engagement will make Christians in Nigeria to come to the realization that participation in democratic elections is a binding responsibility. Powered by a hope that never disappoints (Rom. 5:5), Nigerian Christians with a formed conscience will not give up on their obligation to participate in elections, despite the fact that the people are currently not reaping the full fruits of democracy. Formation of conscience on

civil participation will make Christians in Nigeria to take their participation in elections, and other civil and political engagements, as seriously as other religious commitments.

Agents of evangelization have a duty to ensure the formation and education of a democratic conscience of the people under their care and guidance. Away from seeking the popularity and the glamour of being divine gambling electoral prophets, they have a responsibility to teach the people to exercise their voting right in good conscience, in line with the values laid down by the Church in her social thoughts, which promote national interest and cohesion. Some of the values to watch out for in candidates seeking election include capacity to deliver good leadership, respect for human dignity and religious freedom, a unifier, a person who will work for peace and security, commitment to improving the people's quality of life by promoting sound education, provision of good healthcare facilities and other basic social amenities (Bala, July 2022. p. 24).

Nigerian Christians have the obligation to know that the destiny of all citizens of our nation, present and future, are largely dependent on their votes. They need to know that they are culpable for any entrenchment of a bad government either by their votes or negligence in voting. Nigerian Christians need to hear George Orwell who says that; "A people that elect corrupt politicians, impostors, thieves and traitors are not victims, but accomplices" (<https://nosweatshakespeare.com>. 09.01.2023). They also need to know that failure to vote is a vote of compromise.

Christians in Nigeria have a responsibility to make efforts to have knowledge of candidates and their track records, and never to vote a candidate who tends towards policies that are intrinsically evil. Their choices at elections must be made in freedom (Bala, July 2022. p. 24). Publicly playing the role of a soothsayer by anyone is inconsistent with the respect of the God-given democratic right to free choice. The consequence of soothsaying is the swindling the people to vote for a particular candidate. Those who may be blessed with the true gift of prophecy must be seen exercising it within the overall prophetic mandate of the Church.

8. Conclusion

This article stands at variance with the "pious predisposition" that regards the political arena as dirty, the "abdication predisposition" where some Nigerians entirely shift their responsibility in the choice of a political leader to God, the "end-time" predisposition that explains away bad leadership to eschatological Parousia, and the "our votes do not count" predisposition.

The article re-echoes the consistent guiding principles of Mother Church on democratic engagement and participation. It reiterates the obligation of Christians and agents of evangelization on the duty for conscience formation for authentic democratic engagement and participation. Children of Mother

Church and indeed, the whole of humanity needs to conquer their ignorance on civil participation for the purpose of fostering the future prosperity of our nation. The time for self-pity, despondency, and hopelessness, being gullible to the manipulative antics of corrupt politicians is gone.

Citizens are to rise and take their destiny into their hands with courage. There should be no sitting on the fence as far as elections are concerned. Nigerian Christians need to know that when wo/men, enlightened by truth [in their consciences], have collectively exercise their freedom in the choice of a good leader in an election free of manipulation, it is considered that God has spoken" (Bala, July 2022. p. 23). A Christian who is negligent towards performing his or her civil responsibilities is culpable.

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