

CHRISTIANS INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE: A SINE QUA NON FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The quest for development is the most talked about theme and most expected phenomenon within the African milieu. Unfortunately, this expectation appears elusive drawing from the fact that Africa and particularly Nigeria have had over time leaders who thought less of the general wellbeing of the greater majority than for self, friends and colleagues. Suffice to state that this has adversely impacted on the development of the continent. The main thrust of this essay is to x-ray and emphasize on the need for the emergence and involvement of Christians with the fear of God in various political positions and governance as this will positively guarantee Africa's elusive development. No doubt the biblical injunction that says: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". The wisdom required for the development of Nigeria cannot be solely contingent on sensual but also on divine wisdom. The intermixtures of both will guarantee development in Africa. This essay relies on the exegesis of Proverb 29:2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked are in power, the people mourn". This essay identified that the major problems bedeviling Africa's development are bad leadership, lack of fear of God and selfishness characterized by ravenous corruption. The essay therefore recommends the involvement of Christians with the fear of God in political positions of authority and decision making as a panacea to Africa's development.

Keywords: politics, governance, development, Nigeria

Introduction

This paper is conceived to assist those Christians involved in politics, or considering it, to think seriously the place of Christianity in the politics and governance and its imperative towards the development of Nigeria. John 15.19 indicates that while we are not "of the world" we are "in the world" (see also Jn 15.15). We have responsibilities in the world and cannot ignore the political climate in which we live. Christians should be an influence for good in the world wherein they live.

It is important, therefore, to have a clear understanding of our responsibilities to the "powers that be" (Rom 13.1) and the extent to which we should be involved in the political life of our country. This essay as earlier mentioned finds relevance on the exegesis of Proverb 29:2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked are in power, the people mourn". The above statement is not intended to imply that non-Christians are unrighteous but it avers that Christians who are followers of Christ are better positioned to

understand and passionately ameliorate the plights of the members of the society which will impact positively on the development of the society.

The first Christian contact in Nigeria occurred in the fifteenth century when the Portuguese introduced Roman Catholicism. However, it was virtually extinguished over the following 200 years until the coming of the Protestants. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive Nigeria were Wesleyan Methodists. They began work in the southwest among the Yoruba in 1842. Other Protestant groups followed: Church Missionary Society (evangelical Anglican), United Free Church of Scotland, and the Southern Baptists. Over the last 100 years, several other missions followed. Almost all of these missions have planted large and vibrant churches with millions of adherents all over Africa. It beholds on this group of persons not to remain apolitical.

The quest for sustainable development is the most researched theme among African scholars and most expected phenomenon within the African milieu. Unfortunately, this expectation has remained elusive drawing from the fact that Africa and particularly Nigeria have had over time leaders who thought less of the general wellbeing of the greater majority than for self, friends and colleagues. Corruption and bad leadership no doubt have remained the bane of Africa's development efforts. Suffice to state that the two sociopolitical viruses mentioned above have adversely impacted on the development of the continent. The author believes that Christians involvement in politics and governance in Africa will help to ensure the development of the continent.

Conceptual Clarifications

Politics

Politics is an art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs. The methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government. Politics can also be defined as the practice or study of the art and science of forming, directing, and administering states and other political units. The core of politics is the problem of winning, maintaining, and exercising state power. The essence of politics is the organization of state power. Politics also refers to a set of activities associated with the governance of a country, or an area. It involves making decisions that apply to members of a group (Hague and Harrop, 2013),

It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance - organized control over a human community, particularly a state (*Merriam-webster.com*). The academic study focusing on just politics, which is therefore more targeted than general political science, is sometimes referred to as politology (not to be confused with politicology, a synonym for political science) (*Giovanni, 2005*).

Politics is a multifaceted word. It has a set of fairly specific meanings that are descriptive and nonjudgmental (such as "the art or science of government" and "political principles"), but does often colloquially carry a negative connotation (*Brady Linda, 2017*). In the final analysis, the content of politics is always determined by the interests of a class or an alliance of classes.

Governance

Governance comprises all of the processes of governing – whether undertaken by the government of a state, by a market or by a network – over a social system and whether through the laws, norms, power or language of an organized society.

The word “governance” came from the Latin verb “*gubernare*,” or more originally from the Greek word “*kubernaein*,” which means “to steer.” Basing on its etymology, governance refers to the manner of steering or governing, or of directing and controlling, a group of people or a state.

Governance is essentially related to politics, in that politics is often defined as the art of governance. Just as politics talks about governments, institutions, power, order, and the ideals of justice, governance also deals with the public sector, power structures, equity, and ideals of public administration. Nevertheless, they are distinct from each other in the sense that politics is broader than governance. Traditionally, the study of politics entails the concept of the “good life” and the “ideal society,” which are so broad they include a web of subjects and every possible form of government. The study of governance, on the contrary, is generally attuned to the concept of democracy, and on how the government and the civil society arrive at a decision in meeting their needs.

Governance is commonly defined as the *exercise of power or authority by political leaders for the well-being of their country's citizens or subjects*. It is the complex process whereby some sectors of the society wield power, and enact and promulgate public policies which directly affect human and institutional interactions, and economic and social development. The power exercised by the participating sectors of the society is always for the common good, as it is essential for demanding respect and cooperation from the citizens and the state. As such, a great deal about governance is the proper and effective utilization of resources (Kjaer Anne, 2004).

Development

By concept of development is meant a gradual advance or growth through progressive changes. It is a gradual differentiation of an ecological community (Webster, 1986). Within the context of this article, the term 'development' is a conscious acceleration of economic, political, social, educational and technological growth of Nigeria through effecting, consistent, progressive and enduring policies of the government. It is conceived in this article that such effective policies of government that are capable of effective progressive development in all spheres of our national life must curiously evolve from a truly democratic political system in which adequate value is placed on protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is also believed in this piece that the overall development of Nigeria cannot be realized in an environment which is characterized by lack of respect for democratic process and fundamental rights of citizens. The need for a nexus between the concepts of human rights, democracy and development will be examined later in this article.

The concept of development as perceived from the international perspective in this research refers to the evolution of institutions of government that is based on a common political ideology which can bring about peace and overall development among nations. It is conceived that the existence of solid socio-economic, political, cultural, educational and technological development in every nation is a prerequisite to the attainment of growth and

development.

The World Summit for Social Development adopted the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action which underlined the urgent need to address profound social problems, especially poverty, unemployment and social exclusion which affect every nation. The Declaration stresses further that “people are at the center of our concern for sustainable development and ... they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with the environment” (Symonides 1998).

Biblical Injunctions on Politics and Governance

If Christians believe that God created human beings with freedom of choice, it must be assumed that people may choose. The statement proves that every Christian must be free to support any kind of political ideas and ideals. Above all, to demystify through all kinds of intellectual tools, the concealed ideologies used by our governments to hide and justify the inhuman situation of the majority of our population is the ultimate task of theological engagement.

It has to be understood that politics and governance are not constituted by aliens, rather by human beings, whom Christians affirm to have been created in the image of God. Moreover, some belong to the church, and ministering and administering should take place in every aspect of life. To lead a spiritual life is to live as the people of God in all aspects of life. Failure to do this is problematic and abdication of responsibility as Bridston (1969) has observed. He argues: “the problem is that the church generally has denied its character as a political institution, has camouflaged its political processes, and has refused to admit the political responsibilities of its leaders”. (p. 116)

A deeper issue related to our main discourse here, which needs clarification, is the following: why do people join political associations or governance? Human beings come together and form associations, merely for the sake of life (Hulled 1993:11). Human beings are created as social beings. It has to be understood that it is through socialisation that we come together, share and learn from one another. It is also coupled with valuable information about life and the skills needed to live well, and this togetherness can be a powerful tool for promoting human development. Again that this facet seems to have disappeared from Nigerian reformed theological circles can only be credited to an intense obsession for the new adherents to comply with conditions for acceptance into a new faith. It is significant that we ask the question: what purpose does politics serve? Hulled (1993) has already given us this directive about politics: 'Political governance ... implies deliberations, aspiration for rationality, and subjecting governance by folkways to questioning and criticism' (p. 13).

Nevertheless its own challenges, it cannot be denied that Christians as well as the church are still perceived to be the most credible institutions. This is said here because Christians and churches are trusted in those institutions that are better placed to assist communities to struggle against issues of poverty and other social ills. They are also seen as institutions with less room for breeding corruption which no doubt is one of the most bedeviling elements

taunting sustainable development efforts in Nigeria.

Suffice to observe that politics and governance cannot be separated from ethical considerations. Barth makes this point poignantly clear in his essay, 'The Christian Community and the Civil Community', where he argues: "The poor, the socially and economically weak and threatened, will always be the object of the church's primary and particular concern, and it will always insist on the state's special responsibility for these weaker members of society." (Barth 1989:284)

From this point view, we must concede that morality and politics cannot be divorced because morality simply means priority of good over evil in social relations. Our social relation or contract is governed by politics. Moreover, if morality is the answer to the question, 'how ought we to live at the individual level?', then politics can be seen as addressing the same question at the social level. It is therefore unsurprising that evidence has been found of a relationship between attitudes in morality and politics. We must understand that 'group morality' develops from shared concepts in the spectrum of social life, and the same applies to theology, that is, it develops from shared concepts (Gousmett 1994:34).

The Old and New Testaments Examples of Christian Engagement in Politics

The Bible is highly political with loads of examples of men and women engaging in political life. Here's a run through of every book in the Bible and what it says about politics and political engagement.

From the creation mandate in **Genesis** we received a cultural mandate – to develop institutions upon the earth. In this task, we understand that our relational priorities are governed by the fact that we are all endowed with equal worth and dignity. In other words, there are no premier league people. Under God's authority, this essential equality is the starting point for all human government. Being made in the image of God, we are called to faithfully manifest that image in our day to day work. We govern because he governs. Throughout the rest of the Bible God keeps calling people back to this task. With Joseph we see how God uses his anointed to govern in an alien land for the protection and prosperity of his people. Genesis also shows that emancipation from oppression is on God's agenda.

In **Exodus** we see how Moses was a deeply political figure, and we begin to receive the laws that express God's heart for good government.

With a strong emphasis upon personal and corporate morality, and caring for the poor, **Leviticus** shows us how the law is designed to cover all the dimensions of Israel's relations with God, with one another and with the earth.

Numbers proposes a democratic process under God with the selection of representative leaders.

Deuteronomy affirms the idea of equality under the law for Kings and subjects alike.

Joshua shows the need for integrity of leadership, and a strong national identity in which morality is required as a distinctive for God's people.

Judges shows how the Lord raises up and empowers people to lead the nation out of sin, error and judgment. It also shows the need for women to assume national leadership responsibilities.

Ruth shows how social responsibility transcends legal contract.

Samuel 1 & 2 reaffirm equality under the law.

The books of **1 & 2 Kings** chart the good, the bad and the ugly of how to govern. These books show how leaders are subject to greater accountability for their actions.

The books of **1 & 2 Chronicles** show the Lord's heart for government through the reply to Solomon's request for wisdom to govern, and they place the responsibility for national renewal with God's people.

Ezra demonstrates the power of the Word to restore identity and direction to a people.

Nehemiah teaches how we learn about how the restoration of authority.

Esther and **Mordecai** were raised up to lobby the authorities to save their people.

Job teaches us about trusting a sovereign God in trials.

The **Psalms** cover the whole range of effects that the human condition and the righteousness of God.

Proverbs was written to instruct princes how to govern when they become kings. It also instructs the righteous to be involved in leadership for the sake of the people's happiness.

Ecclesiastes talks about the wisdom needed to rule.

Song of Solomon describes our relational priorities.

Isaiah describes the coming saviour and his Kingdom – the increase of whose government there shall be no end.

Jeremiah illustrates the need to speak truth to power.

Lamentations shows how God can use one nation to punish another.

Ezekiel describes how the river from the temple heals the nations.

Daniel demonstrates that God's people can be called to rule in alien, pagan cultures. With an implicit recognition that for engagement in politics there is a time to defy and a time to comply for the people of God. With Daniel, we see how integrity is tied to identity, and how the role of the prophet is important for governmental power. Importantly, the book shows that God's dominion covers all kingdoms, all empires and the whole earth – and that ultimately, all kingdoms will pass into God's own kingdom of love and righteousness.

Hosea attacks hedonism and the abuse of wealth.

Joel challenges public consciousness.

Amos exposes hypocritical rulers.

Obadiah affirms that justice cannot be escaped.

Jonah speaks of responsibility beyond the borders of our own race and ethnicity.

Micah emphasises the importance of morality, integrity and justice.

Nahum explains how freedom can bring both curses and blessings to a nation.

Habakkuk talks of God's care for the poor.

Zephaniah binds belief with action, and demands clear identity.

Haggai re-orders our social priorities in light of God's holiness.

Zechariah reaffirms the absolute authority of God.

Malachi warns against complacency and idolatry in national life.

Matthew, Mark, Luke & John cite the governing supremacy of Christ through his statement that 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given unto me' (Matt 28: 18); and when Jesus told Pilate that 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above' (John 9:11).

Acts demonstrates a unified and equal community that is governed by council, consensus and majority; illustrates the need to speak truth to power; and proposes new forms of citizenship. It also shows illustrates the need for religious freedom.

Romans shows the value of secular government; and critiques the human effects of state sanctioned idolatry. Crucially, in stating that that the political authority 'is God's servant for your good (13: 1-4) Paul affirms that political authority comes from God for our benefit.

1 Corinthians & 2 Corinthians in identifying the flawed wisdom of hollow philosophies establishes the need for moral reference beyond human ideologies; calls believers to model new, subversive forms of community; outlines the ministry of reconciliation; and values suffering for what is right.

Galatians explains the radical, totalising freedom given by Christ – that the gospel both necessitates, requires and sustains freedom.

Ephesians describes human responsibility in the spiritual battle that informs earthly authority, and states how the church is to communicate 'the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms'. Demonstrating the good governance of the Kingdom is proposed.

Philippians encourages humility and hope in the face of suffering; and challenges abuses related to social status.

Colossians affirms the supremacy of Christ in human affairs by stating that 'Thrones or dominions or authorities – all things were created through him and for him ... and in him all things hold together' (1: 16-17); and calls for intellectual rigour to challenge hollow philosophies and human traditions.

1 & 2 Thessalonians confirms the value and dignity of labour; and asserts the necessity for the rule of law.

1 & 2 Timothy compels believers to pray for government 'first of all' – as a priority for the gospel; values the council of elderly people and encourages young people to lead; explains the role of charity; warns against the corruption that wealth can bring; describes a godless society.

Titus discusses authority amongst diverse social groups.

Philemon deals with slavery and labour.

Hebrews confirms the equality of all people before God, and how justice is indivisible from mercy.

James explains how deeds must accompany words; that favouritism is forbidden in leadership; that a focus upon developing good language and communication is essential for leadership; and how the wisdom that comes from God differs in substance and impact from earthly wisdom.

1 Peter calls for believers to 'Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor ... or to governors.' (2: 13), confirming that all authority is ordained by God, and that submission is required even during persecution. It also shows that the gospel itself has its place in political power by revealing that Jesus 'has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.' (3: 22).

2 Peter asserts the value of a clear conscience and good teaching for leadership; and the need to respond to evil with good.

1, 2 & 3 John describes the institutional nature of sin; and the need to provide good role models for leadership.

Jude attacks bad role models for leadership; and shows how when abused, authority can be abdicated.

Revelation affirms the dominion of the kingdom of God above earthly empires; calls Christians to lead as well as serve; condemns those who have put their faith in money and power; and promises a conclusion in which justice is inescapable. It shows how redemption in Jesus Christ is not limited to any one area of the creation. Not only persons, but nations, kingdoms, the entire creation will be reconciled.

Reasons for Christians Involvement in politics and Governance

A number of arguments have been set forward which advocate the value of an active involvement in the political process by Christians. Significant good has been achieved by great Christian men and women of the past who were able to improve society by advocating Christian principles. As *responsible citizens*, Christians have a duty to contribute to improving society through active involvement in the political process. Christians also have a moral obligation to oppose things which are anti-Christian and this at times necessitates political participation and helps to improve the society. Christians have the capacity for *good influence* and therefore should be seen to be a positive influence for good in society and this can be achieved by engagement in politics.

The desire to be involved in the political process may be based on good intentions, but the

guide for the believer is not the persuasive and logical arguments of men but the Word of God.

Politics is unavoidable for Christians. The likes of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Barth and others have indicated on several occasions their inclination to be biased towards democracy. Decisions about the economy, society and beliefs are taken in the political realm. Thus, the absence of a Christian in politics implies that a Christian is not part of this decision-making process and, because what affects the individual in the Christian community also affects the same individual in the civil community, the idea of the Christian from politics is in fact absurd.

What we cannot deny is the fact that we have histories to point to how this idea of the non-participation of the Christians in politics and governance came into being. At the heart of the separation of politics from the spiritual was not the understanding that the Christian who remains apolitical will preserve himself or herself for posterity (although that was the perception which many imbibed), but in fact the objective was to ensure that the new converts comply with the dictates of the new masters of their destiny. Any attempt to speak about the Christian's involvement in politics and governance in Nigeria today must start with this acknowledgement.

Senokoane and Kritzinger (2007) warned against the privatisation of Christianity by arguing that:

If we as Christians, who make up a statistical majority of 70% of South African society, do not commit ourselves to significant processes of people-centred development, anti-racism and church-re-unification, but continue in our lukewarm and comfortable private Christianities, we should not be surprised when South African society at large leaves us behind or even splits us out. (p. 173)

Conclusion

Engagement in the political and governance process in any form is not contrary to the spirit of Scripture. It is consistent with the scriptures and should be considered among other priorities. Christians can make positive contributions towards the development of the society leveraging on their faith and confessions. Abstention is a step in the wrong direction, it is indeed an abdication of responsibility. Considering the book of Proverb 29:2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked are in power, the people mourn". This is a specific pointer that Christians should be involved in governance. Under the present hunger, poverty, unemployment and insecurity situations, the people cannot rejoice. It is a statement that strengthens the fact that with Christians on the seat of authority development is guaranteed.

Reformed church people through the ages have always acknowledged the need for people to be led. Sometimes this acknowledgement had dismayed many who had held these reformed leaders in high esteem (see, for instance, Luther's regrettable remarks about the peasants after

the Peasants' Revolt) (Blickle 1981: xxiii). The latter Calvin and his attitude against radicals can also be construed as problematic; the case of Michael Servetus has particular reference to the point made here; yet what remains is the fact that these reformed pioneers (Luther as well as Calvin) were not oblivious of a political role that can and must be played in the material transformation of societies.

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