



The Church and Politics

Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, Phd

Hod Pastoral Department, Ecwa Theological Seminary, Jos, P. O. Box 5398, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Road, Jos 930001, Plateau State, Nigeria.

***Corresponding Author:** *Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, Phd, Hod Pastoral Department, Ecwa Theological Seminary, Jos, P. O. Box 5398, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Road, Jos 930001, Plateau State, Nigeria.*

1. PREAMBLE

This topic under review is very relevant and timely. Some might be tempted to observe as follows; 1.) Is politics biblical? 2.) Why a spiritual Church must get involved in politics? 3.) What impact will the Church make in the community through her participation in Nigeria politics? Just as this adage, “You can’t go to abattoir and come out without the stain of the blood”. The question is, can the Church get involved in politics without being stain?

What will the Church benefit if she participates in the politics?

All these observations are alright and okay. But for the sake of clarity, the writer would endeavor through this paper to give a little historical background into church politics and to also define some relevant terms for the understanding of the reader. Mwai Kibaki, Kenya’s Vice-President, has been the most out-standing spoken leader in Kenya in his statements concerning the relation between Church and politics. Okullu (2003: 53) simply stated, “Politics and religion are inseparable.” To suggest that politics should be left to the politicians and religion to the clergy, is a terrible intellectual arrogance.... Okullu (2003: 53) added, this way tends to suggest that through some mysterious magical process, some politicians have become specially qualified as to be the only ones to pronounce on political issues.

Okullu (2003: 52, 54) believes that it is through the involvement of Church leaders in public affairs that Africa can retain its soul. They have warned that the government could remove the government-given freedom of worship. Kibaki resorts by explaining that Christians should stop glorifying the government in gratitude for the freedom of worship. The simple reason is because this was a God given right which the government has the obligation to protect in the same way it protects other rights.

Haselbarth (1976: 228-229) traced the history that, in previous ages the church often tried to rule and dominate in politics. This goes back to the moment when Emperor Constantine opened the way for Christians in the Roman Empire to represent the official state religion. Up to now we call the succeeding centuries the Age of Constantine. Expressions of this era are the Vatican state, the Crusaders, the conquest of Latin American; but even the majority of the churches of the Reformation were still under this spell of power. It is still observed that in some countries today, the Christians form only a minority which has to find its place among other groups and creeds. This helps us to understand that the church can influence politics not only by ruling power but insofar as she serves the communities in which she lives. Again, the church owes its country quality message from the scriptures and our lifestyles.

In this article, the following would be evident; definition of terms, brief observation of Nigerian politics since 1960, the poor performance of the church in Nigeria politics, the role of the church to the society, participation of the church in politics, reasons Christians should be involved in politics, and how Christian politicians can be effective in politics.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.) The Church

The New Testament speaks of the church in a wider sense, as in Colossians 1:24-25. It also speaks about local churches in certain places, such as the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1) and the church at Corinth (1 Corinth 1:2). In both the worldwide and local sense, the church refers to a group of people. In Acts 5:11 it says, 'Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.' The church is a group of people, whether it is referring to all Christians everywhere in the world or just to those Christians who regularly meet together each week in a certain place.

Therefore, O'Donovan (1996:151) notes, the church consists of all those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, regardless of their race, nationality, denomination or position in life. Galatians 3:26-28 says, 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' All the people who have trusted in Christ in this way have been regenerated (made spiritually alive in Christ) by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-7). By trusting in Christ we have been spiritually joined to Christ, and have become part of his spiritual body. Romans 6:5 says, 'If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection'.

Further definition of the Church has been referred to;

*As a house where Christians meet to worship God

*An Assembly of God's people

*A group of worshippers of God through Christ.

According to Evangelical Church in Germany (1973:26) it is very important to know that the word "Church" in its original meaning was political in outlook. "Ekklesia in classical Greek means the assembly of the citizens of a city for legislative purposes. This word was later adopted in Hebrew to describe the religious assembly of the Israelites. The early Christians applied the same word (Ekklesia) to mean the assembly of those who believed in Jesus Christ." Evangelical Church in Germany (1973:27) also noted, "From the brief development of the word Ekklesia, it can easily be inferred that politics started with the Church. Therefore, it is considered not out of place for the church to get involved in politics for what she was originally inaugurated for." The semi-educated, fearful unstable and timid community left behind by the Lord Jesus Christ was visited by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. From then onwards the church had the courage enlightenment and stability that made it possible for its members to build up the church with boldness. The church at Pentecost received vision and direction.

2.) Politics

Politics is a science of governance, a means to setting up a government to govern people. The political parties display their manifestos and the aspirants articulate them as their objectives for better tomorrow. Politics can also be described as ideologies expressed to capture power. When a political party satisfies the electorate in its manifesto, and it is voted into power to form government it addresses itself to providing the essential needs of the electorate such as food, shelter, education, medical services and the like. In Africa, for example, Christianity has had a tremendous influence because of the churches' service through schools, medical and agricultural programmes. Okullu (2003: 18) observed that, "there is the great contribution made by revivalist movements John Wesley and that, he had no intention of bringing the church back into politics, but his revival had that effect." Okullu (2003: 18) explained further, the abolition of the slavery trade and of slavery itself was political projects; but they were carried through by evangelicals in the fervor of their evangelical faith. It is reported of Lord Melbourne, Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister, that after hearing an Evangelical preacher he remarked that, if religion was going to interfere with the affairs of private life, things were come to a pretty pass.

3. BRIEF OBSERVATION OF NIGERIAN POLITICS SINCE 1960

It is very clear that government has failed the common man. Most of the politicians became people who had little interest in promoting the needs of the poor. Okullu (2003:18) notes "the following are results of poor performances by Nigerian political actors since independence:

- *Educational system maimed
- *Transport system in shambles
- *Primary health care neglected
- *Cost of living too high
- *Injustices in our judiciaries on the increase
- *Insecurity on the citizenries on increase.”

4. THE POOR PERFORMANCE OF THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA POLITICS

In the early days of Colonial rule, Aguwa (1993:29-39) observes that “a common source of conflict between the missionaries and the secular authorities was based on the inhuman treatment meted out to the local people officers in their anxiety of speed to create the basic structure needed for effective administration often resorted to brutal acts of flogging and maiming elders who came to negotiate on behalf of the people.”Aguwa (1993:29-39) again noted, “the missionaries on the other hand detested and denounced such inhuman tendencies and thus got the support of the people through the exercise of an opposite policy based on kindness, patience, sympathy and friendliness. The mutual trust that grew between the missionaries and the political dwarfed the relationship between the missionaries and the political administrations.”Another source of conflict between the missionaries and the political administrators was on the issue of the traditional culture and its practices of the people. Aguwa (1993:29-39) further gives reason:

In this area, the missionaries were the culprits. The missionaries labeled the natives as “heathens,” “pagans,” etc. The missionaries were convinced that the indigenous religious practices of the people vis-à-vis Christianity were poles apart. The missionaries thus felt that the only way of making Nigerians real Christians was to eliminate the traditional practices of the people and enthrone Christianity in its place. The liturgical practices of the people which were full of songs, dancing, clapping, and drumming were frowned upon. The people were forced to take new names at baptism-names that had no relevance to the bearers. The missionaries became so opposed to the idea of promoting the indigenous culture of the people that they discouraged their members and converts from participation in the “native administration,” which they considered as “worldly.” Besides, within the framework of the ‘salvation-of-souls’ theology which was the controlling theological orientation during the early missionary era, the intent of the missionaries was to win souls for Christ and not to gain political power. It was orientations and perceptions such as these that separated religion from the secular state. Thus from the onset most educated Christians came away with the mentality that they were trained for service in the church and not in the civil society. It is however pleasing to note that as early as 1948, Late Mazi Mbonu Ojike of Orlu Local Government Area in Imo State called on the church to form an organization whose creed was to be “No Cross, No Crown”. The members of this movement realized that education was an important tool for National Unification, Industrial and cultural renaissance and political progress. This spirit must not be allowed to die out. Nigeria is for all of us and we must work hard to build it up.

5. THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TO THE SOCIETY

The Church involves itself in politics more directly by denouncing what is wrong in society. Julius Nyerere according to Okullu (2003: 19) says that “Everything which prevents a person from living in dignity decency must therefore be under attack from the church and its workers. The following are the roles of the church to the society

- a.) It is the duty of the church not to only publicly denounce evil in society but also enable individual Christians to fulfill their prophetic role in society.”
- b.) In trying to describe the new servant role of the church,Haselbarth (1976:229) notes “we must stress once more the role of the peace-makers and intercessors in the conflicts of the world.”
- c.) Okullu (2003:53-54) believe, the church role in society is to pray for the government and to help the people to keep peace.

- d.) Encouraging participation in politics. Danladi (2009: 135-136) proves, the church is expected to assist members of the church to identify their gifts of leadership. Such people should be encouraged to go into politics to enable them use their gifts to serve people especially those that are marginalized and oppressed. The main aim of having Christians get involved in politics is not just for them to represent the church in the government, but more importantly to address the issues of injustices, corruption and bribery in the country.
- e.) Promoting Values Transformation. Danladi (2009: 138-139) urges, Christian politicians should be made to realize that they must uphold Biblical values above all other values. Any value that goes against the Bible must be discarded. It is a choice they must make if they want to be effective and to glorify God. Our values must be positively transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. This should be done through consistent and in-depth Bible Studies specifically organized for the Christian politicians and preaching on various themes related to values and how they affect our attitudes and behavior.

6. PARTICIPATION OF THE CHURCH IN POLITICS

The Bible has warned that “when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan (Proverbs 29:2).” JFO (1993: 8) stresses, this is why the church must not fold her hands and watch. She must participate and influence the politics of the day. The assumption that politics is a dirty game is absolute and outlandish. Politics is not dirty; it is the politicians (not all of them) who make it dirty. And if politics is dirty, Jesus Christ has called the church i.e. the Christians to flush out the dirt.

According to JFO (1993:8) the church that can play a meaningful role in politics is a dynamic and progressive church—not a static and conservative church which vainly glories in a frozen and forbidding status quo; not a church that withdraws to her sanctuary in a cozy and comfortable isolationism or self-righteousness. Only a creative church with a high sense of ministry and commitment can effect significant contributions to the political life of its people. Only an adaptively flexible and sensitive church can adequately, legitimately and competently work for the welfare of society in the political domain.

Finally, JFO (1993: 8) alluded, the church as a sensitively dynamic society will do all it can to socialize the individual, to promote social solidarity, foster stability in society, establish personal rights and status, nourish fellowship, support morality, exercise social control, meet social welfare and philanthropic needs, and provide esthetics, recreational, economic, educational, medical, vocational and counseling services. There lies the social dimension of the mission of the church.

Gehman (2008:76) added his voice, “the church, if it is to be properly and competently active in politics, then, she must have a proper and definite understanding of power in its various forms and dimensions, whether personal, domestic, social and political. She must harbor no power phobia, no power mania, and no power intoxication. She must realize that the reality of power is inescapable.” All human beings, here in this material world, are born into an inescapable network of power. Right from the moment of conception to the grave, we find ourselves in the vortex of power structures—of hierarchies of power—personal, domestic, social, ecclesiastical, political, industrial and economic power, civilian and military power. All these spheres of power have their impact on any freedom or right we exercise; and on any order and responsibility we carry out and discharge.

The church must do some hard-headed and realistic thinking about the nature and function of power. She must recognize that power is inescapable. To escape from it is to fall and to divorce oneself from all human relationship; just as to escape from life means death and divorce from all human relationship. Gehman (2008:76) stresses “The sum total of all these vitalities by which organized social life is maintained...No life is possible without power.”

7. REASONS CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN POLITICS

It must be noted that there is nowhere traced in the Scriptures discouraging Christians from seeking active elective positions in government. This is the reason why Christians who are convinced that God is leading and directing to go into politics are encouraged to go into it.

a. Integral Mission

Danladi (2009:34-36), notes, “the mission of the church is to build the Kingdom of God where Jesus Christ reigns supreme through the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel to a sinful and a suffering world.” Being actively involved in politics is seen as part of our involvement in social action. Christian involvement in politics should be regarded as part of the mission of the church as it provides opportunity to demonstrate the gospel.

b. Light and Salt

Christians are supposed to be the light and salt of the society (Matt. 5:13-16). Danladi (2009:34-36) stresses, “we cannot be the light and the salt to the corrupted and wicked generation without us getting involved into Nigerian politics today. When we get into politics, it is then we can demonstrate the justices of God, his fairness, mercies, love, honesty and accountability into politics and model God’s character in these areas.” It is now generally accepted that one of the main ways that Christians can positively influence the society and make a difference is to get involved in politics, business and social action. By so doing, Christians will truly become the light and salt of the society.

c. Development and the Poor

When we get involved in the politics, we shall ensure that the resources of the country are effectively harnessed and managed so that all people especially the poor benefit from development programmes. The focus should be on the poor and less privilege. The Apostles emphasized the importance of the ministry to the poor just as Jesus did. Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:10 stated clearly the reputed pillars of the early church such as Peter, John and James were reminded to remember the poor in their ministries to the Gentiles. At the beginning of Jesus ministry, He stated that God had anointed him to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). According to Danladi (2009: 34-36), “it is evident that when we get involved as a church into politics, we would gain experience in governance, provide security, ensured moral standard of living, and bring back human dignity and national development.”

d. God’s Glory

Whoever is going into politics today as a Christian, the aim and motive should be to glorify God and not self. Danladi (2009: 34-36) concluded “the implication of this is that their allegiance must be to God and not to their parties or god-fathers. Jesus must truly be the Lord of their lives including their secret lives not known to anybody except God.”

8. HOW CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS CAN BE EFFECTIVE IN POLITICS

There are numerous challenges facing the church today and looks as if the church has either pay less or nor attention to some of these challenges. It is important that we know these challenges and be ready to address them adequately. It is when these challenges are not taken into consideration that Christians become ineffective in politics. This makes some Christians believe that it is impossible to play clean politics in Nigeria today; or go into politics, and come out clean. Danladi (2009: 95-96) believe that “God fearing Christians can be effective in politics and make a difference and still and come out. The grace of God is available for any Christian politicians to overcome these challenges. Christians should therefore not take going into politics lightly.”

How to be Effective

- a.) Christian politician must have a good relationship with God
- b.) Christian politician must have a meaningful relationship with God
- c.) Christian politician must have a close relationship with God
- d.) Christian politician must be willing to learn from others and have a teachable spirit
- e.) Christian politician need the prayer, financial, encouragement and constructive feedback from the church
- f.) Christian politician must learn to relate very well with the church, Danladi (2009:95-96).

9. MAINTAINING A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL INTEGRITY IN POLITICS

This is a challenge to all Christians that feel called to join politics. It is a call for whosoever wishes to get involved in Nigeria politics, that it is very important for such to maintain their integrity. According to Watkins (ed.) (1992:355), “it is strength and firmness of character; utter sincerity and honesty. It is a state of being undivided and completeness.” There is no way we can talk of integrity apart from connecting it with virtue. Because of lack of certain virtues in us, so we are witnessing in large measure, failure in our ethical traditions and the breaking down of morality in our daily living and culture. Kafang (2011:41-42) talk of the virtue of purity of heart. That is, “integrity of inner and outer being and doing.” The Beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5-7 are keys to how a Christian can maintain his integrity in any circumstance he finds himself and not only in a politicized society. O’Donovan (2000: 171) alludes, “but since we are aware that the battle is fairer, here are spiritual weapons to help us maintain our integrity even in a politicized society. They are all found in Ephesians chapter 6. These are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer.”

10. EFFECTS OF THE CHURCH ON POLITICS

1.) It serves as mediating structure

This is one of the ways Church leaders can come in to serve as “mediating structure.” According to Oderinde (2012:87) define mediating structures as “those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the larger institutions of public life.” Practical examples are the neighborhood, family, Church and voluntary associations. As Christ is the Mediator of the world universe, so also must Christian see themselves as mediators in order to bring sanity to the political structure.

2. Oderinde (2012: 87) added, “Christianity should serve as a Panacea to Corruption.” Watkins (1992:486) stresses, the word “Panacea” means something that is said or believed to cure all ills or troubles.” Therefore, Christians should come into politics in order to speak against the ills and corruption of this country.

3. As a Church we are to shed light on the path and heart of men

Oderinde (2012:88), “this position should enhance faith and the fear of God among the corrupt people of the world. Not only that, but our position should promote sense of responsibility for the reformation of man’s thought and belief. Christianity also promotes high principles of morality, human relations and extinguishes all sorts of ill practices from the political society.” Corrie (2007:291):

Came to understand that the leaders of Churches founded by missionary activity have often been ready to take part in the political process. In the Philippines evangelical Christians joined in the protests that brought the downfall of Marcos. In Sarawak, an evangelical church released one of its pastors to stand for parliament. In Malaysia, evangelical Christians have engaged as co-belligerents (that is aggressively hostile) with other non-Muslim groups to protect the Church’s status. In South Africa some Christian churches were active in the post-Apartheid situation, and in particular the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was built upon Christian principles. However, where the Church has failed to engage with its own political context, opting for a gospel that is disengaged from the world, the result can be disastrous, the events in Rwanda in 1994 being a classic example. Many churches have accepted that as communities still in this world it is vital for them to take a role in the political process of their countries both as individual Christians and as institutions.

11. CONCLUSION

I see the position of the church in our society beyond our active party politics. We stand in a position to contribute to the solution of political problems. The church should be able to make peace between fronts of tensions, be it in wards, villages, tribal groups or different religions. A sense of citizenships needs to be built up from below. The Christians do so by training ourselves to be service to others. Christians do not only become active where religious interests are served, but have in mind the common welfare of all. I do not command that we must control and dominate all areas of life as a church, but I am rather saying, we must be ready to serve in all these areas. Whatever serves human needs and combats poverty, ignorance, oppression, sickness may be said to be the relative aim of Christian politics also.

NOTE

- a.) Church cannot say she is not interested in politics because it is worldly
- b.) Politics is issue of two major religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam
- c.) When Children of God gets to political positions, there usually a get influence positively in policies as its relate to us
- d.) Politics is not dirty and it is not a sin
- e.) Unbelievers have corrupted the good intension of politics
- f.) Let's encourage our members interested to join politics to do so
- g.) Make sure that you come out and vote the right candidate in April elections so that God brings the right people into the various offices from Federal, State, and Local Governments, God bless you all, amen.

REFERENCES

- Corrie Ed., John. *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundation*. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007.
- Danladi, Musa. *Christians in Politics: How can they be Effective?* Bukuru, Nigeria: acts, 2009.
- Evangelical Church in Germany, 1973.
- Gehman, Richard J. *Learning to Lead: The Making of a Christian Leader in Africa*. Wheaton, Illinois: Oasis International Ltd., 2008.
- Haselbarth, Hans. *Christian Ethics in the African Context*. Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976.
- Jude, C. U. Aguwa. *Religious Dichotomy in Nigeria Politics*. Forth Dimension Publishing Co.,Ltd., 1993.
- JFO, Elegbede. In the Nigerian Christian. Vol. 26 No 10, 1993.
- Okullu, Henry. *Church and State: In Nation Building and Human Development*. Nairobi, Kenya: Uzima Press, 2003.
- O'Donovan, Wilbur. *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*. Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1996.
- Watkins, Morris G. & Lois I. Watkins. *The Complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School*. Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1992.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, Phd, Born in Nyanya, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria, May 25, 1967. Began Christian ministry in July 6, 1988. Served as a field missionary with EMS of ECWA from July 1988-March 2001. Served as a resident pastor with ECWA Minna DCC (District Church Council) from April, 2001 to May 2012. Served as Chairman, ECWA Minna DCC from June, 2007 to May, 2012. Served as ECWA Assistant General Secretary from April, 2012 to April, 2018. Lecturer at ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria from August, 2018 to date. HoD, Pastoral Studies, ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos from January 13, 2022

Citation: Rev. Eliazar Daila Baba, Phd. " The Church and Politics" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 9, no. 4, 2022, pp. 162-168. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.09040134>

Copyright: © 2022 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.