
THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

An examination of ancient Greek writings on democracy and the teaching of Christian Religion we read in the Holy Scripture reveal that Christianity and democracy can pave the way for a better Nigeria of our time and any other times. We therefore, plan to show in this paper that true Christianity and true democracy has the answer to the political problems of present day Nigeria. This paper will discuss this under the following sub-headings: definition of terms (Christianity and democracy), the mission Christian Religion and democracy on earth, democracy in practice in Nigeria today, Christianity and democracy the solution to the present day Nigeria problem.

KEYWORDS: *Christianity, Democracy, Christian Religion, Mission.*

INTRODUCTION**Definition of the Terms (Christianity and Democracy)**

Christianity: Christianity is that religion or belief system that its adherents have turned away from sin and accepted the liberating work of God in Christ Jesus. Having embraced the saving work of God in Jesus Christ, the Christian no longer lives in sin or under the oppressive rule of the devil from whose hands he has been delivered. Having been liberated, they have become God's special people on earth to declare his saving work to those are yet to be saved and come under his rule. Therefore, according to the word of God, Christians are: A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (Peter 2:9). And also John declares: Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name has gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12).

Therefore, a Christian is the one who is connected to Jesus Christ, under whom he has put himself absolutely under Christ's command and Christ can use him in anyway he wishes. A Christian lives as the Lord's person, subject to his command. He can trust Christ with his soul. His commitment to the Lord is very strong and is motivated by love and gratitude for Christ dying for his sins and forgiving his sins. For this reason, Christians are a body of people called by God to a holy life as their heavenly father is holy. To be holy therefore, means to be different, separate and upright or righteous from the other people of the world who do not belong to this faith or religion (Christian Religion). Harrison (1983), says a "Christian is a person related in some way to the Christ". The word comes into usage first in Acts 11:26-"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Democracy: What do we mean by democracy that people clamour for today all over the world instead of communism, totalitarianism, dictatorship or any other kind of governance? According to Aristotle (1317): The word democracy is derived from the Greek word *democratia*, which means, "popular rule", "the people's rule", or "popular or majority government". Democracy is therefore, popularly understood today as, "the government of the people by the people for the people. Aristotle of the fifth century BC, who happened to be a strong advocate of democracy stressed that democracy is the rule of the poor majority of the citizens of a nation. For him, a nation is democratic only when poor who are usually in the majority "are in sovereign control of government" of a nation. In his book titled, *Politics*, he says:

A basic principle of the democratic constitution is liberty. People constantly make this statement implying that only in this constitution do men share in liberty; for every democracy, they say, has liberty for its aim. Ruling and being ruled in turn is one element in liberty, and the democratic idea of justice is in fact numerical equality, not equality based on merit; and when this idea of what is just prevails, the multitude must be sovereign, and whatever the majority decides is final and constitutes justice. The result is that in democracies, the poor have more sovereign power than the rich; for they are more numerous, and the decisions of the majority are sovereign.

In other words, democracy is that system of governance that lays emphasis on the participation of the teeming poor people for a given nation in their own governance rather than it being the sole responsibility of the people in power. Yamsat (2001) says:

This understanding of democracy is like the Nigerian village system of governance where all matured male of the village have a share in the development of it and not only a few called politicians or the nobility. All are expected to attend the village assembly or meeting and contribute in word, cash and kind for its development. Even though it is perceived in terms of a kingdom because an unelected chief is the supreme head, the people have a say in the way the village is run and developed.

Thus, whether we are looking at ancient Greeks or traditional Nigerian village governance, democracy which is the right of the people to have a say in their governance lays at the root of it all. Democracy puts emphasis on the rights of the individual regarding the faith of his choice, speech, private possession and his responsibilities to fellow citizens. Democracy is that type of governance that embraces all peoples in a given land and demands that they contribute their share in the building of that land. It is that system of governance that guarantees the rights of all and makes them know their responsibilities to one another irrespective of creed, tribe or status. Bertrand (1993) says in democratic political theory, "power comes from the people and government must derive their authority from the first consent of the governed.

The Mission of the Christian Religion on Earth

Our Lord Jesus Christ stated vividly his mission right at the beginning of his ministry on earth in such a way that shows the wholistic nature of that ministry. Hence, Luke 4:18-19 says:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

The vision and mission of Christian Religion is none other than the vision and mission of Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the adherence of Christianity from oppressive power of sin and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places. The pressing question is, how are we to preach this good news or "proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed?" Christianity proclaim this good news best by mingling with unbelievers of the world in every facet of life, including politics. Are we to do so by staying apart from the other people of the world and only have contact with them to declare the good news of the saving work of God in Christ Jesus? According to the word of Jesus, 'Christians are the salt and the light of the world. Jesus Christ says:

You are like salt for the whole race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again .It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it, (Matthew,5: 13).

As salt, their mission is to infiltrate the world and not stay outside it. They are to infiltrate the world to give it the desired taste; the good taste God expects it to have, having been made tasteless by sin. Salt not cooked with the soup but put after cooking or placed on the table to be put on the food by the person eating it, does not give the desired taste as when it is cooked with the food. In the same way, Christians who are cut off from the rest of the people of the world cannot impact them as those who interact day in and day out with them. Furthermore, the analogy of the salt is saying that without Christians, the world is contaminated. This is to say that for the world to remain uncontaminated, good, tasteful, and sweet Christians must mix or interact with the rest of the people of the world. They must be found in every facet of life of the world, influencing the world "with the wonderful deeds of him who called them into his marvelous light." Thus, as the second analogy says, their mission is to serve as the light to the world.

Jesus Christ further says:

You are like light for the whole world. A city built on hill cannot be hidden. No one light a lamp and put it under a bowl, instead he put it on the lamp stand where it gives light for every one in the house. In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your father in heaven, (Matthew,5: 14-16).

The analogy of the light is intended to say the same thing as the analogy of salt, that Christians are the catalysts of the world. As light, they give life and direction to the world; tell the people of the world where to go and be saved, where it is safe and where it is dangerous. As light, they must stay up high and shine bright, so that every one may see clearly the path he is walking along, everyone must see the good work of the Christians and give glory to God our Father who is in heaven. Thus, as light, the Christian's activities must be exposed for everyone to see and not to be done in hiding. The Christian cannot hide his

testimony, his faith, his commitment to the Lord wherever he finds himself, but must be a witness of the saving work of God in Christ, unashamed at any time or in any place he or she finds himself or herself. Wherever and whenever the Christian hides or conceals his testimony or the gospel of liberation, for any reason, he loses touch with his saviour, and loses his value to the world of unbelief and as a result, he is thrown away and trampled over by men, even unbelieving men (Matt.6:13). In short, the Christian can best influence the world of unbelief through participation in politics if that is his or her calling from God.

The Mission of Democracy

Basically, the mission of democracy is to give liberty to every person in a given state irrespective of status and ethnic origin. It is to give everyone the opportunity to serve his or her state as far as the person possesses the ability to offer such service. It is to place power in the hands of the majority of a given society. The mission of democracy is therefore, to provide justice and equity to all in a given nation. The mission of democracy is to make it possible for every citizen to participate in the governance of his or her state and to share in the resources of the state he or she belongs. According to Yamsat:

In a state, either all citizens share all things, or they share none, or they share some but not others. It is clearly impossible that they should have no share in anything, at the very least, a constitution being a form of association, they must share in the territory, the single territory of a single state, of which single state the citizens are sharers. The question then becomes twofold if a city is to be run well, is it better that all the citizens should share in all things capable of being shared or is it only in some of them and not in others?

Therefore, Democracy gives opportunity for everyone to demand for his or her rights and in turn demands from him his responsibility to others and the state. It is also aimed at providing fellowship and partnership spirit and friendship with the best of people.

Democracy in Practice in Nigeria Today

If the above is the mission of Christianity and democracy, why is Nigeria still in the woods having embraced democracy over twelve past and Christianity many more years back and it does not appear we will be any better in the near future? The way democracy is practiced by most Nigerians shows that this is more of a lip service or gimmick to woo the preachers of democracy in the West for personal and immediate material benefits by the big shorts.

When many go into politics for the sake of political leadership or for the cake that goes with leadership, there is bound to be trouble for the populace. What they end up having are rulers, self-made rulers, dictators or demy-gods in the gown of democracy and not born charismatic leaders with hearts to serve the people. When we have instead people whose desire is to be served and enjoy the national cake meant for all, we are bound to have leaders who behave as little gods with absolute power over a kingdom that is their exclusive right to have until Christ returns. Nigerian politics is therefore, far from what it is supposed to be. In Nigeria, a crook can become a leader, as long as he has the money and connection to climb to the highest position of leadership. And when he gets it, he remains there until death does him part or until one stronger than him pulls him down from the throne of power. When

he is looking for the position, he honours democracy but after getting it, he honours dictatorship instead. Any person that disagrees with his policy or is not in his own camp is an enemy to be dealt with, even to taking his life. Thus, the crave for political leadership by most Nigerians, is to enable one has the power and the freedom to do as one wishes, good or bad, as far as one has the power and the money to do and undo. It is seen as a system of governance where the majority and the strong have it all, at the expense of the minority and the weak. This is not only the problem of those in power. As we look around, we see that those who are not in power are doing all in their power to undermine the efforts of those in power. This is with a view to making them ineffective and unproductive so that in the next election they can capture the power. Thus, the Nigerian kind of politics perpetuates non-performance in governance for there is always an opponent opposing the ruling party unethically so as to score cheap political points for their own benefits. Thus, their opposition is not in the interest of the populace and the state or nation but to weaken the ruling party and portrays the opposition party in good light to the electorates with a view to winning the next election.

Yamsat argues that:

Politics for most Nigerians is therefore big business, it is money making venture, rather than service to the society one belongs. This became much clearer in the last election (2007) than at any time in the history of Nigerian politics. Money and not issues or programmes were the determining factor as to who gets elected. Many therefore, got elected because they had enough money to put into many hands, especially those that matter in their constituencies.

We may also observe that even the last general election was mixed up with political gimmicks all over the nation. Where do we go? We think the only solution is to turn to the real mission of Christian Religion and Democracy.

Christian Religion and Democracy the Solution to Present Day Nigerian Problem

Even though Plato's negative perception of democracy is such that he believed that democracy by its nature is capable of putting an ass as leader of the people by virtue of its emphasis on the voice and wishes of the majority, democracy by its emphasis on the rights of the individual as well as his responsibility to others makes it a possible solution to the contemporary Nigerian political problem. Whereof, the tenets of democracy are truly and zealously followed, couple with the fear and love of God, it is the best option. The democratic structure is capable of arresting the excesses of democracy where in the name of democracy the majority disabuses the rights of the minority or the weak without any sense of guilt of breaking the law. On this, Thucydides, in Yamsat (1999:24) the fifth century BC historian would say:

Our Constitution is called democracy because power is in hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law: when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability

which the man possesses. No one is, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, and is kept in political obscurity because of poverty.

TCNN Research Bulletin (1995) says the Greek idea of *koinonia* (partnership) in politics, where politicians must see themselves as *koinonoi* (partners) and *sunergoi* (fellow partners) in a common cause and not rivals is what we see features in Paul's understanding of the kind of relationship that should exist in the Church or among God's people: This fellowship, maintained with scrupulous care, which makes us mingle as men with our fellow men and holds that the human race has certain rights in common is also of great help in cherishing the more intimate fellowship which is based on friendship. For he that has much in common with a fellow-man will have all in common with a friend. Sharing or to share (*koinonein*) in the affairs of the state or nation was central and non-negotiable in ancient Greek politics not to talk of sharing in all things worth sharing between friends. This brings us to the Christian understanding of democratic leadership. The Christian understanding of democracy is very crucial for the contemporary Nigerians because to stop at the secular or pagan Greek understanding leaves us in despair because a purely human wisdom of leadership ends in destruction and oppression since God is not in it. We find this to be true in the Nigerian situation. Even though the idea of fair sharing of the resources of the nation is in the Constitution of Nigeria, people in power still accumulated the wealth of the country to themselves to the detriment of the rest of the populace. The idea of sharing merely from a humanitarian basis ends on a human level but sharing the resources given us by God's springs from God himself who loves us so much that he gave his only beloved Son, Jesus Christ to die on the Cross so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. As Christ did not look only to his interest, the Christian is called not to look only to his own interest but to the interest of others.

The Christian is urged to put away selfish ambition and conceit and put on humility, as Christ did and gave his life for our life (Phl.23-11). Apart from the fact that Christ has left us an example of sharing our life with others to the point of even giving it up for them, believers from one indivisible body with each member having a unique gift for the nourishment of all. So that, if one member suffers, all the others suffer with him or her and if one member is honoured, every other person rejoices with him or her (I Cor.12:26). The apostle Paul says that the idea behind sharing in our life, gifts and material possession with others is to bring about a state of equality or as we may say today a state of justice and equity. It is on the basis of this that he urges the Corinthians to support the famine stricken Jerusalem Church materially and financially. Corinthians 8:13-15 saying:

Our desire is not that others be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present, your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little (I Cor.8:13-15).

It is this that we see being exhibited in the early Christian community as we read in Acts 2-5, where we read that the community had everything in common and that when one family decided to sabotage this spirit of communism or communalism, the result was death. Luke says in Acts 4:32 that: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possession was his own they shared everything they had."

CONCLUSION.

Christian Religion therefore, has much to offer to contemporary Nigeria about democratic leadership, for in it is found the Christian spirit of sacrifice modeled after the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. In Christianity is found also the spirit of sharing. However, it is not every Christians who is obedient to this teaching can be a good democrat in the political arena. Only the person who is called and gifted in it, for political leadership like any other leadership is God's calling. Some people he has called as clergymen or pastors, some as evangelists, some as teachers, some medical doctors, some engineers, some administrators or political leaders, all with a view to lead the rest of us to a state of happiness or excellence. Any person who ventures to take up what is not God's plan for him or her cannot succeed in that field or calling. That is, why it is important that the Church should be interested in the calling of their members, right at a very early stage of their lives, even right back during Sunday School age. Only when the Church is able to help guide people to take up to their God-given calling in life, will Christians make any head way in this country. We cannot all be politicians just like we cannot all be pastors or medical doctors, but we can fix people where they belong. When we do not do that, we are in great danger of running ourselves and the nation down. When we choose our career because of the money it gives us and because God calls us into it or we have the gift in that area, we are in for trouble or for non-performance and frustrations. In the eyes of God, taking up a career not meant for us amounts to disobedience, jealousy, greediness and stealing, which certainly is bound to end up in frustrations and even death. Nigerian therefore, must realize that politics is not a money making or business venture, but a service to humanity. It is a calling to make life better for the people. Because it is a service or calling, only those are called by God to do it, can succeed in it, for the good of all in that nation. The role of the Church is to ensure that only gifted ones get elected into political offices and to groom them to excel in it as she does with those in other fields of service. Only in this way shall we be the salt and light of the world of our time. Only in this way shall we impact the world of our time for good. Yes, only in this way shall the Church be found to be relevant in the world of our time and will therefore, not be matched over by anyone under the pretext that we do not matter. And above all, only those who believe in God and fear him will succeed in the political arena to which they have been called to serve God and society and not self

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