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The Church and Politics in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The church is the called-out people ((Deut.5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16)) and has more frequently come to refer to the body of Christ across the world. This body, due largely to its avowed neutrality in issues of contest between or among its members, often is expected to be apolitical or not involved in any form of politics. However, as both an entity and a stakeholder it is impossible and indeed detrimental to divorce the church from politics. It has interests that must be protected and advanced and the leaders also have personal interests that are surreptitiously championed even within the body. This work is therefore an attempt to establish that contrary to popular belief, the church cannot and should not be apolitical or indifferent to politics or partisan politics. This paper is hinged on the elite theory as a foundation for explaining the phenomenon of the church in politics in Nigeria and politics in the church in Nigeria.

Keywords: Christian, Church, Elite, Islamisation, Politics

1. Introduction

According to Pfeiffer and Vos John Rea (2005, p.350) the word church is derived from the Greek adjective *krykon* (*kyriakon*) which means “belonging to the Lord”. The church is also often seen as the *ekklesia* or assembly or called out people of God (Deut.5:22; 9:10; 10:4; 18:16), “a people for His own possession who should receive His promises” (Pfeiffer,2005, p.351). In the New Testament account of 1 Peter the church is described as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet.2:9, KJV). In some cases, it is used to designate a Christian place of worship. One central thing about the perspectives on the church is that it is about people, in one place or scattered abroad but who represent the Christian faith. It is important to note that this body has grown over the years to a myriad of denominations which are often open to centrifugal forces of doctrinal differences. The church or Christianity is not a religion. McGee (1980, p.336) defined religion as “a set of actions organized around the sacred, that is a non-empirical source of power, transcendence, mystery and awe”. Another attempt to define religion was by Durkheim (Tylor, 1958, p.62) which says it is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart or forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them”. The above definitions suggest man looking for a way to reach God. However, among the Christians, Christianity is not a religion because it is God looking for man through Christ (John 1:1-5; 3:16,17 and 3:31).

A popular theorist, Harrold Lasswell (1936), defined politics as “who gets what, when and how” and this in political sociology connotes application of power, where power is the capacity to achieve one’s objectives even when those objectives are in conflict with the interest of another actor or actors. It can also be seen as a study of power relations. Politics is contest by powers for scarce resources in a given environment or context. It may also be defined as struggle for protection and promotion or advancement of parochial or peculiar interests. Another way of defining politics is to see it as organized advancement of organized interests. This may be through political parties. Organized interests suggest plurality and aggregation of interests. Human nature perpetually thrives on interests. Various disciplines in the social sciences emphasize interest. In law one needs to show interest in a matter to have locus. Again, in law even lack of interest can cause abortion of a matter through lack of diligent prosecution. In business administration the proprietor would ask: what is in it for me? Or, is my interest protected? In public administration, the officer weighs and balances interests and options. He may also seek to ascertain public interest before action is taken on a public matter. Sometimes, and in an often-unfortunate manner, the public administrator (public servant) often considers his interest before attending to public issues. Once the interest is defined the need for its protection and promotion arises. At the national level minority groups tend to congregate around parties that will protect their interests best, since on their own it may be elusive. To address this fear some political parties in Nigeria have adopted what they call zoning formula. It is indeed as cyclic or endless as man’s needs are insatiable. Resources to satisfy any or a combination of Maslow’s (Berkman ,1974; Maslow, 1954) 5 hierarchy of needs, including physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization, are usually scarce.

The environment determines the type of politics in question, that is environmental determinism. The environment may not only be spatial but can also be any human grouping and may range from family (even just a man and his wife), club, school, church, office, local government area, state, regional (within a country and among a number of countries), national to international. And so, when we

prefix the environment to the word politics we get the politics we are referring to. Examples include village, church and international politics. The scarce resources in contest may also be used to distinguish the types of politics. Thus, we may have food politics, water politics, employment politics etc. Food is important because without food there may be starvation. It is a basic resource. Indeed, it is an obligatory starting point for other forms of politics. Politics may also be defined as balancing of interests among contending powers. The powers in the contest or struggle for the scarce resources are the actors in the group(s). Depending on the size of the group(s) they may form alignments from time to time and from interest area to interest area. They may call themselves stakeholders, a term which in itself arrogates a special status or advantage to them in terms of ability to lay claim to the resources in question or contest. Once this is done the disadvantaged groups tend to be relatively incapacitated concerning their aspiration over the resources in question. They are thus psychologically conquered and tend to depend on the stakeholders to allocate crumbs to them. The stakeholders are usually small in number and are often erroneously looked up to for a change in any resource distribution that adversely affects the majority. This is usually not possible because it will amount to shooting themselves in the leg, exchanging riches for poverty, trading places with the poor or conceding power to the poor. Power is not given, but taken. Even the bible says that “from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent *take* (emphasis mine) it by force (Matthew 11:12)”.

2. Theoretical Perspective/Application

This paper is situated within the game theory analytical prism. The game theory or theory of games as it is variously called (Varma, 2011, p. 286) is “a body of thought dealing with rational decision strategies in situations of conflict and competition, when each participant or player seeks to maximize gains and minimize losses” (Plano & Riggs, 1973, p.33). The game theory owes its genesis to parlour games like chess, chicken, poker, or bridge, with obvious elements of conflict, decision-making and co-operation, played between two or more players, where decisions of each player are contingent upon the decisions of others, and the central point, therefore, is the inter-dependence among the decisions of the different players participating in the game (Varma, p.287). In game theory, the participants watch their opponents closely and try to anticipate their moves and are guided by such moves. Thus, Schelling (Varma, p.287) says it is the “formal study of the rational, consistent expectations that participants can have about each other’s choices”. This theory assumes that there are players or decision makers who could be individuals or institutions who have rational objectives and have resources that can be deployed towards achieving such goals. Such resources can also include, as in Machiavelli’s Prince, subtlety or outright lies to achieve an end which will later justify the means.

- The prince, Machiavelli claimed, should uphold morality, but not take it too seriously himself. For instance, the prince should attend a place of worship, because it looks good to do so, but should not take the sermon—political morality is different from private morality. Machiavelli also believed a prince must be prepared to do what is necessary to uphold both his power and the security of the state. Hesitation to be ruthless when ruthlessness was required would make the prince both politically immoral and a political failure (Mbah, 2006, p.19).

The choices over alternatives that players make now determine future state of affairs which are called the outcomes in the game or the prizes to be won or losses to be borne. The pay-off or reward to the player determines the type of game played. Generally, there are a) Zero-sum two person’s games involving only two persons wherein the winner takes all and the loser loses all; b) Non-Zero-sum two person’s game. In this game, the gains and losses do not add up to zero. Here both players may gain or lose in varying degrees; c) Zero-sum n-person with infinite number of persons and equally infinite possibilities of winnings and losses on both sides; and d) Non-Zero--sum n-person game where two or more persons or groups may cooperate to tackle any given number of opponents. The idea is to reduce the number of opponents and increase the chances of winning by the player or players.

In terms of application we note that life within and outside the church is about contest and competition regulated as game. It is always about winning and losing and who wins and who loses what when and how. Thus, those afraid of the massive influence of the church, because of the numerical strength of the church, tend to rely on preaching that politics should be left for the politicians. They feel better keeping the church at bay and making donations to the church later.

- The church purifies them from their iniquities with hyssop and presents them to the people, they sit very close to the sanctuary as knights of the church and most of the times donate to the church from the accumulated tax payers and pensioners money stolen from the states treasury. They pay their tithes in huge sum and even build colossal churches and basilicas (Anyanwu, 2016).

If they succeed, then the church is caged in spite of the supposed numerical power at the church’s disposal. The church will later be made to be at the receiving end of policies churned out by parties and policies that may be hostile to its interests, for example Islamisation. Such was the case when some unwary and ‘liberal’ Christians helped a Moslem Buhari into power last year only to begin to feel the heat of Islamic jihad soon after. According to Itua (2016) “A coalition of 22 Christian groups, led by the National Christian Elders Forum (NCEF), yesterday, said the declaration of Monday, September 12 as a public holiday in commemoration Eid-El-Kabir celebration by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhai Sa’ad Abubakar 111, was the height of impunity”, claiming that it was “improper for the head of an Islamic faith in Nigeria to announce, declare, or extend public holidays”. The paper noted that in the preceding July “Christian organizations criticized an extension of public holidays by the Federal Government over the non-sighting of the moon by the Sultan, which was to have signaled the end of Ramadan”. According to the NCEF chairman, Solomon Asemota “the full membership of Nigeria in OIC, in 1986, by the (Gen. Ibrahim) Babangida military administration is tantamount to making Nigeria an Islamic state”.

Jimanze Ego-Alowes (2016) noted, concerning Buhari’s appointment of Ms Hadiza Usman as Chief Executive of the vital Nigeria Ports Authority, that:

- The said Ms. Usman, whose appointment has been distinguished more by nepotism than anything else, is deemed to be a key person in the wily deal of the present powers controlling APC, to convert Nigeria into their ethnic tributary state. Simply put she is an agent of internal colonialism masquerading as a technocrat and moral crusader. What greater corruption is there than that of all the appointments so far made by the APC led federal government, northerners who are Moslems, are achieving about 95 per cent predominance? This is especially in the critical areas of oil, security and now NPA. ... Is she not an agent of this ethno-regional-religious militia...?

Again, within the church we find that the church leadership constitutes the elite that Pareto (1939) said is disciplined and has leadership qualities and are made up of those successful persons who rise to the top in every occupation and stratum of society: there are elite of lawyers, elite of mechanics, and elite of thieves, and even elite of prostitutes (Ezeani, 2010:96).

3. Empirical Verification

In politics there are the rules, techniques, plans etc., employed by the actors to knock out their opponents. They may be legitimate, illegitimate, moral, immoral, combination of these or even absurd in some cases. These include pacification, diplomacy (including carrot and stick), coveting state media and other infrastructure, negotiation, numbers, war and threat of war, among others.

Pacification is a technique used at all levels of politics. It is used by a party or actor to alienate another or others, thus reducing the number and strength of its opposition. It puts the pacified or bought over on the side of the pacifier. The pacified then tends to collapse his interest in the hands of the pacifier, believing it will be safe there. It is like mortgaging the future for a plate of porridge (Genesis 25:29-34). An example is when politicians make apparently harmless or innocuous donations to churches and ministers of God ahead of elections. Over time the church and its ministers come to believe that politics should be left for politicians alone. Ironically, the same politicians who donated to the church while campaigning soon turn around to insist that the church pays tax.

Coveting state media (Chukwuma, 2007, p.10) and other infrastructure belonging to the state or all by state governors or others already in power is another strategy usually employed in politics, especially in Africa and other developing countries where there are weak separation of powers and distinction between personal and collective interests (Eleagu, 2005, p.66). Here, these actors see state-owned media houses as regular ministries of information staffed by civil servants who are guided by civil service rules including absolute loyalty to the government in power. This way information or news from other contending powers or opposition is usually killed on arrival, unless it is adverse to the interest of the opposition. Compliance with this arrangement is enforced through carrot and stick style of salary payment to state media staff, employment of known government party agents and propagandists into the media houses as journalists and deployment of 'erring' media staff to redundant tables, sometimes next to public toilets, in the ministry of information or as information officers in very remote local government areas. In some other cases, during electioneering campaigns, stadia and other publicly built and maintained facilities as schools are no-go areas for opposition parties but are available to the party in government. Government circulars, citing security threats, are often issued to the facility managers, school headmasters/headmistresses and principals forbidding public gatherings and worship without clearance from the governor, which is usually impossible, in such places. Ironically, the same places are used without such clearance by the party or parties in power, for the same purposes.

Intimidation is another absurd means of compelling loyalty from opposition. For instance, in some states of Nigeria, and for lack of resources to approach the courts, people who join opposition parties risk withdrawal of certificates of occupancy or outright demolition of their houses if they ever hoist opposition flags, posters or even handbills therein or even use such places for their meetings. This, however, contradicts the constitutionally guaranteed right to peaceful assembly and association (Chapter 4, Section 40) in Nigeria.

Actors in politics often reach written and or unwritten agreements which often guide their behaviour in the struggle for scarce resources. Their adherence to these agreements is often determined by their level of individual discipline and how they later interpret the accords or agreements. The more undisciplined they are and the more they feel change will be in their permanent interest the more they are prone to break the agreements. Some will even deny that such gentlemanly agreements ever existed in the first place. This is because they are often not written, done in the dark and may not even be actionable.

An unwritten understanding in church circles is to leave politics to the politicians, as if the church is bereft of internal and external politics. Is it not curious that a very high percentage of bishops have older bishops as their filial relatives? Yet the church and the priests are to distance themselves from partisan politics. What party, whose interest? At civil society events during the build up to elections in Nigeria it was usually argued that religion should not be an issue for discussion. But once a Buhari won Islamisation became an unwritten state policy, as provided for by a non-existent chapter of our constitution. While the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was pretending to be apolitical Nigeria's Muslim presidents, without recourse to the constitutional secularity of Nigeria, were busy enlisting Nigeria as member of Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, and even licensed Islamic Banking in Nigeria. In the current administration Moslem President Muhammadu Buhari is also strategically the petroleum minister and nearly all the heads of the armed forces and paramilitary or security agencies as well as heads and boards of key boards are Moslem northerners, in spite of federal character balance enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria. An insignificant percentage went to Moslems from the centre and the west while the bewildered Christians, especially from the east, appear to watch in utter amazement.



Figure 1

Source: WhatsApp broadcast message.

It may be important to note, as Ike (2016) did, that Christianity is most apparent in southern Nigeria, an area dominated by many different ethnic groups, for example, the Ibibio, Efik, Igbo, and Yoruba. A cursory look at the distribution of capital projects in the 2016 federal budget will suggest that the Christian south is neglected deliberately. There is hardly any other way to explain North Central's 272 trillion allocation over South East's 28 trillion or over the 35 trillion budgeted for South. It is also noteworthy that the same budget was essentially based on oil proceeds from the same South East and South. For now, the entire North does not contribute a drop of oil or its proceeds to the national treasury.

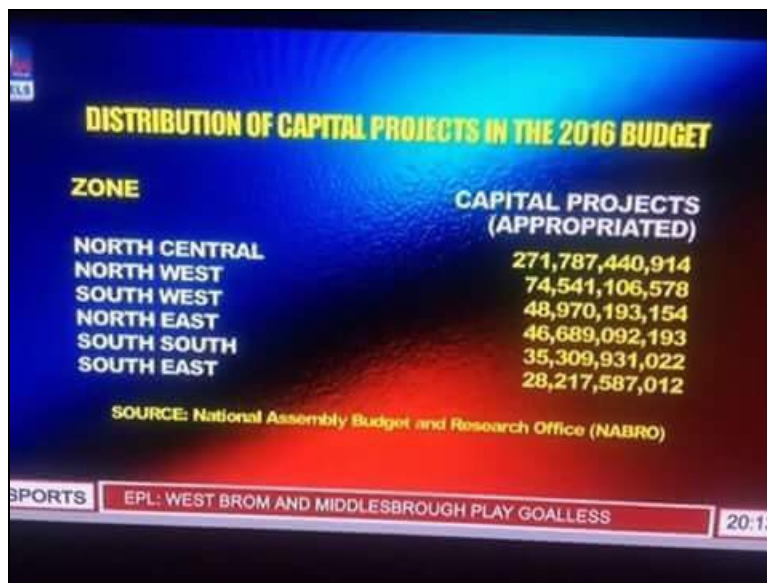


Figure 2

Curiously too, religious crises usually arising from Moslems' demand for imposition of sharia laws are almost always when Moslems are not in power. Uju (2004:145) noted that

- Between the middle and late 1970s the issue of sharia became the first obvious ambition of the Northern political elites to give national elevation to Islam over and above Christianity. Therefore, there can be no mention of religious crisis without the Sharia crisis since it epitomizes in its true form the connection between religion and politics in Nigeria.

The elements or ingredients of politics include power, influence, force, negotiation etc.

These elements can be found singly or as a combination. They may be interwoven in both definition and use. For instance, power is ability to influence or compel another or others to accept or do one's wish. It may be achieved by force or peaceful negotiation. The ultimate aim is a shift in position in the interest of the powerful. It may involve pooling together of strengths by actors to bring down a common threat. Example at the international level of politics was the coming together of the Allied Forces in 1945 to check the spread of Nazi Germany, under Hitler, across Europe and the rest of the world. Again in 2012 it took the coming together of France, USA, and Britain etc. to bring down the government of Col Muommar Ghadaffi in Libya, in an attempt to check Libya's export of terror across the world. In Nigeria, in 2011 elections, it took the merging of forces among opposition parties to unseat then Governor Ikedi Ohakim of Imo state. Even at the family level a rallying behind the wife by the children tends to water down and keep in check the influence of the father. His behavior will be influenced by his desire to win back his children's love, respect and loyalty, items that are usually scarce in supply. In politics power is not given but it is taken. Even when it is given, as in the case of Governor Theodore Orji of Abia state and his predecessor, Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, it may be subject to protracted litigations, a huge sign of struggle. The contest will necessarily be there but it may be fraught with irregularities and lack of transparency which brings us back to ability or power to manipulate the system in one's favour. In essence, even the one to receive power at the end would not be alone. He would have been chosen over a number of other contestants lined up to be given power. He may have long-drawn litigations to contend with, as did Theodore Orji.

On November 29, 2014, according to a monitored CNN report, the present pope visited and prayed at the blue mosque, Istanbul in Turkey. Recent report from BCA (Broadcasting Corporation of Abia State) Memory Lane programme said another pope did the same in 2008. It is said that Abraham and the Jews were of Syrian origin (Deuteronomy 26:5) and other records suggest he existed around Istanbul in present day Turkey, not present-day Israel or Palestine. Could it be religious harmony alone that is driving popes to worship in mosques? Which god are they praying to from a particular mosque? Will we be expecting imams to worship in the church? Is it not possible that the popes have their eyes on something there, especially as they were said to have prayed 'silently'? Could it not be a lost ground in one of the earlier conquests that the popes are subtly attached to but cannot overtly go after to sustain inter-religious harmony? Either way it is politics in the faith, church and even across faith borders. The Anglican Communion (Uzodinma, 2014) in Nigeria bestowed its highest honour during its 11th general synod in Enugu in 2014 on then President Goodluck Jonathan, a man with two wives (stargist.com). This is a church that professes the tenets of the bible. However, the same bible preaches that a deacon, one deserving honour, must be husband of **only one wife** at a time (1 Timothy 3:2&12). It, thus, becomes clear that the church leadership did not offer that award to the then president as an encouragement to him to keep up the good deeds or to be a source of inspiration to the rest of the members. Politics and accoutrements may better explain the award.

Curiously, large percentage of knighthood and other recognitions in the various denominations are reserved for those with the wherewithal. People who are poor but run all menial errands in the churches are nearly always forgotten when it is time for recognition and awards.

Some bishops will readily lever on Galatians 5:19,20 to enjoin the clergy under them to avoid dissensions, *iro otu* (igbo), *porapo* (yoruba) or *dengi* (hausa) but behind the scene they encourage clergy from their own natural localities to come together periodically to protect their interests, including the interests of the encouraging bishops, as outsiders cannot be fully trusted with certain key positions and details. They give the groups innocuous labels as ABC or XYZ Brethren. These same bishops ironically are the champions against politicizing the church or politics in the church.

Many new generation churches in Nigeria started out with general overseers who encouraged the people from everywhere to freely give and help build the lord's churches. But as they age their greatest concern is to retain the church leadership in their natural families. When they die succession, plans are arranged in such a way that the lord's church leadership remains in their families. Again, in terms of ethnicity, majority of the new generation churches with Yoruba general overseers find it hard to appoint *igbo* pastors to head even local churches in *igbo* states. At best, they would send a pastor from the old mid-west region, if they think *yoruba* pastors would be resisted. There the *igbos* can only be prayer warriors, burial committee chairmen or fund-raising committee chairmen. But the lord prayed in John 17:22 "that they may be one, even as we are one". Matthias was chosen over Justus (Acts 1:23) through casting of lots after praying. Today, however, bishops are made, dioceses are carved out and cathedrals and archdeaconry headquarters locations are chosen to suit powerful interests, sometimes following lobbying, not casting of lots.

4. Conclusions

Politics is about power and its use. Indeed, in their work titled *The Relationship between Church and State*, Kasomo and Naila (2013) maintained that the "church and state are two realms inseparable basically because they concern the same subject matter, namely man and woman, who are both material and spiritual". Even the subtle efforts to hide political moves or maneuvers from the other competing side or sides is strategic in politics. One may refer to this as diplomacy but it is essentially a political tool or strategy. The church is made up of people and because these people interact within and without, influence in either direction is inevitable and so politics is unavoidable. It is misleading to think that the church is apolitical because the church does not exist in isolation. Even if the church is an island internal power play is found there, and that is politics.

5. Recommendations

The church as a collectivity has interests. Christianity as a faith, with all the buffeting missiles (2 Timothy 4:1-4), should come out clearly and seek to possess the Christian possession (Joshua 1:11). The church should be free to command votes and extract promises from competing candidates in order to ensure, at least, the continued secularity of the entity called Nigeria as well as maintain earthly relevance while upholding heavenly consciousness. The wanton religious killings and indiscriminate rape of innocent women and girls by Fulani herdsmen in the southern part of Nigeria, where they are strangers, will abate if Christian leadership moves from reacting through press releases to such ugly incidents to angling for positions of reasonable power in the polity.

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