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DISCOURSE ON RELIGION AND POLITICAL GODFATHERISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Political godfatherism has become a strong determinant in the shaping and operation of politics in the present democratization experience in Nigeria. Considering the booming religious life in the country, the study argues that the pattern of godfatherism displayed in Nigerian politics brings unhealthy result which renders the state of governance in the country at alarming stage and attracts worrisome agitations, opinions and insinuations. From the functionalist theory point of view, this paper posits that if adherents of the religions in Nigeria stay true to the tenets of their faith as they go into partisan politics and as well remain impartial and objective in their political interest either as politician or political godfather, the result will reflect on awesome governance that will achieve the good of the masses, not that of selected view, or party members. Furthermore, this paper examines the proper positive roles which both politicians and their godfathers should play in order rid the Nigerian society of the menace of corruption which has dwindled the social, economic and patriotic strength of the country, thereby posing threat and looming doom against the Nigerian state. Findings show that the causative factors of religious crisis, insurgence, poverty and social crimes are traceable to poor performance in governance from the political office holders in the country which could be traceable to the kind of roles played by political godfathers before election, during election and after election in country. Therefore, the study suggests that politicians should respect religion and the positive ethical and moral functions it stands for in the society knowing that the use of religion is a positive instrument to achieve good governance in the society. Therefore there is need for our leaders to allow their religion to reflect in the way they treat the masses God has entrusted in their hands.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Godfatherism, Governance, Nigeria.

I. Introduction

One of the greatest questions that border the society is that of political life; how will individuals and societies decide their own future? (Zartman, 2019). The interface between political and religious inclinations of both the political actors and the masses attracts serious evaluation in the contemporary Nigerian society where religion is used as a tool for political power (Enwerem, 2013). Hence, the influence of religion on the practice of political godfatherism in Nigeria is a phenomenon that demands elucidation in the contemporary era when good governance is a collective quest. The phrase "political godfather" seems to be

weird and composite phenomenon that introduces phobia in Nigerian political arena and brings worry in the minds of the masses that are at the receiving end of what politicians and their supporters deliver. In the recent times, political godfatherism is becoming a very popular concept in the Nigerian polity as it occupies a centre-stage in the factors that determine the success or failure of a particular political administration. The idea and understanding of the functions of godfatherism remains somewhat saturated with ambiguous philosophy. The concept in most cases could attract a lot of interpretation that and truncate the true meaning and function of the term when displayed in its primary and true capacity. Taking the Nigerian political terrain into consideration, there is an understanding that godfathers should serve as sources of inspiration and their record should motivate political office holders to be mentored by such experienced politicians. However, there seems to be an otherwise and a contrary motion as regards what is practiced between political godfathers and their godsons. Godfatherism in African politics seems to promote an entrepreneurial idea of politics which is opposed to the conventional civic responsibility and of course raises the stakes of politics coupled with untold mixed feelings as it affects electoral politics in an emerging and transitional democracy (Oladipupo, 2013). In Nigeria presently, it is assumed that political godfathers employ every means, both legitimate and illegitimate to make sure that their political godsons are pronounced winners in elections so as to return to them financial benefits that should have been used in developing the society (Gambo in Oladipupo, 2013).

From its etymological and morphological identity, the term *"godfather"* seems to have rooted from a religious practice in Christendom. Hence, godfather as stemmed from two norms, god and father, hence, it a man who is present at the Christening of a baby who promises to help raise the child in a Christian manner; a male god parent who sponsors the baptism of a child (Albert, 2005). The noun godfatherism seems to have emerged and applied vividly in the context of negative political practice. However, Albert (2005) refers to political godfathers as rich men whose contributions to campaign funds of some candidates have helped the latter to win elections. The understanding of the rendering of the term could sometimes be coloured by the context in which it is used. The concept of godfatherism is often used interchangeably with some other concepts which stand and refer to other things such purported synonyms include mentor, adviser, benefactor, supporter and similar concepts (Oladipupo, 2013). Practical understanding of the practical meaning of a godfather to a godson in politics suggested that godfatherism is a process whereby new or upcoming politician desiring to be elected into a certain political office goes after an influential and experienced politician who adopts him as political godson and works with him until such desire is accomplished. The central understanding in the definitions applied to the concept of godfatherism as far as politics is concerned is that the godson goes a long way to afford the tenets of agreement between him and his godfather before election, during election and after election.

II. Theoretical Framework

Functionalist perspective is based largely on the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton (Mooney et al, 2007). It is a sociological theory sees society as a complex system whose diverse parts work together in order to enhance solidarity and stability. Hence, functionalism is an approach looks at society from a macro-level of orientation, with its focus on the social structures which shape society as a whole, and considers social structure and social functions as different, yet indivisible entities that must

collaborate to produce an ideal society. In essence, functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements, which include the norms, traditions and customs as well as the institutions. Herbert Spencer, one of the promoters of this theory popularized a common analogy which presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. In the justification of this theory as being applicable in this study, Spencer's view which maintains that true social happiness is obtained when individual needs and desires are achieved without infringing into other people's rights (Turner, 2002). Hence, this paper maintains that ideal political godfatherism is when the godfather and the mentee divorce themselves from tailoring and showcasing political malpractices and concepts that lead to disenfranchisement, rigging of elections and mis-governance of the masses. Again, religion, being a pro-moral and ethical norms of the society should assume a more didactic and instructional role to the political class who are their adherents, since role enhances conditions and situational necessity for the society to remain at equilibrium or balance position.

III. Origin of the Interaction Between Religion and Politics

Religion and politics had been age-long social institutions whose relationships are interwoven in virtually every generation. Although the modern society could brag to an extent of secular status, yet the bond of religion has never lost its function as social soldering paste. Religion and politics have been in a relationship for several thousands of years. Similarly, the debate about the origin of religion cannot move on unless it is related along the line of age of human race. For to many people, religion should not be subtracted from whatever activity that happens among humanity. That is to say that religion should be the determining factor even of politics. However, Farnsley (2012) maintains that religion is just one lens through which humans view the world, not just the only lens. Although many people may appear to be religious in several things, but different religious people expect different things from their political leaders. Adam (2013) argues that when religious tenets become visible feature of politics, both the essence of religion and the effectiveness will suffer great loss. The understanding and practice of politics in Greek culture was an integral aspect of religion. Any one going to take a work of serving the public in any aspect must first of all understand that it was a duty for the gods. Devoting oneself to family responsibility was an honourable acts to the gods, so it was when one is devoted to the social services of the city. Civil patriotism was an act of religion forming part of the social success, thus religion and politics were interwoven (Finley, 2013). In the ancient time as evidence in the social order of the Greece of antiquity, serving the city is serving the supreme order of the supernatural. The one in politics never sought self-glory, but the glory of the gods and the good of the *demo* (the people). Plato's philosophy engaged the idea that the problem of politics receives its proper solution in nowhere else, except in the domain of religions. In nearly all the societies of the ancient world, the object of religion and worship was located with the political system. It was only the tyrants who once possesses political position that exhibit the habit of attending to themselves (and making the society a secondary matter). Obineche (2017) asserts that in the Old Testament dispensation, religion and politics complemented each other because the truth was not only told but was upheld as the accepted standard of leadership and governance. The marriage between religion and politics was not devoid of the consciousness of what God would want the leaders to do and the consequences that must follow any disobedience from the divine prescriptions. In ancient Hebrew government, all political leaders were not just politicians, but religious figures as well. The political institutions were not totally different or separate

from religious institutions in Ancient Israel political practice; political organizations were simultaneously regarded as religious organizations evaluation, description and acceptability or discredit of policies were weighed on a religious undertone. It was not easy to grasp the differentiation between politics and religion since the success as well as the failure of every government was measured on the religious policies and practices - how they were honoured or disregarded during the regime of each king both in Judah and Israel. Effectually, Israel's political leader's achievements were designated solely on the basis of the standard of religious practices, that were enforced in their days as kings (Obineche, 2017). The judicial-moral codes in the Torah show the acceptable moral conducts and legal provisions for business transactions. The social-ethical-judicial commandment and guidelines discuss the responsibilities to pursue either blessing, for obedience or penalties and curses for the violation of the stipulated principles. The foolishness of rulers in Israel politics of the antiquity was valiantly dictated in the way such kings acted contrary to the moral codes put in place in the scripture as it was expected that the rulers were to take their counsel not just from political allies, but the word of God was the yardstick for government. Gottwald in Obineche (2017) presents two-fold aspect to the understanding of Israel politics as the politics was not only seen as obscured by religion but reforms in religious system were used as assessment to the political leaders who tended towards negligence. Religion was a powerful dominant force in the ancient Egyptian society. Okon (2002) posits that the religion of Egypt emanated from simple polytheism to philosophical monotheism and all communities were having specific deity which symbolized the personated powers of nature. Thus, a Pharaoh was not just a political leader (Monarch) but god on the throne (Okon, 2002). The history of Roman polities cannot be understood unless the religion of the time is involved. The inculcation of politics into religion of the people was what the ancient societies knew very well. Although democracy was partially unknown to the ancient world, the will of the deities were accepted as the collective will of the people. So, no better constitution could be implemented against the rudiments of their culture and religious prescriptions. Emperors were the executive custodians of the pantheon, the priests were oracles and maintenance agents. Although they were the interpreters for the gods, the kings were seen as the chief care-takers.

IV. Religion and Political Godfatherism: The Nigerian Experience

The historical origin of the influence of religion on electoral choice in Nigeria dates back to the introduction of Islamic state through Jihad in the Sokoto Caliphate (Enwerem, 1995).The political exploits made by the caliphate since then in Nigeria political history awakened the political consciousness of the Christians, which led to the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in the mid-1970s as a strong ecumenical movement.

Kalu (2003) asserts that there is a perennial connection between religion and politics in the history of Nigeria. In his position, religion is intricately woven into the fabric of politics and provides the compelling touchstone of legitimacy or the love of the ruler by the ruled; the motive for exercising power; reason to be obeyed; the determinant of the moral standards and style of power and the engine that moves governance. In such contexts, the structure of governance had tremendous impact on the modes of religious expression and religion could not be conjured out of politics. Religionization has been the nature and ordeal of Nigeria political system even from its independence. Nigeria gained her independence on October 1 1960, she obtained republican status on October 1 1963, that the nations independent status has fluctuated between parliamentary democracy, broken by military rules and the most

contemporary is "a presidential capitalist system of democracy since 1999" (Momoh, 2016). As Nigeria struggles with the stability of democracy so it does with the constitution which is the embodiment of political regulations of every nation whether written or unwritten. While lamenting the state of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Momoh (2016) maintains that the constitution has been amended four (4) times since independence, yet it is lacking proper implementation. He also argues that in 1999 amended constitution, the word 'religion' is mentioned 74 times. Archbishop Ben Kwasi quoted in Ross (Ross, 2015) opines that when religions like Christianity and Islam comprise of multitude of hungry followers, and not very educated people in them, politicians explore the opportunity to invade religious arena with their dangerous plans of having them as supporters. The way politics is practice determines how the result will be and the look of the society where it is practiced. The argument of the best place for the discourse of politics seems to occupy the attention of modern scholars. Kilani (2017) averts that the intellectual debate on sustaining democracy and good governance has dwelt much on the secularist ground without recourse to religion. Religion is social paste, the bond that binds the society. It has the capacity to house the moral discussion of all that is in the society. Politicians who use their religion as means of political mobilization see themselves as being indebted to service the faith other than the society (Udemagwuna, 2017). This pattern of religious understanding seems to constitute cardinal militating factors against true politics in Nigerian society.

V. Socio-Religious Implications of Political Godfatherism

On a positive note, good political godfatherism is a powerful mentorship for fair governance. Sound minded older or experienced politicians, through their wealth of knowledge teach the younger and upcoming politicians the art of governance of the dynamics of the society. This platform is operational where the system of politics is free from religious and ethnic nepotism. However, when the aim of political godfatherism is misplaced and misapplied, the following unfortunate phenomena are experienced;

a. Disenfranchisement

The condition where the electorates are for sale is the most appalling of democracy. When the voters are bought with tomato, onions, bowls of rice or money, they sell their right out-rightly and contribute to the corruption of unfair and un-free electoral process, and suffer the consequence too. Lack of fair play and patriotism has crippled the political system of many African states even in Nigeria. Behind this brand of corruption lies the activity of political godfathers, using their godsons. Oladipupo (2013) strongly posits that it is never a crime to have political godfathers who possess wealth of knowledge and experience. Who are embodiment of ideologies and are ready to selflessly use such for the advancement of good governance. However, business political godfathers who seem to outnumber the genuine ones in the Nigeria polity, grab the opportunity of the position of their wards to enrich themselves (Oladipupo, 2013). Once their parties win elections, either by omission or commission, they neglect moral responsibility of harnessing the losing and winning parties together. Genyi (2016) refers to Nigeria as a state where the struggle of democracy is both fierce and bitter, as democratically elected leaders in Africa are tempted to become monarchs, tyrants, dictators and remain in power until death or even try to hand over power to their next of kin (Pipim, 2013).

b. Massive Unemployment

Johnson (2010) perceives the menace of unemployment and how it degenerates every aspect of the society even human health and refers to it as "problem of national ethics". Thus, seeing the huge responsibility in the hand of government concerning state welfare policies and safety policies and their implementations, observers lamented that as at 2012 about 20.0 million Nigerians were unemployed. And the numbers keep increasing with ninety percent of those affected being the youths. Adetipe, in Udemagwuna (2017) argues that the problem of joblessness in Nigeria is at an extent contributed by political leaders who grab and seize employment vacancies for the children, wards and acquaintances even those who are yet to finish schooling, a phenomenon that is built on the concept of 'federal character'. Therefore the youths keep on roaming the street, believing that one day street will pay (Adetipe, in Udemagwuna 2017).

c. Electoral Battle and Fraud

. Electoral fraud is inevitable in a setting where politicians have turned democratic elections into ventures and battle fields where money, private armies and thugs are employed to create enabling environments that guarantee returns on investments and accelerated access to primitive accumulation of wealth (Agba, 2012). The role of such people is highly injurious to the advancement of popular, participatory democracy in Nigeria (Albert, 2005). Activities of political godfathers could be responsible for the pre and post-electoral violence in the society. In a bad political system, where corruption is groomed and grown, politics in seen as more of business, lucrative money-making adventure than service to humanity (Chukwuka, 2011). In this ugly type and selfish politics, the political godfathers receive the providence made for any other persons. They determine the nature of contracts, who takes it and the royalty that must come their way at all cost (Chukwuka, 2011). Consequently, the problem of flood, traffic congestion, and overcrowded cities has been negatively affecting Nigerians (Ogunbodede & Sunmola, 2014).

d. **Betrayal of Professed Religious Beliefs.**

Pals (1996) argues that religious institutions influences political choice or activities. Politicians, who uphold the basis of their beliefs and ideas, have ways in which they conduct themselves, practically showing forth the religious and political conceptions to which they subscribe (Hughes 2003). However, there is a strong challenge in balancing religious sensitivity and the general social welfare of the masses.

Conclusion

The practice of political godfatherism occupies center-stage in the political life in Nigeria and seems to be the order of politics the people are familiar with or adopted. In order to boost economic welfare, good governance and political stability in Nigeria politics there is a need for appropriate balance between religious interference and proper governance. It is obvious that Nigerians are religious people, who practice religious politics. Thus every politician or every political godfather is a member of any of the religions practiced in the country. The desire to have a democratic society that can guarantee sustainable development in all area of the economy in Nigeria cannot be achieved, if godfathers characters are full of flawed, limited and questionable in their conduct, one will not be wrong to say that those modern godfathers are like a 'god' he is expected to lead by good example. From all indications, it seems that the

type of political godfatherism practiced in Nigeria is a departure from the ideal ethico-religious conception of what true politics should be. When political godfathers and their mentees are not guide by any moral value, but get centeredness which in the world modern trend, that such understanding is gradually destroying ethical value and weaken religious beliefs. Moreover, there is nothing wrong with godfatherism in politics if the goal is used to get the right people into public offices. Unfortunately, the emergence of selfish political godfathers has robbed the citizens the privilege of enjoying the dividends of democratic governance in the sense that government has become blind to initiate and implement policies that would accelerate the well-being of the generality of the citizens.

Recommendations

From the ethics and religious understanding of what ideal politics should be in the society, the study recommends the following;

i. Political godfathers and politicians in Nigeria should begin to see politics as services to humanity, not business or opportunity of wealth amassing. The religions in Nigeria, through the adherents who are either politicians or supporters must be co-operative, rid themselves of acrimony and work in collaboration with mutual understanding and respect for each other and as a people acknowledge that they have more common problems and challenges which do not involve discrimination among the practitioners of various traditional religions. These include poverty, insecurity, corruption and a whole lot of other factors that incur underdevelopment in the county.

ii. Politicians and their political godfathers should be agents of peace and unity beginning from the local settings to regional, state and global. Understanding that most religious related crisis are insinuated politically from local settings before they escalate to regional, national or even global levels. Therefore there is high level of need for political re-engineering at the grass root, involving leaders of such religions and their members.

iii. The true meaning of politics which is governance must be made categorically explicit, as religious leaders should intensify efforts in training their adherents who are into politics to appreciate the privilege God gave them to serve. They should be encouraged to promote the positive elements of their religious tenets and beliefs and do well to discourage those religious understanding and misconceptions that become causative factors and objects of discord and bring forth violence at the long run every atom of misinformation should be discouraged.

iv. Politicians should seek to align themselves on with political godfathers who have good records in their political career. People who have the good of the society in mind rather the pursuance of avarice which leads to looting and embezzlement of public fund thereby rendering hopelessness to the people.

v. The teaching of religion and its importance should be made concrete at every level of education. Practitioners of religions should be encouraged to live out their faith in much practical ways, doing to others as they would be interested to be done to. Each religion has the element of the 'golden rule' treating others in the best way and loving way to enhance peace and trust and harmony.

vi. Less emphasis should be placed on money for those seeking political office, rather emphasis should be placed on the credibility of the candidate seeking political office, as the law makers should enact law to prohibit godfatherism in Nigeria's politics.

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