

ATTITUDINAL DISPOSITIONS OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TO CHURCH MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT: Christian involvement in politics is a perennial issue. Over the years, scholars have had divergent views on whether or not Christians should be allowed to participate in partisan politics. Is politics bad in itself, as many suppose? Should Christians be actively engaged in it? Why do some Christians distance themselves from the political activities of the land? How can Christians' involvement in politics foster development in nation-building? What should be the attitudinal dispositions of pastoral leadership to this crucial issue? This research aims at responding to the questions raised above. The paper adopts a descriptive method and reports the findings qualitatively. It examines the nexus between religion and politics, the biblical perspective on politics and Christians' involvement, and pastors' attitude towards members' involvement in politics. The study reveals that politics is not bad, but the players' attitude towards it needs a reorientation. It also discovers that misinterpretation of the concept of separation of Church and State leads to the nonchalant attitude of some Christians toward involvement in partisan politics. The findings also show that religion and politics are interconnected. Hence, the need for the involvement of Christians. To foster national development, pastoral leaders should enlighten their congregants and members about the need to be actively involved in politics.

Keywords: *Attitudinal Dispositions, Pastoral Leadership, Partisan Politics, Christians.*

Introduction

Christian's involvement in politics is a perennial issue in public discourse. It is a crucial subject that has produced divergent views over the years. While some maintain that Christians should be actively involved in politics, others hold that Christians should not be a party to politics. Despite the latter position, the historical record reveals that Christians have participated and are still involved in partisan politics against all odds.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine the attitudinal dispositions of pastoral leaders toward Church members' involvement in partisan politics. Should pastors support members who have political ambitions? What should the attitude of Church pastors be toward two or more members seeking political office(s) on different or the same political platform? In an attempt to address these questions, this paper examines the nexus between religion and politics; it discusses the biblical perspective on politics and Christians' involvement in politics. Why should Christians be involved in politics? And the attitude of pastors towards members' involvement in partisan politics.

Nexus Between Religion and Politics

Christianity will be used interchangeably with religion in this paper. Christianity is a form of religion that upholds the teachings and tenets enshrined in the Holy Bible, with the ideals and ideas rooted in the teaching of Jesus Christ. In other words, the teachings and principles of operation in Christianity are traceable to Jesus' teachings. Hunt espouses that Christianity comprises a group of believers who have the affiliation of faith and doctrines with the sole aim of salvation.ⁱ The word "Christianity" is derived from the word "Christian." Biblical record has it that disciples of Jesus Christ were called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). So, Christians are followers of Jesus who believe and practice the teaching of Christ and, through exemplary living, influence the world positively.

Defining the word “politics,” Faleye traced it to three ancient languages; Greek, Latin, and French. According to him, politics in Greek is “*polis*,” which means “state or city, its Latin equivalent is *Politicus*, and it carries the same idea”ⁱⁱ On the other hand, politics in the French language is pronounced “*politique*.” Its English equivalent explains issues regarding state or city matters.ⁱⁱⁱ Familusi refers to the opinion of Aristotle that politics has to do with the social interaction of two or more people, which is the essence of human social existence.^{iv} Desmond Tutu asserts that politics is an avenue by which citizens live, do things and make decisions.^v The above descriptions of politics points to the fact that politics is a way people govern one another in a given context by nomination, selection, and election. It could also be by traversing and canvassing for support to rule a group of people.

Exploring the relationship between Christianity and politics is considered necessary, having examined the concept of Christianity and politics. Over the years, Religion and politics have been considered phenomena with human beings as their major players.^{vi} Hence Christianity and politics are social constructs that interact with each other. However, Chilufya asserts that religion and politics should be considered independent subjects and separate entities. He notes that even its interactions in practicality are equivocal.^{vii} Familusi argues that religion and politics interconnect due to their crucial societal roles. He states that religion interacts with social institutions, one of which is politics.^{viii}

Tracing the historical lane, Don-Yehiya recalls that though Jewish tradition assumes a dichotomy between religious leaders and political leaders, the line of distinction between the two was not rigid.^{ix} There is a relationship between Jewish religious leaders and political leaders. Smith also argues that there is no contrast between Religion and state in Judaism, as Jewish religious law is regarding social and political matters^x. He maintains that, in Judaism, there is a connection in the functions of both political and religious leaders, although each office maintains some measures of independence.^{xi}

Corroborating the above stance, Fatokun maintains that significant interactions between Church and nation came to bear when Emperor Constantine pronounced Christianity a legal religion at his conversion.^{xii} So, since politics and religions are

governed by some rules, and human beings practice these two concepts, one can submit that they are connected. So, Religion and politics can be regarded as intertwined concepts with inextricable dualism. Although Carson notes that Christianity and politics are separate entities with dichotomous practices, he asserts that both are related as they both help in the growth and development of human existence because both share some common goals of value to humanity.^{xiii}

Despite the above position, some Christian fathers and scholars such as John Locke and Thomas Jefferson maintained that the Church should be separated from the state because there can be a spread of conflict among human beings with respect to Religion.^{xiv} Tutu regrettably notes that one of the mistakes made by the great Reformers such as John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Martin Luther was that the change they brought excluded the political sphere, and the philosophy did not suit the Church system.^{xv}

Biblical Perspective on Politics and Christians' Involvement in Politics

Biblical perspective on politics and Christians' involvement in partisan politics is pertinent to this discourse because the infallible word of God should guide Christian lifestyle and activities. In the first instance, the Biblical account reveals that God created man in his image and gave him authority to take dominion and rule over (Genesis.1:27-28). The statement “take dominion and rule over” could be interpreted as politics because to take dominion could mean offering leadership, exerting power, and exercising authority. Politics, in the real sense, involves exercising power and authority.

Sabes argues that the authorship of government and his connection to human government starts with God.^{xvi} He reiterates that scriptural references to politics with related terms such as “kings and kingdom,” “govern and government,” “ruler and reign,” “nations,” “citizens,” “ambassadors” authority,” and “sovereign” abound in the Bible.^{xvii} The Chronicles of the selection of Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, and other kings in the Bible allude to the fact that God did not distance Himself from the political arena of His people. Sabes maintains that the account of King Josiah’s

reforms that brought restoration to the land of Israel points to the fact that the Bible does not disdain civil matters.^{xviii}

A peep into the New Testament record, by pitching a tent with some Christian political theorists, one may be tempted to assert that the New Testament record concern less about government. However, Storkey blames biblical scholars for failing to recognise political content and its implication in the New Testament. He asserts that several illustrations of Jesus on the Kingdom using several earthy images such as a planted field (Matthew 13:24), mustard seed (Matthew 13:33), and the use net (Matthew 13:47). The illustration, according to him, were meant to unfold the place of righteous reign on earth.^{xix}

Despite the above biblical position on politics, others also use the same Bible to argue against Christian's participation in politics. One such biblical reference is Mark 12:17. "...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Spencer states that many evangelical and religiously-conservative missions, especially in Africa, vehemently based their argument of non-involvement in politics on such Bible references.^{xx} Similarly, some also hold that they are called the "salt and light" of the world (Matthew 5: 13-16) as the basis for non-involvement in partisan politics. However, Razafiarison remarks that the proponents of this school of thought fail to consider the political realm as part of the earth they should season and beam the light.^{xxi} Abstinence from politics based on the above bible references is considered a misinterpretation of the texts.

Also, some Christians consider politics a dirty game due to irregularities that always accompany political activities in Africa and Nigeria in particular, such as violence, election rigging, political corruption, and so on. So, Christians should not be involved. However, Ayantayo's response from an ethicist viewpoint is that politics is biblical and should not be termed a dirty game.^{xxii} He stresses that the God of the Bible would not be a party to what is unclean.^{xxiii} In essence, it can be said that politics is not dirty, but human beings, the players of politics, are those who make it dirty.

The doctrine of separation of the Church is another reason why some Christians do not get involved and participate in politics. Some Christians believe politics is a “worldly” activity, so involvement in it is tantamount to being “part of the world.” Hence, they view religion and politics as parallel lines with opposing interests.^{xxiv}

On the contrary, John Witte Jr. differs in his opinion on the doctrine of separation of Church and state. He argues that many publications on the separation of Church and state have rendered inaccurate the actual meaning of the concept^{xxv}. He maintains that the key theme of the doctrine has to do with religious liberty.^{xxvi} He underscores that the doctrine provides five basic understandings, namely, to maintain and exercise religious liberty; to protect the state from the Church (to guard against spiritual oppression); to preserve an individual’s liberty of conscience from the interference of either Church or state; to protect the individual states from interference by the federal government, and to ensure the security of society and its members from unwarranted participation in and support for Religion.^{xxvii} Based on the review of the five understandings of the separation of Church and state, one may submit that the doctrine does not prohibit Christian’s involvement in politics. In tandem with the above viewpoint, Ishola^{xxviii}, and Ayokunle^{xxix}, in their respective writings, also refer to religious liberty as key in the separation of Church and state doctrine. In essence, no religion should be placed above others.

Pastors’ Attitude Towards Members’ Involvement in Politics

It has been observed earlier that there are divergent views on whether Christians should be involved in politics. Observations among denominational leaders and pastors also reveal different positions and attitudinal dispositions on members’ political involvement. While some hold that pastors should be apolitical, some contend that as citizens of a nation and the leaders of the people, pastors should not stand aloof in the governance of their country. Irrespective of the above differing positions, it is essential to examine what should be the attitude of pastors toward their members’ involvement in politics. It is expedient first to investigate why Christians should participate in politics before delving into what should be the attitudinal disposition of pastors toward members’ involvement in partisan politics.

Much has been written about why Christians should actively participate in the country's political affairs. Agang maintains that Christians, especially in Africa, should be concerned about the vices that have bedeviled the continent, such as corruption, immoral acts, and so on.^{xxx} He states that our prayer "Your kingdom come" should not limit our understanding of Christ's coming to the futuristic event of His return. The statement also speaks of the present realities when the reign of Christ would be felt in every facet of human endeavour, including politics.^{xxxi} However, Agang observes a disconnect between Christian life and public life, a detachment between the sacred and the secular. He, therefore, calls on Christian pastors, priests, religious leaders, and members to take responsibility.^{xxxii}

Similarly, Faleye states that politics is a divinely established institution with reference to Paul's assertion in Romans 13:1-4 that no government is established without the knowledge of God.^{xxxiii} Hitchen also asserts that God instituted and oversees the political affairs as He does other aspects of creation.^{xxxiv} He alluded to the Psalmist's statement that God executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts those who are bowed down, watches over the stranger, and upholds the widow and fatherless. (Psalm 146:7-9).^{xxxv}

Corroborating the above stance, Tutu also avows that Christian involvement in politics is a spiritual duty to God and social duty to humanity.^{xxxvi} He reiterates that Christians, as salt and light of the world, are good citizens to lead others. This implies that Christians should make themselves available and be ready to be involved in partisan politics. Tutu opines further that Christians should be involved in politics because they owe an ethical and moral duty to the truth.^{xxxvii} This presupposes that Christians are expected to maintain sanctity and be responsible. He stresses further that our society can be a better place only if the citizens pursue a life of truth and uphold the value that comes from it.^{xxxviii} Tutu succinctly states that the involvement of believers in Christ in politics should uphold the tenets of truthfulness, faithfulness, and honesty, among other virtues^{xxxix}. It must be noted that when the righteous are in power, there is a likelihood that the gospel of eternal salvation will reach the lost souls.

With the above viewpoints on why Christians should be actively involved in politics, it is expedient to explore what should be the attitudinal dispositions of pastoral leadership to church members' involvement in politics. Pastors as leaders of the Church are not meant to provide spiritual leadership only; they are also to guide members in all matters of life. Christians are expected to be exemplary in their dealings in everyday life. So, pastors should be positive in their dispositions toward members' involvement in political activities, either to vote or to be voted for.

First, Pastors should demonstrate positive attitude to politics and those involved in it by teaching good representation, stewardship, honesty, and integrity. Pastors should take advantage of the pulpit to instruct members on God's expectations from political leaders and officeholders. Familusi states that Christians should be taught and guided by the biblical servant-leadership principle.^{xl} In effect, Church leaders should make Christian politicians see their position in political offices as an opportunity to serve, not to be served, and not to amass wealth to themselves at the expense of the populace.

Also, Pastors should take advantage of the pulpit to sensitise the youths, women, and church members in general that it is their civic responsibility to be actively involved in the political activities of their country. Pastors should not shy away from the fact that if politics is left in the hand of unbelievers, they are the set of people to lead us and make policies that would not be favourable to us and our faith. Familusi remarks that the non-involvement of Christians in politics is an avenue for unbelievers and people of low or no integrity to be in charge of policymaking.^{xli} When this happens, Christians indifferent to politics would not have the moral ground to complain.

Additionally, as the leader and shepherd of God's people, the pastor must not exhibit partiality or favouritism in his disposition to politics and Christian politicians, especially his Church members. If he has two or more members of the same local assembly (Church), indicating an interest in vying for political positions either from the same political party or different political parties. The Church pastor must apply wisdom not to tilt toward a particular political party, for such disposition could breed polarity and disintegration. The pastor must pray and counsel every church member interested in any political position, irrespective of political affiliation and sentiment.

One of the challenges of politics, especially in Nigeria, is the challenge of godfatherism. This is a situation whereby acclaimed political personalities would be dictating the pace of what happens in political activities. Sometimes, they dictate for the elected leaders to do their bidding. In most cases, these godfathers remotely control the elected leaders. As leaders and spiritual fathers of Church members, pastors should discourage such tendencies among Christian politicians.

Church leaders should also take it as a duty to regularly organise programmes geared toward moral transformation, especially in politics. Biblical characters like Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, and so on, who served well in public space and represented their people well, could be used to challenge politicians from time to time.

Conclusion

This paper discussed attitudinal dispositions of pastoral leadership to church members' involvement in politics. Having explored the nexus between religion and politics, biblical perspectives on politics and Christians' Involvement in the nation's political activities were also examined. The paper argued that, though some firmly against active participation of Christians in politics by holding on to the doctrine of separation of Church and state, it notes that the doctrine of separation of Church and state does not forbid believers in Christ from participating in politics. Hence, as a matter of responsibility, pastors should be proactive enough to teach and re-teach the proper interpretation of the separation of Church and state and apply the concept within the Nigerian context. The pastor should also be wary not to take a side in the candidacy of a particular member while against another one. Pastoral, responsibility is to pray and counsel whoever aspires to hold a political position among his congregation.

Endnotes

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