

AFRREV IJAH

An International Journal of Arts and Humanities

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (4), S/No 8, September, 2013: 191-204

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

Enthroning Responsible Democratic Culture in Nigeria through Christian Values

Rev. Canon Eric Emeka Anozie, Ph.D.

Department of Religious Studies

Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe

Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper looks at the devastating democratic activities in Nigeria. Governments in Nigeria have tended to be pre-occupied with power and its material perquisites. Corrupt politicians with questionable pedigree occupy the political sit of Nigeria. Corruption is the ocean which separates Nigeria from prosperity, and good living conditions such as good roads, social amenities, viable industries and employment opportunities. Nigerians require deep re-orientation. Christian values play vital role in any democratic government. Therefore, the potentials of enthroning responsible democratic culture in Nigeria through Christian values are the discourse of this paper.

Introduction

Greed, patronage and avarice which characterized our first taste of participatory democracy, produced a political system that was as corrupt as corruption itself. And in no time, corruption became a national religion spreading to every organ of the government – civil service, the police, army, etc. thereby producing a morally bankrupt society that could not find her bearing in anything that has to do with dedication and patriotism (Omo-Ikirodah, 1979:15).

The capitalist value of profit maximization and exploitation has pushed most of the politicians to use their positions to enrich themselves. Politicians and leaders initiate and implement policies in such a way that they would favour and serve their own interests and those of their allies. Contract sums are highly inflated. At times, payment vouchers are raised for jobs not done and ghost workers are introduced to the payroll.

Many corrupt politicians, political thugs and political God-fathers have vowed not to let Nigeria go; in every sector of our political life, political cabals are there, making the culture of our politics a dirty game. Thus Okeke (2003:16) lamented that:

Politics of today has degenerated to that of possession, acquisition of commodities and accumulation of wealth. The nation becomes a commodity, a minefield, and an article of trade for gainful lure. The citizens and electorates are purchasable commodities to be bought at will through gratifications, preferment and appointment. People do not matter, Nigeria as a political entity is not valued and cherished. There is no self-worth.

This leads to tension, killing, arson by politicians and leaders. This is the case in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and other African countries. The harm corrupt leaders have inflicted on Nigeria nation is better seen than said. People of dubious behaviour rig themselves into

government offices. This group of people is oblivious of the people's plight or the honour in the service to the people. Rather their ambition centres on power, self enrichment and popularity. According to Nwachukwu (2002:104)

Many of the so called politicians are unqualified and inexperienced for the position they are rigged into hence they have nothing to deliver. The resultant effect of this phenomenon is political instability, looting of public treasury, mismanagement, rape of democracy, outright indifference to people's yearnings and aspirations and above all political cynicism.

Nigeria as a nation in Africa is looked up as not only the giant of Africa in terms of population and economy; it is also looked up for exemplary behaviour but people get disappointed when Nigeria is properly examined. It is therefore necessary to see the features and faces of democratic culture that obviously is lacking in Nigeria, and establish the intrinsic role of the Christian values in enthroning responsible democratic culture with a view to providing lasting solution to this problem.

Advantages of Responsible Democratic Culture

The term democracy is principally derived from Greek words "Demo" meaning the people and "Kratein" meaning rule. Democracy has been defined as government of the people by the people and for the people. It connotes a system of government where the governed (the citizens) have the freedom to participate in public affairs. Dibia (2007:12) opined that "democracy is a form of government in which the people exercise their governing power either directly or indirectly or through representative periodically elected by them". What Dibia was saying here is that democracy provides institutions for the expression and the supremacy of the people or popular will on basic issues bordering on socio-political decisions and policy making. Eze (2004:24) asserts that "democracy is a populist form of government that allows for the

participation of every member of the state in government and rule of majority”.

Democracy is a system of government that gives preference to and strengthens citizen decision making, thereby promotes equal participation of local citizens in securing and building their nation for the collective good of all, while upholding the principles of justice and rule of law. We discovered that democracy is not talking about absolute power or authority but people repeatedly exercising their authority, choosing whosoever they want to be their representatives. Nigeria’s democracy is still a nascent one, that is why political Godfathers ‘select’ who will take over the office for them and share the returns/dividends among them.

Despite the popularity enjoyed by democracy globally, Nwokolo (2001) believes that democracy suffers from twin problems in Nigeria today. According to him, the first is on conceptualization while the second has to do with democratization which is the process of putting democratic structures and machinery in place in the society. Onyejekwe (2011) sees democracy as a “government of the politicians by the politicians and for the sole interest of the politicians” (p. 30). The nature of democracy in Nigeria was thus lamented by Okoye (2007):

It is frequently the case that political victories assumes a ‘winner-takes all’ form with respect to wealth and resources, patronage and the prestige and prerogatives of office. With insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important and the stakes becomes dangerously high (p. 22).

In such circumstances a responsible democratic culture that is people oriented and transparent can heal this wound.

Democratic culture is all about individual's liberty as well as collective self-governance. It concerns each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture. Removing the political, economic and cultural elitists from their thrones and allowing everyone a chance to participate in governance. Culture is bound up with man's life in society and it is always social. It is a product of people's perception of universe or world view. In the context of our study Nmah (2008) definition of culture calls to mind thus:

the sum of all that has spontaneously arisen for the advancement of material life and as an expression of spiritual and moral life – all social intercourse, technologies, arts, literature and sciences. It is the realm of the variable, free, not necessarily universal, of all that cannot lay claim to compulsive authority (p. 151).

Indeed democratic culture abhors monarchy, autocracy and despotism. The features of responsible democratic culture according to Onyejekwe (2011) are as follows:

1. The supremacy of the will of the people.
2. Represented government duly elected by the people.
3. Periodic and free elections.
4. Universal adult franchise.
5. Responsible government
6. Limited and constitutional government.
7. Aim of the governments is service and social welfare.

8. Political power as peoples, trust in the hands of the government.
9. Popular participation of the people.
10. Safeguarding the rights of the people is the prime duty of governments.
11. Independent judiciary, and
12. At least two political parties and pressure groups.

In a similar development, Nwanekezi (2011: 109) highlighted the following essentials of democratic culture namely.

1. Periodic free and fair election.
2. Popular consultation.
3. The rule of law.
4. Existence of multiparty system.
5. Press freedom.
6. Majority rule.
7. Political equality.
8. Independent of the judiciary, and
9. Accountability of the government to the people.

Democratic culture gives an atmosphere where the people have the freedom to make some contributions in matters that concern them. The citizen's justification for his participation in the ruling is virtue. Here virtue means the moral and intellectual ability always needed in a 'statesman' and political leader who rules in the interests of the entire community.

The attainment of social justice is possible under democratic culture, which is the sole end and in which all legal energy ought to be directed. Justice in the form of equality is the foundation of a

peaceful and stable society that any group wishing to set up a peaceful and lasting society must base on. However, all the paraphernalia of the responsible government, independent judiciary, social justice, political parties etc. that will move this nation forward and foster sense of belonging and participation is still not present in Nigeria. According to Adaramola (1993:135)

The greatest yearning of Nigerians today is for social justice. They yearn for the equitable and just distribution of the national goods; and the reversal of what appears to be a policy of harsh capitalism whereby the wealthy get wealthier and the poor become wretched, and the human rights clauses in our constitution are hallowed more in their breach than their observance.

There is no doubt that when the political terrain is moody and hopeless the church is looked upon to show the way. The church can inculcate values on both the government and the people.

The Role of Christian Values in Enthroning Responsible Democratic Culture

Christian values comprises two words namely Christian and values. ‘Christians’ are those who follow Christ without respect to locality or time. They are those who received Jesus Christ’s message and proceeded to put it into practice (Anozie, 2007:2). They live exemplary life, worthy of the divine calling, in honest manifestation of other virtues like humility, patience, meekness, forgiveness, reconciliation, tolerance, unity, love, faithfulness, justice and truthfulness.

‘Value’ is also defined as belief about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. In the view of Okafor Udah (2006:39) “value connotes an idea of anything which has quality of being useful or desirable”. According to Anozie (2013:27)

Value carries a considerable level of emotion or interest. The feeling that something is desirable or of worth is enough to stimulate action. Values have utility to man in society, some of them can be perceived as possessing extrinsic, aesthetic or inherent, positive, negative, neutral, conceptual and contributory values.

Therefore, Christian values historically refer to the values derived from the teachings of Jesus and taught by Christians throughout the history of the religion. For Nigerians to have a responsible democratic culture they should be able to have regard, respect for and abide by the Christian values because they have many merits that could foster our democratic culture.

Nigerians should value God. God is the creator of heaven and earth and he is the fundamental value in Christian ethics. The overall sovereignty of God as the creator, as the father of all should make us live as brothers and sisters in Nigeria (Africa), this could lead to a rational brotherhood unity and integrity. It could also lead to patriotism, fraternity (coming together under one umbrella), tolerance and mutual understanding.

However, the Nigerian society has been overwhelmed by material values. This is a situation where every other value like service, patriotism, integrity, kindness, humility, goodness are sacrificed on the altar of material wealth. Ebo (1994:11) has shown that materialism has become the spirit of our age. He lamented that this acute sense of materialism has created a moral vacuum. Okolo (1993:11) equally argues that the problem of Nigerians is wrong or false values, wrong priorities and the materialistic outlook which underpins them.

In the Nigeria society, a culture has emerged which prizes material success and possessions higher than any other value in the life of the people. Success in material wealth was lauded no matter how it is achieved, challenging those still left with some vestige of moral

restraint to abandon their restraint if they must ‘succeed’. Perhaps nothing has fuelled corruption as much as this unfortunate attitude. According to Okwueze (2002:237)

It is so bad that communities, clans, families, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, in-laws etc. pressure the occupant of a public position or office to take his share of the national or state cake and it does not bother anybody how this cake is brought home.

In fact, in discussing the level of abnormalities in governance and its attendant corruption in Nigeria one cannot help but refer to Okwueze (1996:115) who in talking about the Nigerian nation lamented:

a situation where the president is a drug baron, a governor a fraudster, the minister/commissioner a crook, the chairman a rogue, a clerk a thief, the businessman a swindler, the police an “armed robber” and most regrettably, the pastor a dupe.

Ours is a decaying society, which is changing its moral and social values to capitalist values (Nwala, 1980:299).

The above has led to a situation where a few are too wealthy to need what they have corruptly acquired and the majority are so impoverished that need, want and starvation have become their other names. Corruption which has been one of the deadly diseases eating the fabrics of our nation at large can be dealt with if genuine Christians man the reputable posts in our villages, society and country. We are suffering today in Nigeria democratic dispensation because majority who are there lack godly value. They embezzle government fund, loot other private individuals.

Nigerians must value life, and shun bloodshed and kidnapping phenomenon. Life is a vital force recognized as the central value on which Nigeria behaviour revolves. Sadly this supreme value of life is

betrayed in people's speeches, thoughts and in their acts and deeds. No wonder Ofomata (2002:419) reiterated that:

No matter the achievement of the individual, if those successes do not lead to the preservation and increase of life, then they are meaningless. Again, they mean that the primary consideration in every situation one finds oneself must be life, its increase and preservation.

The best life a man should live is the life that is good, and pleasing to both God and man in the society.

Christians have strong feelings for man's welfare and this manifests in the spirit of concern for other's problems and successes. This spirit of love for one another connotes the Christian respect for human dignity, worth and sanctity. For a healthy political development, Nigerians must be seen as righteous individuals both in deeds and in words. The ideals of the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5.3-11) are added to individuals who exhibit attributes of meekness, purity, mercifulness, fortitude and peace.

The fidelity that is required in the life of an individual does not depend on economic or social conditions. When an individual is corrupt, families, societies and nations are bound to be corrupt. This is because individuals are the basic units of families, and families are the basic units of societies and nations. This is indispensable because "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverb 14:34). The failure of our political models and regime in Nigeria has been blamed on moral decadence in discipline and corruption.

Nigeria leaders must value truth. In theory and practice truth is required in every activity of man and in politics in particular. There is the need in governance to know the truth, to consent to the truth and to be in the right. In Nigeria we have elements of untruthfulness in homes, in schools, in market places, offices and in politics. The mind

dedicated to truth can hold on against falsehood, misconceptions, illusions, pressures and attacks (Anozie, 2013: 29).

Our political terrain needs peace. Christianity, the religion of Christ is the foundation of peace, and peace simply means freedom from war, conflict, rioting, disorder, strife, quarrel, hostility or violence. It is also freedom from anxiety, fear, disturbance and from tension. Christianity fosters an atmosphere of calmness, security and safety. Jesus is the prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6) who guarantees that there ought to be peace among men (Luke 2:14). If politics in Nigeria must have enduring legacy, peace must be enshrined in it. Political opponents and actors must have this peace in their mind.

It is essential for one to have good character and to embrace actions that are morally praiseworthy and to shun those actions that are morally bad. In attempt to be good in character, one must be sure that one's actions are always guided or supported by good motives. In backing up one's action with good motives one must always make use of one's rationality or reason. Majority of the electorate, aspirant, etc don't have the fear of God. They forget their laudable manifesto and begin to pursue shadow. This is because the ultimate and intrinsic Christian value is being relegated to the background. The effect is political cabals here and there, corruption as a national religion, and politics as a dirty game which make the democratic scenario to be a hopeless one with its attendant underdevelopment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as a way of enthroning responsible democratic culture and sanitizing the political terrain of Nigeria.

1. There is need for a re-orientation on values that centres on God and society. Individual values and interests should be shunned and values that build our nation should be pursued.
2. The church should be alive in teaching sound and salvation message that is capable of transforming the individual, and

once this is done our family will be transformed and the entire strata of the society will be transformed too.

3. Communiqués issued by the churches at the end of their conferences and synods that touches on societal ills like rigging of election, God fatherism, selection of leaders instead of election and enthronement of mediocre in political system should be given wider circulation. They could be published in National Newspapers instead of limiting it to pure churches publication.
4. Materialism and pursuit of materialism should be given back sit in political system. People should be concerned with service to God and man, dedication to duty, commitment and faithfulness. These cardinal values can enthrone responsible democratic culture.
5. People at the position of authority should be concerned with the welfare of the people they govern and they should be put into consideration in any decision affecting them.
6. Christians should not be partisans in politics or degenerated to the level of using people or being used to achieve selfish interest rather they should be epochal in their calling.

Summary/Conclusion

It is crystal clear that the political terrain of Nigeria is not democratic in its entire ramification. Nigeria leaders are on the lead in eliminating and wiping any element of democracy and exacerbating corruption. They have tried with absolute consistency in stamping autocracy and politics of dirty game. A situation that had costs this nation so dearly. Politicians and leaders are confused, helpless and downcast.

Indeed the only way forward is to resign to the will of God through values. The potentials of using Christian values in enthroning responsible democratic culture cannot be over emphasized.

Democratic activities are often driven by people who are not morally sound, characterized with selfish impulses. Therefore, Christian values can take this nation over to a world of salient values and virtues which Nigeria urgently needs.

References

- Adaramola, F. (1993). Human and people's rights: The way forward. In Emiola (ed) *Contemporary issues in Nigeria law, essays in honour of Judge Bola Ajibola*, Lagos: Yale Publishers.
- Anozie, E.C. (2007). *The early church: A historical perspective*, Enugu: Frefabag Publishers.
- Anozie, E.C. (2013). Philosophy: Basis for human development in Africa. In Chinwuba, C.O.(ed). *Philosophy and logic: An introduction*, Onitsha: Oremus Publishers.
- Dibie, C.C. (2007). *Essential government for senior secondary schools*, Ogun: Tonad Publishers.
- Eboh, B.O. (1994). *Living beyond materialism*, Enugu: Snaap Publishers.
- Ezeh, G.C. (2004). *Contemporary issues in Nigeria history*, Nsukka: Mike Social Publishers.
- Nmah, P.E. (2008). *Religion and society in Africa*, Enugu: Rabboni Publishers.
- Nwachukwu, K.O. (2002). Implications of corruption on national economy, ethics and political process In Ugwu C.O.T. (ed) *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives*, Nsukka: Chuka Publishers.
- Nwanekezi, I.C. (2011). The role of education in promoting and sustaining democracy in Nigeria, In *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 4(1).

- Nwokolo, B.U. (2001). *Social learning and personal development*, New York: Holt Rinehart Publishers.
- Ofomata, G.E.K. (2002) *A survey of the Igbo nation*, Onitsha: Africana Publisher.
- Okafor Udah, S.C. (2006). *Moral philosophy*, Nkpor: Camoz Publishers.
- Okeke, D.C. (2003). Nigeria journey to maturity: The imperatives of discipline and self sacrifice In *Arts and social sciences forum journal*, 7(4).
- Okolo, B.C. (1993). *Education and Nigerian values: A companion for students*, Enugu: Cecta Publishers.
- Okoye, J.C. (2007). Environment and conflict in Africa: Issues and problems In Udoye, E.E. and Onuora, M.E. (eds) *Environment and conflict in Africa: Issues and problems*, Enugu: Frefabag Publishers.
- Okwueze, M.I. (1996). The prophecy of Amos: A moral imperative for Nigeria. In *Biblical principles: As moral foundation for the Nigerian society*, Ibadan: Spectrum Publishers.
- Okwueze, M.I. (2002). Corruption in Nigeria: Lessons from the Old Testament. In Ugwu C.O.T. (ed). *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives*, Nsukka: Chuka Publishers.
- Omo-Ikroda, J. (1979). *The great race*. Benin City: Bendel Newspaper Corporation.
- Onyejekwe, C. (2011). *Political ideas, ideal and ideologies*, Onitsha: Coskan Publishers.
- Onyekwe, C. (2011). *Comparative political system: An in-depth analysis*, Onitsha: Auschak Publishers.