

Christians as Light and Salt: Implication for Good governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Generally, in Nigeria, the issue of good governance has had only marginal success and this has resulted in a lot of problems bedevilling Nigeria. Some scholars have written on good governance in Nigeria, but this has not been adequately linked to Jesus' command to his followers to be Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16), especially in the context of Christian leadership. Therefore, this paper examines the implication of Christians being the "light and salt" for good governance in Nigeria. The paper employs a documentation method to collect data and textually analyses the data. Primary data is sourced from the Bible and secondary data is sourced from published works on governance in Nigeria. Christians can institutionalize a difference by applying biblical teachings in their lifestyle and actions. Hence, it's suggested and recommended that the old idea of politics been "dirty" must be jettisoned by Christians. Finally, Christians are called on to join politics from the grassroots or ward level, while working in collaboration with other religious organizations to harness ideas to foster good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Christian as 'salt and light', Sermon on the mount, Good governance in Nigeria, Christian participation in politics, Politics in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of good governance in Nigeria has had minimal success. And without any doubt, this has resulted in a lot of problems bedeviling Nigeria. Governance is the process whereby elements in society wield power, authority, influence, enact policies and decisions concerning public life, economic and social development.¹ Scholars have written a lot on governance and good governance. Good governance, according to Huda is the “act of process through which decisions and policies are made and implemented in the conduct of affairs and management of resources by public institutions”.² Also, Muyiwa in Huda defines it as a “means of managing a country’s economic and social resources for development”.³ In other words, good governance is a model of governance that leads to social and economic results for citizens.

Lawson, comment on Rothstein's book "The quality of governance, corruption, social trust and inequality in international perspective mentions that good governance according to him, relates to the concept of impartiality, which is basically when the bureaucrats perform their tasks following the public interests rather than their self-interest.⁴ Since government carry out goals like the provision of public goods to its citizens.

Another way to think about good governance according to Yagboyaju is through deliverables, which are precisely demanded by citizens like security, health, education, water, protection of lives, properties, and environment, their ability to vote and get paid fair wages.⁵

Good governance has been that something that has always eluded Nigerians. Governance and political leadership in Nigeria have been driven by self-interest. The state has failed in some major areas of public life, like the security of lives and properties, provision of infrastructures, promoting the rule of law and provision of visionary leadership when compared with some other nations. A good example of this is in the following statement made by the former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Nigeria on August 12, 2009.

What Nigeria need is not more strong men,
it needs more strong democratic
institutions... without good governance, no
amount of oil or no amount of aid, no
amount of effort can guarantee Nigeria’s

success but with good governance, nothing can stop Nigeria... we believe that delivering on roads, electricity, and on education and all other points of that agenda will demonstrate the kind of concrete progress that the people of Nigeria are waiting for.⁶

Simply put, good governance means that processes and instructions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.

Few Christians have been opportune to lead this nation and this only happened by chance. Historically, many Christian have no problem accepting political offices, provided it comes by appointments, many cannot vie for a political post. This is because they still see politics as a dirty game, thus they leave it for the so-called dirty people; this should not be so. This paper, therefore, aimed at examining Christian as salt and light and its implication for good governance in Nigeria.

The study adopts the documentation method of collecting data, which is aimed at extracting information from the Bible and other published works on good governance. The data is then textually analysed in other to proffer templates for good governance in Nigeria. This paper is significant in that it further creates awareness and establishes the fact that Christians are to actively participate in politics and that they are seen as ambassadors of Christ, being salt and light to preserve and illuminate their world.

STATE OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Many scholars have tried to define the word governance. Fatile defines it “as the use of political authority and exercise of power over society and the management of its resources for social and economic development.”⁷ Similarly, Ogundiya, as cited by Kola, Gana, and Olasumbo defines it “as a way in which government exercise power for management and distribution of a country’s social and economic resources.”⁸ Good governance is the desire of every nation, as it is only by it that a nation can have peace and progress which are the ingredients essentially needed for sustainable development, unfortunately, Nigeria

has always experienced bad governance, as such the Nigeria society has remained pauperized and the people wallowing in abject poverty. The Nigeria state has degenerated to the point where it is unable to provide minimal social amenities, infrastructures, security of lives and properties to its population.

Characteristics of Good Governance

To know how Nigeria fared in governance, these are some characteristics one can use as a yardstick or measure as suggested by Lydia are transparency, rule of law, accountability, equity, and gender participation and security.⁹

Security: This is a state of being free from danger or injury. A nation that can have the capacity to mobilize military forces to guarantee its borders and to deter or successfully defend against physical threats including military aggression and attacks by non-state actions such as terrorism.

Transparency: This is where information is freely available and accessible to the citizenry that will be affected by the decision.

Rule of Law: This requires that fair legal frameworks be enforced impartially; it also requires the protection of human rights and properties.

Accountability: This is where those who rule are answerable to those been ruled, those whom they derive their authority.

Equity: This is where equal opportunity is giving to all citizens, men, women, the poor or the rich.

Gender Participation: Both men and women should be allowed to participate in the administration and running of the government. Therefore, good governance is involved in the process of achieving all these lofty goals.

Judging by these characteristics discussed above, one can say that Nigeria, as a nation has not fared well or good enough. This is because she is faced with lots of challenges that negate the features of good governance so discussed. Tunji Olaopa observed that Nigeria has suffered massive human and governance tragedy resulting from the religious insurgency of Boko Haram. Thousands have been killed; a thousand more rendered homeless and millions of naira in properties have been lost'.¹⁰ Apart from insurgency, other challenges are socioeconomic and political inequality, lack of accountability, corruption, lack of transparency and disregard for to rule of law. In other words, Nigeria lacks good

governance which invariably means she is bedevilled with bad governance arising from bad leadership.

Features of Bad Governance

Insecurity: This means the inability of a nation to secure, defend and protect the life and properties of her citizenry from attacks and terrorism.

Corruption: Oyeronke asserts that corruption is a “problem of routine deviation from established standards and norms by public officials and parties with whom they interact”.¹¹ He went further to identify various types of corruption to include bribery, private gain, dishonesty, illegal behaviour etc. According to the ICPC Act (Section 2), as cited by Iyanda, 'corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit, monetary or otherwise.'¹²

Unemployment: According to the Organization for Economic and Development, unemployment includes all persons above a specified age who during the reference period were not in paid employment or self-employment; or when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work.

Poverty: This means not having enough material possessions or income for a person's needs or lack of the means necessary to meet basic personal needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Poverty is measured by the number of people who fall below a certain level of income – called the poverty line. Simply put, poverty means not having enough money for basic needs such as food, drinking, water, shelter or toilets.

Infrastructure: This is defined by Iyanda as a set of interconnected structural elements that provide a framework supporting an entire structure of development.¹³ It can also be defined as the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities, for example, roads, power (electricity), sewage, pipe-borne water etc.

To say governance in Nigeria is bad is an understatement. Judging from both good and bad characteristics/features examined, one can say that governance in Nigeria is bad. This is because the insecurity of lives and properties is still prevalent. Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented security challenges in recent times in almost all parts of the country. Boko-Haram insurgency in the North, kidnapping in the South and the West armed robbery, ritual killing almost everywhere. It was observed that more than 70 per cent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty,

living below the poverty line. According to Zakaria, one-third survived on less than US 1 dollar a day. Many people find it difficult to get enough money to meet basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter.¹⁴

Moreover, unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which is existing especially among the youth in Nigeria. Ozohu Suleiman noted that the ‘Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment.’¹⁵ This portends a bleak future for them and thus can make them become vulnerable and make them a willing tool in the hands of greedy politicians who use them for their selfishness. The same goes for infrastructural development, many communities both in rural and urban cities lack basic infrastructure like good roads, pipe-borne water, good hospitality etc.

Lastly, corruption is a social problem and a symptom of numerous difficulties within contemporary societies. “According to the perception index of transparency international, Nigeria was ranked 144th out of the 146 countries.”¹⁶ Simply put, most Nigerians are corrupt.

Textual Analysis of Matthew 5:13-16 (King James Version)

¹³ Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

¹⁴ Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

¹⁵ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

SALT

According to Louw & Nida, salt is the translation of the Greek words: *hals*, *halos* (m) and *halas*, *halatos* (n)¹⁷. *Halas* is the late form of *hals* and is used metaphorically in Matthew 5:13 and Mark 9:50a. Luke 14:34; literally salt can be defined as a dietary mineral composed primarily of sodium chloride that is essential for animal life.¹⁸ Salt flavour is one of the basic tastes, an important preservative and a popular food seasoning.¹⁹ Salt enhances flavour, preserves, purifies e.t.c. Salt balances

sweetness and helps to suppress other flavours such as bitterness.²⁰ Salt is a common image Jesus used for painting a picture of how he hoped his followers would act and be in the world.

LIGHT

Light is the translation of Greek words: *phos* and *photos*. Scientifically, when one talks of the noun light, one means "the bond of electromagnetic radiation between the wavelength 3,800-angstrom units and 7,600-angstrom units to which the retina of the eye is sensitive and which the brain interprets."²¹ In biblical tradition, light has both literal and symbolic meanings. In the literal sense, it means, daylight, sunlight, brightness, shining. It is not just a medium of sight but also its object.²² Thus, literally light brings about visibility. So in this sense, light is indispensable to human existence in the world. In a symbolic sense, light is symbolic happiness (Job 22:28, Psalm 97:11), protection (Job 29:3, Isaiah 58:8), Orderliness (Genesis 1:3, Amos 5:20), exemplary life (Matthew 5:14a, Luke 2:32), prosperity, joy and good fortune (Esther 8:16, Ish 60:20).

Light also is a symbol used to mean awareness, knowledge and understanding.²³ Light is seen as life as seen in John 1:4. Thus, Jesus expects Christians to show their light and give life to the world.

IMPLICATION OF THE SALT AND LIGHT ANALOGY FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS

Salt acts as a building and emulsifying agent.²⁴ It purifies and preserves. Light illuminates, it dispels darkness. Salt and light are essential for life.

Jesus used the concepts of salt and light many different times to refer to the role of His followers in the world. Believers in Christ are preservatives to the world, preserving it from the evil inherent in society. As salt enhances the flavour of the food it seasons, so also contemporary Christians stand as those who enhance the flavour of life in this world. They are to influence the world for good. Where there is strife, we are to be peacemakers, where there is sorrow, we are to be the ministers of Christ, building up wounds. The presence of Christians in the world must be like a light in the darkness.

Being salt and light is not optional. Jesus did not say you can be... or you have the potential to be... He said you are.²⁵ The metaphorical understanding of these elements "salt and light" both in biblical and social parlance is instructive. For instance, salt is a sign of covenant while the light is a sign of orderliness and progress. So Jesus meant Christians are to be to humanity what salt and light are. And that Christians in Nigeria understand their worth as salt and light to the Nigerian nation.

CHRISTIANS AS SALT AND LIGHT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Ever before now, Christians have seen politics as a “dirty game” and so, as a no go area for Christians. However, since politics is seen as an inevitable part of human life, as it cut across all aspects of human existence, Christians can no longer shy away from this reality. Christians have very important roles to play in transforming society. This they can do by getting involved in politics to fight corruption, injustice, insecurity of lives and properties and provide good governance through an exemplary leadership life. Fatokun assert that “Christians should desist from branding politics as “dirty game” for ‘dirty people’ because to leave politics in the hand of the so-called dirty people is to make governance in society move from bad to worse.”²⁶ If Christians are truly the 'light of the world' then they need to make that light shine in the political sphere to make all enjoy the good virtues and gifts for leadership given to them by God.

As being salt and light, Christians have the responsibility to stand up for what's right, sacrificially serving and leading as Christ did and speaking truth to power. For example, Williams Wilberforce committed his life to challenge e.g. the injustice of slavery and restore morality to his nation'.²⁷ Also, Christians in political life have a unique opportunity to share their faith to a wide audience in their everyday lives, by this; their integrity in politics provides a practical way to communicate the gospel to many.

Christians must also lead by example. They must live an exemplary life in all ramifications. They must be good citizens, abide and obey the law of the land. For example, part of their responsibilities involves the payment of taxes and dues due to the state (Romans 13:6). Adeboye asserts that "our obedience to civic laws should not be by

coercion but voluntary, as unto the Lord. So Christians who don't pay taxes, yet want to enjoy social amenities are reaping where they did not sow'²⁸ Christians as the light of the world must shine not only within, but also without'.²⁹ Committed Christians in Nigeria should be involved in partisan politics to effect a good change in social-economic life. This is because; politics controls the economy and the social life of the people. Preaching in the church is not enough to change society; society needs to be led by good people. Hence, Christians must actively participate in politics. This is supported by Grudem, that Christians should be actively involved in political activity, drawing their political principles from their Christian faith as defined by the teachings of the Bible.³⁰

Mepaiyeda charges that serious-minded Christians cannot remain 'standing at one corner condemning those on the corridors of power and blaming them for governance when there is available opportunity to go in and put things right.'³¹ Praying alone without getting involved has not, and cannot help the situations in Nigeria. This has often led to backwardness in terms of development. Christians as salt and light indeed should allow their "light" to shine in the dark corridors of powers and polity, and their "salt" to be felt in the sour political soup of the democratic dispensation. "salt" and "light" entails leading by example and also an added value and not value depletion,³² to the society, showing humility, contentment, charity, forgiveness etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, Christians are recommended to apply the theory of salt and light along the following:

- 1) Christians should strive to be like Jesus' metaphor of salt and light whenever they found themselves in politics. They should live a Christ-like life and be a good example.
- 2) The church should encourage their members to get registered and have valid voters card and to also tell them that their votes counts, hence they should go out massively to vote when the occasion arises.
- 3) They must join a political party of their choice right from the ward level and must be involved in campaigning and lobbying for their choice candidates.

- 4) Prayers for political leaders and good government.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that Nigeria is at the most precarious phase of its existence even as a nation. These are indeed trying times for the nation and the citizenry. This is because we have lost the wisdom of governance and that of service as a people. It is also evident that there are compelling reasons as Christians to be actively involved in politics, first because it is a civic duty. Secondly, we have a responsibility to bring transcendent standards of righteousness and justice to bear as the "salt and light" of the world. 'By being involved in governance brings opportunities to bring Godly wisdom to a world that is grappling with profound economic, social and environmental challenges.' We are to be involved and yet remain distinctive. This means participating fully in political activities and yet without losing essential Christian values, identity and vision in the process.

There are powerful forces at work asserting Christians should not be involved in political practices. This should not be allowed, if not biblical principles and Christian values will continue to be deliberately and systematically eroded if allowed. In conclusion, our mandate as Christians to be "salt and light" for good governance is to affect the world positively for good to project the message of love, hope, joy, and perseverance to a society that is godless and besieged by drugs, crime, corruption, and insecurity. Christians are "salt" to bring out the God-flavours and "light" to bring out God-colours. It is a challenge to Christians to bring the flavour of Godliness and the light of Christ to the most public and visible places of our society. Therefore, since salt and light are positive necessities for nations to grow, we are to be salt and light to bring good fortune and progress to our nation.

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