

1 Samuel 18: 1-9 in the Context of the ‘Politics of Bitterness’ in Nigeria’s Political Space

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Abstract

The politics of bitterness, which is an act of violating political principles of fairness and justice and inflicting bitterness and killings into politics, is a major factor that has prevented development and stability in Nigeria’s political space. Oftentimes, politicians kill and betray each other because of political positions or appointments. But this situation deprives the Nigerian political space of the necessary impetus for integrity. Therefore, this paper analyses 1 Samuel 18:1-9 to draw templates for minimizing and resolving the prevalence of political bitterness in Nigeria’s political space. This paper tends to justify the effect of politics of bitterness as in 1 Samuel 18:1-9 as a yardstick for Nigeria politics. The paper adopts historical-critical and biographical research methods to collate primary data from the Bible, while secondary data are descriptively collated from other literature sources. Data is textually analysed. The study recommends that Nigerian politicians should minimize division and rule which generates bitterness among themselves and the masses

Keywords: Politics of bitterness, Nigeria’s political space, Saul and David in biblical history, Politics in Nigeria, Politics and integrity

Introduction

One major factor that prevented development and stability in the political dispensation in Nigeria at large is politics of bitterness. There is a growing awareness that for the government to govern society, in Nigeria, there is a need for the enthronement of peaceful nominations and elections in Nigerian politics. Every citizen desires to reap the fruit of true democracy in Nigeria but often, some politicians kill and betray one

another because of political positions or appointments. In a situation like this, Nigeria politicians should distinguish between peaceful politics and violent politics because the political campaign is being altered by politics of bitterness where the lives and properties of the citizens are not safe. One of the most notorious avenues for fomenting religious crisis or violence has been the approaches of our politicians during the political campaign and election² The modes of campaigning during the election period among the various political parties have been far from the ethics of the politics for peaceful coexistence and leaves much to be addressed. Violence in Nigerian politics is seldom an isolated occurrence. It is often a function of many factors. Take, for instance, each time Nigerian elites are excluded or disfavored in the power configuration, the next line of action is to foment trouble by appealing to ethnic sentiments. Billy Dudley opines that: “Rather than the political elite in Nigeria acting as conflict Manager, given their level of education, they became, in a strong sense, conflict generator”³

Political violence has been suggested to escalate in Nigeria as a result of the failure of the government to provide the basic living necessities of the populace and secondly, the nature of politics in Nigeria, which tends to be the sole determinant of everything in the country.⁴ That is, politics is seen as a sure way to easy wealth, and, at the same time it operates on the principle of winner takes all. In that wise, the holder of power does not want to let go of it and the contenders would also want to have a feel of it.⁵ In such a situation, it is often a do or die affair, which is a recipe for the politics of bitterness.⁶

Therefore, this paper analyses 1 Samuel 18:1-9 to draw templates for minimizing and resolving the prevalence of political bitterness in Nigeria's political space 1 Samuel 18:1-9 presents a case study scenario of the phenomenon of the politics of bitterness generated by women between two leaders in Israel: Saul and David. David's rising profile in Israel became a threat to Saul concerning his kingship, which before then was not an issue until the women sang about Saul's conquered thousands and David's ten thousand. The paper adopts the historical-critical and biographical research methods to collate primary data from the Bible, while secondary data are descriptively collated from other literature sources. Data is textually analysed.

This paper is significant in that it establishes a strong rivalry between David and Saul and how the politics of bitterness crept in, and how the politics of bitterness could be managed in our society. The rivalry between David and Saul was not well established not until after the victorious battle of David against Goliath, which orchestrated the bitterness between David and Saul.

David and Saul in Biblical History (1Samuel 18:1-9)

David's fame spread through Israel, and he was considered a greater warrior than Saul. Saul was enraged with jealousy, tried to kill him, and finally demoted him. Ordinarily, this was engineered by women through their songs which reveal political ineptitude and bitterness. In 1 Samuel 18:7, we read of "David and his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 21:11; 29:5). It is a common feature of Hebrew poetry to "step up" one or more terms in the second half of a poetic couplet (for the "thousand" / "ten thousand" intensification. Cf: Deuteronomy 32:30; Psalm 91:7; 144:13; Micah 6:7). Nevertheless, the women probably intended the comparison to reflect more than mere poetic convention, and Saul, at any rate, certainly took it that way (1 Samuel 18:8). Phillips comment is helpful. He says:

There is much to criticize in this song, beginning with how injudicious it was. It could be understood why David was included in their praise since he had dispatched the enemy giant, and Saul needed to be praised as well. The problem was the comparison made between the two and the prominence given to David over Saul. The women were not claiming that Saul had killed thousands and David ten thousand. The point was their respective might in slaying Israel's enemies, and the effect was to picture David as a mightier man than the king. The slight to Saul, though probably unintended, was inevitable.⁷

The women's song reveals more than political ineptitude, however, Israel's low spiritual state is revealed in the fact that no praise was given to God, but only to men. Compare this with the song of Miriam and the women of Israel after the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, when Miriam sang, "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exodus.

15:21). No praise was devoted to Moses, who had stretched out his hand over the Red Sea so that it parted because the people knew that the power and the glory belonged to God alone. It generally reveals a low spiritual level when Christians take after the world in praising men instead of God. Yet, this is the very tendency in evidence today in the marketing of celebrity ministers and their empires. Christians should, of course, give thanks to able and faithful Christians, but glory should be reserved for God alone.⁸

In 1 Samuel 18:8 Saul rightly sensed that David might be the "neighbour" (1 Samuel 15:28) who would replace him (1 Samuel 17:55). Once again the Bible mentioned an "evil spirit" (1 Samuel 18:10). In this context, "prophesying" here should be compared as in 1 Samuel 10:5 (see also 1 Kings 18:29). In 1 Samuel 18:12, the Spirit "had left Saul", while in 1 Samuel 16:14, "The LORD was with David." Davis says: One cannot miss the repetitions in chapter 18. There are four references to David's success (1 Samuel 18:5, 14, 15, 30), three assertions that Yahweh is "with" David (1 Samuel 18:12, 14, 28), and six uses of some form of the verb to love (Hebrew, *'Ahab*) with David as the object (1 Samuel 18:1, 3, 16, 20, 22, 28). Everyone seems to love David. Jonathan loves David; Michal loves David; all Israel and Judah loved David. Not Saul, however; he fears and stands in awe of David; the text says so - three times (1 Samuel 18:12, 15, 29).

In 1 Samuel 18:13-16 Saul's removal of David from the court, with an accompanying demotion in military rank, may have been intended to decrease David's visibility (and hence the popularity) and to increase the risk of his death in battle. The effect of Saul's scheming, however, as throughout this chapter, was the reverse.⁹ David was brought into closer contact with the general populace, so that "all Israel and Judah loved David because he led them in their campaigns" (1 Samuel 18:16).

About Saul, the chosen king (1 Samuel 8-15), God never intended Israel to have any king but Himself. He would send them great leaders and these, in turn, would receive their orders directly from Him. But Israel in her falling away had become restless. They wanted a king like the other surrounding nations. We find God granting their request. Saul was handsome to look at, he was tall and of a noble mien. He started

splendidly. He proved to be an able military leader. He defeated the enemies about him—the Philistines, the Amalekites, and the Ammonites. Saul was humble at first, but we find him becoming proud and disobedient to God. No man had a greater opportunity than Saul and no man ever was a greater failure.¹³ His jealousy of David bordered on insanity. Saul failed God in several ways: Saul's presumption at God's altar ([1 Samuel 13:11-13](#)); cruelty to his son Jonathan ([1 Samuel 14:44](#)); disobedience in the matter of Amalek ([1 Samuel 15:23](#)); his jealousy and hatred of David ([1 Samuel 18:29](#)); and his sinful appeal to the witch of Endor ([1 Samuel 28:7](#)).

Politics of bitterness

Does politics teach us to destroy one another? Is politics meant to eradicate integrity and love for one another? Politicians who destroy and betray each other do so because they lack the ethics of politics and the true meaning of politics. The fact that someone loses an election should not make such a person develop hatred and bitterness towards political opponents as in the case of King Saul and David. A true politician should constantly allow ethics in politics to guide his words and actions.

The essence of politics is to promote one another, enhance development in our society, promote peace and unity, and motivate one another to higher heights generally. We fail in our political ambitions and positions because of wrong motives in politics. We should constantly emulate God who makes the rainfall on the just and the unjust. We should always learn from his faithfulness, love, mercy, and kindness towards his creatures. Politicians who succeed in any position should wish others well and should overlook the mistakes and shortcomings of others.¹⁵

This paper urges politicians in Nigeria to constantly allow their words and actions to be devoid of hatred for their opponents, live in unity, and have a common goal that will always enhance positive development in their states and countries.

Ethics of the Politics in Nigeria

Politics and political activities across the world ought to be characterized by ethics. Lack of ethics in politics makes politicians live for themselves and enact laws that do not favour the electorate and

deprive the citizens of the dividends of democracy. True ethics of politics make politicians govern well, enact laws that favour the electorate, shun corruption, and live legacies that will outgrow their generations. Ethics in politics make politicians avoid rigging of the election, abide by its parties rules and regulations and seek the welfare of others.

Ethics in politics will make politicians shun every act of betrayal of one another, eradicate killing one another, promote love and unity, and encourage development in our states and nation. Ethics in politics enhances and promotes wisdom, ideals, faithfulness, and commitment to every political position and promote unity among our political parties.

Ethics in politics make Governors, Presidents, or Senators resign in office if they have health challenges that are preventing them from governing well. Pope Benedict XVI honourably resigned from his exalted office due to health challenges. Other Popes who are not guided by ethics will prefer to die in office despite health problems.¹⁶

Lack of ethics in politics make politicians see their exalted position as family affairs, ownership culture towards political office holders destroy Politicians and soil their names. Politicians who see themselves and their political positions as stewards live by ethics and are guided by ethics, and constantly prevent anybody who wants to soil their ethical Values.

For example, post-election violence recorded in the northern part of Nigeria and other states during Governorship and Presidential elections took place because of a lack of ethical value in our society.

The purpose of the election is to put credible candidates into political offices to achieve development in our states or country. A situation where post-election violence leads to the death of thousands of Nigerians shows a lack of knowledge and immaturity in our political process. A true politician works hard for the growth and development of the country. He constantly seeks the welfare of the poor, needy, and less privileged in society. Lack of ethics in politics leads to political cross carping without due respect to its political aims and objectives. Examples abound in our country where an elected governor or a Senator dumps the party that elects them into the political office within three months.¹⁷

If our country must experience development, then we must change our attitudes towards political appointments or elective positions.

Lack of ethics in politics which is constantly being displayed by politicians makes Boko Haram kill innocent citizens at random, destroy properties worth billions of naira and hinder development in their geo-political zones. Lack of ethics in politics make (MASSOB) constantly clamour for sovereignty in the Eastern Part of Nigeria.

Lack of ethics in politics makes (MEND) blow up oil wells; kidnap both local and foreign expatriates and demand millions of naira in Dollars for their ransom. Lack of ethics in politics by our politicians makes the militants and armed robbers kill, rob, and kidnap people without mercy, fear, or favour. Nigeria in 1960 gained its independence. If not for lack of ethics in politics, how come nations that got independence almost at the same period with us left us far behind, in their steady march to progress? How come we are still battling to get 4000 Megawatts of electricity when power and education is no longer an issue in other countries? How come we are producing the 21st set of unemployed graduates? A country that is the 6th largest oil-producing nation on earth? ¹⁸ How come, if not for lack of ethics by politicians we haven't got our transportation system right. air, road, rail, and waterways?

How come our army of unemployed, keeps lengthening, while our industrial capacity keeps reducing? How come budgets are running into trillions, while the ordinary Nigerian is still battling with the necessities of life, such as water, food, shelter, clothing, and health care, amongst others? Lack of political ethics displayed by some politicians leads to the death of millions of Nigerians due to their selfishness, empty promises during the campaign. bad roads and unemployment.

Nigerian politicians should shun politics of bitterness and lack of political ethics in all three- tiers of government and see if development and unity will erode us. Politicians that God takes delight in Does it surprise us today that God rejoices and takes delight in a politician that governs well? Or the politicians that shun politics of bitterness and corruption fight for the poor and needy in our society. God loves those that make the house of God a habitable place for humans to dwell in.

The Effects of Politics of Bitterness in Nigeria

Nigeria is a plural nation with over 250 linguistic groups and diverse cultures. According to “*The Punch, Feb. 18, 2007*”. Nigeria has a population of 14 million people, and it is endowed with enormous

natural and human resources. In these case studies, politicians or their close political supporters have been responsible for committing violence for political ends. In most cases, there has been little or no progress in bringing the perpetrators to justice. It is worth repeating that the cases presented below or described elsewhere in this paper do not begin to exhaustively describe all incidents of political violence in Nigeria, or even in the states under study.¹⁹

Politics of bitterness in Nigeria affects the government in the area of political corruption. Political corruption is the use of legislative power by government officers for illegitimate private gain. Misuse of government power for other purposes. Such as repression of political opponents and general police brutality. All illegal acts by an officeholder constitute political corruption only if the act is directly related to their official duties. Some forms of government are susceptible to politics of bitterness. Forms of corruption vary but include bribery, extortion, nepotism and patronage.²⁰

Also, godfatherism as a play of bitter politics affects the government adversely, poses a great threat not only to good governance but also to the socio-economic stability of democratic governance in Nigeria. Instances in Nigeria have shown that godfatherism debars development. The state's resources which the godson is supposed to use for the development of the state will be used to compensate the godfathers for throwing political weight on the godson. Its effect further pauperizes the masses thereby making them gullible and manipulable by the dominant parasitic class.²¹

Moreover, political violence poses a serious threat to the legitimacy of the state and federal elections that normally take place in Nigeria. Since party primary elections for local government candidates began, hundreds of people have been killed as a result of the politics of violence in Nigeria, and thousands displaced. Not all of this violence can be directly linked to the elections, but the heightened tension created by competition for public office has exacerbated existing conflicts and created new ones. Nigerian politicians, police and public commentators have regularly denounced political violence, repeated their resolve that those responsible for the crimes will be brought to justice, and urged citizens not to allow themselves to be used for political thuggery-politicians invariably round off these injunctions with an accusatory

finger pointed at their political opponents. But little concrete action is taken against those who use politics of bitterness to further their political ambitions. The perpetrators of violence and their sponsors often enjoy complete impunity for their actions both from the official law enforcement bodies and from their political parties.²²

The political parties themselves have failed to impose discipline on their members. While government officials and leaders of several parties have made public statements condemning political violence, public reprimands of their party members, let alone more serious disciplinary actions within the parties, have been rare. Also, parties and candidates have sometimes accused their opponents of participating in political violence with little apparent basis, which exacerbates tensions that could lead to violence between their supporters.²³ As part of the process of growing from loose associations based on fleeting political interests to parties with true commitments to human rights, political parties need to begin to take criminal activities and human rights violations committed by their members more seriously, regardless of the criminals' status in government or within the party. Most Nigerians have come to believe that unless their 'own men' are in government they are unable to secure those socio-economic amenities that are disbursed by the government. Hence, governmental decisions about the siting of industries, the building of roads, an award of scholarships, and appointments to positions in the public services, are closely examined in terms of their benefits to the various ethnic groups in the country.²⁴ In fact, there has emerged a crop of 'ethnic watchers' who devote much of their time and energy to assessing the differential benefits of the various groups from any government project.

Conclusion

It is evident from this paper that conflict is inevitable in human social interaction, its negative dimensions no doubt retards peace and progress in society. This paper has examined the roles of followers in the politics of bitterness in Nigeria and the impacts of this on the socio-economic development in Nigeria. It has shown that certain factors are responsible for the politics of bitterness in Nigeria, these include: Divide and rule method by some politicians, Poverty, lack of political knowledge,

uncivilized among others. And unless Nigeria can work on these the problems will persist.

Recommendations

As a result of the problem of politics of bitterness in Nigeria, the following recommendations are given:

1. The federal government should encourage peace as a means of promoting harmony among the people.
2. Nigeria should try the one-party system to minimize the politics of bitterness in Nigeria,
3. Government should tackle those sources of stress and tension within the country, intensify their effort in the institute the idea of preventing violence or politics of bitterness at the local, regional and international.
4. Nigeria government should co-ordinate activities that can prevent the creation of a conflictual situation, establishing a way of detecting early warning signs and monitoring specific indicators that may help to predict impending violence, initiate activities that address the root causes as well as trigger off any forms of politics of bitterness in Nigeria.

Endnotes

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