

Gospel Ministers, The Church In Partisan Politics

By

V.O.A. Elleh

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
P.M.B 5047, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

ellehvictor@gmail.com

08033216945

Abstract

Today, there is chaos throughout the globe, those in majority are now in minority, those who ought to rule are being ruled, and members of the royal priesthood have subjected themselves to a state of "selfdom", those who ought to be used by God to liberate sinners are themselves wallowing in sin. The pictures we have in our hands are gloomy and dim. We need to shake off the shackles of the twentieth century to enter into the 21st century as winners with a willingness to have dominion over creation (Gen.1:26). How can we do this without effective mobilizations of the Christians; irrespective of denomination must be tutored and shown the direction to take to ensure that we arrive at our destinations in God's time and in terms. Therefore, the purpose of this work is to find solution to the problem of non-participation of ministers. In Nigeria there are three religious' traditions- the Christian, Muslim and Traditionalist- none of which are wholly unaffected by the other. It is common place but misleading to suggest that or say that only the Islamic version is a political religion. With phenomenological research method we discover that the only religion that is apolitical is that which suggest that the only form of political religion in South Africa is that voiced by Bishop Desmond Tutu and these churchmen think like him and

that the Dutch reformed church is apolitical or that the only catholic theology that is political is the liberation theology. Know it that defense of the status quo can be as political as any attempt to change it. In Nigeria we pretend not to belong but we belong.

Introduction

God is neither, democratic, republican or progressive; we need to understand the relationship of the ministers and Christian to partisan politics long before politics became complex and highly sophisticated,

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher spoke of it as “the art of achieving the possible”. Politics has to do with arts, science and philosophy of the governmental process. Another way of stating it, is that politics is that discipline which takes seriously the task of making life more humane. Religion has been defined as life of God in the soul of humankind or a system of beliefs and altitudes towards a supreme being. (Rudolf Otto 1904)

It can then be said that by definition religion and politics share a common goal, improving the quality of life for the individual. Religion and politics are by definition, bound to be closely, indeed inextricably related. First, they both as at above; involve systems of values and beliefs and systems of actions which are justified in terms of these values and beliefs.

The Word and the World

We need to appreciate the fact that as Christians we live in two kingdoms and that these kingdoms are virtually at conflict with each other. The kingdom of man is forever opposed to the kingdom of God, every Christian no matter how grounded he or she may be, is daily experiencing the struggles of these kingdoms.

Therefore, Christians are expected to use “the word of God to transform the kingdom of man” (Romans 12:2) (KJV). And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”. Your inability to

effectively use the word to transform the world has made it easy for many to conform to the patterns of this world. For transformation to take place you must get involved and thereby expose them to the undiluted word of God, you cannot be outside to think of transformation. The local church cannot teach the pure word of God if such a church has deliberately taken citizenship in the kingdom of man. There are many ways you can do exploit for God, if you are not there to teach them, how will they know? (Rom 10:17; 1st John 2:15-17, Rom 12: 1-8).

The Church and Socio-Ethical Mission in Politics

As the church cannot avoid to live within the structures of human relationship, and every relationship involves the adjustment of power and interests (right), it follows that power cannot be abdicated or condemned by the church, since politics is also concerned with the adjustment of positions or relationship of power, interest and rights, politics cannot be foreign to the church.

A living dynamic and sensitive church cannot opt out of politics, she must realize that political power is from God and that all power is divine. St Paul in Romans 13: 1 testified that there is no authority but by acts of God, and that the existing authorities are instituted by him.

It is therefore clear from Christian revelation view-point that power social or political comes from God and therefore divine.

Political Power is of God And Divine.

The God of the church is one and the same God of politics, to regard politics as a demonic zone free from God's influence is a distorted vision of divine providence, an unwarranted infringement of divine sovereignty. Christian revelation and theology have as much to say to Christians and God-fearers. Hence the words of Howard Crosby (December 14th 1874) must be taken to heart by the church and church-goers "to let politics become a cesspool and then avoid it because it is a cesspool, is a double crime".

In view of the fact of that power is inescapable, as we have pointed out above, and of the divine origin and nature of power, it is clearly natural and logical that the church as the organized body of the people of God, must be involved in politics, she must be in and above politics but not outside politics, I see it all as a matter of striking a balanced harmony between nature and grace; the natural and supernatural; the God of heaven invisible and of this visible world.

To strike such an equilibrium would require a mature church, a creative church, a courageous church with adequate personnel and appropriate expertise, a church with adaptive resilience, a church sane, sober, foresighted and energetic, a church with able and articulate leadership. Only such a church can have a respectable role and place in the political affairs of our people, especially here in our developing Africa. Such a church would interpret her political role in the spirit and context of her overall ministry to the people and to the world.

A church in politics should not lose her sense of mission and ministry. She will understand and practically acknowledge that the concept of Christian and ecclesial ministry is opposed to dominion and domination and to selfish exploitation for power.

The Church, And Political Powers In Relation To Service, Justice, Love and Peace.

The objective of the church in politics is and should be an entirely noble and humanitarian one. The church should seek to harmonize prayer and justice for the achievement of true peace and social harmony.

The inner life and prayer of the church must show a deep concern for the people of God where they are, and where they can be found. But the people of God inescapably and providentially are to be found in this world of politics. The political forces and powers of the land penetrate and pervade all the essential sectors and structures which affect the lives of the people, who by providential design and simultaneously the people of God and citizens of the polity.

There is no need for adducing practical illustrations. There is therefore need for the church to be present in the area of politics if she is to exhibit herself to the problems of man and as responsive to his problems, to advance a contrary view would be to divorce prayer from politics, to separate prayer from practical concern for the people where they can be found. Such a contrary view would turn the church into an ineffective and irrelevant religious ghetto.

If the church should unwittingly adopt a policy of political withdrawal, abstention and isolationism, she would be to all intents and purpose condemning and committing herself to a course of political sterilization. It is not inconsistent with Christian ethics or sound political practice that anyone should gratuitously impose or invoke political sterility on an innocent unit like the church. To advocate withdrawal from politics for the church is indeed to put the church on a path of conservative and utopian, futile and irrelevant, it is to mutilate and fetter the dimension of the mission of the church to the people and to society.

The church therefore has a role to play in politics, in the public life and affairs of the people. Whether she has been playing her part well or not is entirely a different question outside the scope of the considerations here. Here is to establish the legitimacy of the presence of the church in politics. The church must see, recognize, acknowledge and respect power in politics. The church must assess and evaluate political power without fear and without favours, the church must not seek power in politics, she must rather seek to harness political power to human values and welfare. She must seek to subordinate power to justice, and might to right in politics. Negatively she must seek to divest political power of all its demonic vestiges and mammonic garb, to crush the ugly head of mammonism, that worship of money and of all that money can fetch, it is an aspect of the ministry of the church in politics. (1st Timothy 6:10-12)

Positively, the church must strive to generate and infuse the sense of purpose in power and purpose in politics, she must seek to inject the sense of political responsibility into the public affairs of the country. Highly

sensitive to political realities and to those political decisions which deeply affect the life and future of the people of God, the church should constantly and relentlessly work for the emergence and maintenance of an equitable and stable structure of justice in politics, Thus, the church in such a political role will justifiably pose as the conscience of society and humanity.

The Priests and Politics

The involvement of ministers in partisan politics has always been a sensitive issue, the renting Biblicist and many Christians will utter a resounding “No” to the issue of a gospel ministers’ participation in partisan politics in Nigeria, but more and more in our times we have seen pastors involved directly in the political process. The lives of late Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, balanced the dual hats of politician and pastor, more recently Rep. Rev Williams Bill Grey, of Philadelphia and Rev. Floyd Flake of New York to mention but a few.

The applied liberation theology of Bishop Desmond Tutu did the miracle in South Africa. The Christian association of Nigerian support for Christians and minister’s involvement is a laudable approach after all the bible said “when the righteous rules, the people rejoice” (2Sam 23:3-5) The main issue is not “should ministers be involved in partisan politics? rather to what extent are they already involved in the political process every church building that is situated within a town or village is not only a spiritual entity, but is also a political entity subject to by-laws.

A clear reading of the old testament reveals the facts that God is a political God. Each time God chose to deal with his people, the covenant between God and his chosen people became the point of reference. A covenant is an agreement, a treaty and that makes it a political instrument. A covenant has terms, “if you will be my people, I will be your God”. The old testament is replete with political language, kingships, thrones, rulers’ subjects, a people. Cyrus a ruler is referred to as God’s anointed. Politics in and of itself, is no more corrupt than economics or any aspect of our social existence.

While some politicians may be corrupt there are many Christians who see politics as an arena for Christian services, vocation and witness. God is lord of the world and that includes the political arena. What a difference it would make in our time if we realized that we are inextricably bound together. In the words of Late Dr. Martin Luther king jr, "we are wrapped in a single garment of human destiny" translated into political language, the political arena cannot be what it should be until Christians begin to enter the halls of power, seize the moment and by participating and acting responsibly, be what they were called to be and where they are usually needed.

Being a part of community makes us responsible; there must always be paradoxical tension that propels the Christian in the political arena. President John. F. Kennedy wrote a book entitled, PROFILES IN COURAGE (1955). It says if politicians can stare into their political graves and survive, what about those who proclaim the gospel and face difficult circumstance? It is therefore worthy to note that late Dr. Martin Luther king a clergy man made a speech during his campaign against segregation and crimination against African-Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. His effort led to the passing of the civil rights acts of 1964 and at the age of 35 he was awarded the NOBEL peace prize.

He says to you this morning that, *" if you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for, it then means you aren't fit to live. You may be thirty-eight years old as I happen to be and one day some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for some great principles, some great issues and some great cause. And you refused to do it because you want to live longer, you are afraid you will lose your job or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose popularity or you are afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house. So, you refused to take a stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the announcement of an early death of the spirit. You died when you refused to stand up for justice. Know that if you have a burning desire for a change, for prudence, for the emancipation of the down-trodden, for uprightness, for a better"*

Nigeria, then you must get involved in the political process of your country. Senator Mark Hatfield (1982) a Christian legislator once stated, "For the Christian to say he will not enter politics because he might lose his faith is the same as for the physician to say that he will not heal man because he might catch their disease". Since politics itself is not inherently evil or good and is no more than a conduct of public affairs, the presence of ministers in such an arena could impact morality in places of public leadership.

Not to be involved is to be Seriously Involved

The withdrawal syndrome that has overtaken Christendom must be examined and tackled. When we withdraw our Christian sensitivity from our public, commercial and social conduct, we deplete the kingdom of God to swell the kingdom of man. And the political plane, we intend to display is an attitude of holier-than thou, which never and will never advance the kingdom of God.

Too many Christians with the gift of government shy away from politics because they did not want to be involved, if we must mobilize the Christians for effective expansion of the kingdom of God then we must accept the truism, that not to be involved is to be seriously involved. It is true that Christians are not heartily involved as other religious adherents. The simple but naïve reason they give is that politics is a dirty game. But for now, let us assume that there is a national debate on abortion, some say it must be legalized, others say it must not let us further assume that the debate has become a political issue between two major parties and their candidates, one says he will not legalize abortion upon election and the other says he will do opposite, in the country where there are two million eligible voters, one and a half millions are Christians and because they love to play God and Jesus, then decide not to be involved in the election, because to them politics is a dirty game, at the end of the election 750,000 voters all unbelievers voted for the candidate that will legalize abortion, which he actually legalized.

What has happened is that in reality, it is not the unbeliever that voted for abortion but the Christians by default of not voting, that is exactly the theory and practice of “not to be involved is to be seriously involved”, if the 1.2million Christians had voted, they surely would have outwitted the abortion crazy candidates and his supporters. I also want to state clearly that if politics is dirty, it is because dirty people are into it, if clean people go into it, then the game will be clean.

Jesus’ Ministry, Community Life and In Politics

Also, as matured Christians following Jesus Christ, we realized that while the world is fallen, corrupted and taunted by sin; it is still God’s very creations under his providence and dominion. Prayer and action should always go together in exodus 14:15 at the point where God is about to intervene by way of another miracle in delivering the Israelites from Egypt, Moses was instructed by God to stop praying and speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.

Too many of us are praying when we should be acting, and acting when we should be praying. They are mutually complimentary, “we are admonished that only those who do the will of God shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 7:21) elsewhere we are admonished that we must be doers of the world and not hearers only (James 1:22). Involvement or non-involvement in the political arena is an amoral concern; it is neither right nor wrong, it is a selective concern.

The involvement of the minister has to be reckoned with, whether we agree with their agenda or not. Had there been no Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, African-Americans would not be where they are today in American history. Dr. King viewed his commitment to civil rights as a divine calling to change the face of the nation. Indeed, this is our father’s world and we have been placed in it to minister to it. Without the salt of our witness and action in God’s world, decay would destroy it. As a fallen world we are to lead those in darkness to the light of the world and serve as a sign to an unbelieving

generation. Matt 5:4 says you are the light of the world and salt of the earth while Matt 5:16 says that let your light so shine before the world.

Christians should get involved in politics only to serve, the bible said, even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:23) The problem of today is that no one wants to serve for the sake of service, Christians have the key but they allow themselves to be locked in the cocoon of ignorance.

Examples of believers who influenced government

1. Exodus 1:15-21

The Hebrew midwives in Egypt refused to murder the new born Hebrew boys; they exhibited the love of God by disobeying Pharaoh's command. This is the type of Christian courage that we should bring to book in the exercise of our political rights.

2. Exodus chapter 2:7

Moses asked Pharaoh for permission to let the Israelites leave Egypt, Moses wouldn't take no for an answer he knows he was doing God's work, read through the chapters and programmed for his people.

3. Daniel 3.

Daniel participated in various government administrations but he drew the line when asked to violate his religious convictions, like Daniel we must not wait until we are in a tough situation before we pray, God can use people wherever they are.

4. Joshua 2.

Rehab refused to be a part of the resistance to the interest of God's people, Rehab was a prostitute, a most unlikely person to be accorded recognition, but she is one of the only two women listed in the hall of faith in (Hebrews 1.1). The truth is that God works through people like Rehab, whom we are inclined to reject. We remember Rehab for her moral failure, but God remembered her for her faith, the dirty Nigerian politicians can achieve the same feat for Christ.

5. Amos 5:7, 2:6, 7 & 8, 10:12, 8:4-6.

Amos spoke out during a time of judicial corruption, immorality and oppression of the poor, who speaks for us today?

6. Esther 5.

Queen Esther disobeyed official protocol in an effort to save her people from annihilation, demanded by unjust laws promulgated by evil men, remember that God has a purpose for the situation in which he places us, we have unjust laws being promulgated daily in the country today.

7. Daniel 3.

Shadrach, Meshack Abednego, refused to participate when the king ordered all citizens to become idolaters. This trio clearly showed that it is important to stand with others with whom we share convictions; again God can be trusted even when we can't predict the outcome of our adventure

8. Acts 13-28.

9. Paul sought to obey those in authority even suffering unjustly, though he refused to keep his mouth shut about Jesus, like Paul the present-day politicians must be sensitive to God's leading always.

10. Acts 4:19, 26:5.

Peter operated with the systems of authority, except when he forced to choose between disobedience to God or man, all that we need to succeed in politics is sensitivity to the holy spirit, before Pentecost, Peter spoke without thinking, was brash and impulsive and even denied Christ like every other politician would do, but he became the recognized voice of the gospel during and after Pentecost, the holy spirit was, and is still the difference.

11. Matt 14:1-12.

John the Baptist spoke out against the immoral lives of king Herod and his wife, even though he faced prison, many Christians run from politics because of the risks involved, we must remember that God does not guarantee an easy or safe trip life to those who serve him (John 16:33). John was a fearless confronter and uncompromising fighter for Jesus. We need many of his kind in our political system who will uphold the banner of

Christ no matter the hazards, God can you in a way he will use no other man, make yourself available for his service.

12. Nehemiah, 1-6.

Nehemiah, who had become the cupbearer to king Artaxerxes of Persia (464-426 BC), was able to gain the kings help to rebuild Jerusalem because Nehemiah was right inside the Government.

Ministers in Politics in Time Of Old

13. 2Sam 15:14-29.

Zadok the priest was a well-known partisan follower of King David

14. 1kings 1:11-40.

Nathan the prophet was politically involved and influenced selections of David's successor.

15. 1Cor.9:19-27.

Paul the apostle was political and diplomatic in his dealings with all and sundry.

Conclusion:

We rightly noted that the Christian is a citizen of two kingdoms, world and heaven. And he has been given clear mandate to be responsible in both; involvement in politics by the Christians is nothing but a call to civil responsibility. The only way we can dominate and have dominion over creation is to be involved in the affairs of God's creation. It is mandatory as Christians, the children of God, to possess our possession, for everything in this world belonged to God. (Psalm 24:1, Haggai 2:8)

Fifteen Steps: To Responsible Participation in Politics.

1. Gift: First you need to search yourself and be sure that you have gifts of healing, help, governance, diversity of.... (1Cor, 12:28). Once you are sure of this, you do not need to worry much about ability. God cannot provide a gift without the ability to use the gift. The truth has been that a good

number of Christians have hitherto channel their gifts of government to ministry work alone.

2. Purity: You have to be resolute in your resolve to be pure for only in purity can we stimulate others to holiness. Lack of holiness has been the bane of our nation. Remember that without holiness no one can see nor hear from God. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure (1. Tim 5:22). Always remember that you have the hope that other politicians lack. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:3).

3. Wisdom: for too long, the politicians have been using their own wisdom in solving problems. You cannot be like them, all on your own; you cannot tackle the problems of the nation. You need the wisdom of God to in all things and at all times. Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do! And with your wisdom, develop common sense and good judgments. (Prov. 4:7 TLB)

4. Obedience: obedience to God in his will in our lives is very important. We cannot secure the honour of God and even the respect of the electorate if we are disobedient in spiritual and secular matters. The fact that we have political power does not mean that we should respect our pastors and church elders nor should our positions as deacons, elders turn us into peacocks in the political arena. And even though Jesus was God's son, he had to learn from experience what it was like to obey when obeying meant suffering. (Heb. 5:8 living bible).

5. Listening: Most of the time, politicians are given to talking without listening to people. As Christians in politics, we must learn to listen to men and learn to hear from God. This is very important because no matter is trivial in politics and we must hear from him before we take decisions. Listening to the voice of God can always make the difference.

6. Level headedness: The fact that you are level-headed cannot mean that you are weak or unprincipled. You need calm and stability of mind to deal with people.

7. Strength: politics is a rigorous calling. You require strength, not just strength, but your weakness predicated on the strength of Christ and you can then say, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13).

8. Idealistic: let your action, speech and all that you do reflect that you are Christ's ambassador.

9. Companionship: the company you keep will colour your nature and the world will judge you by the company you keep. Even in politics, you must be able to lift the banner of Christ high at all times. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the lord out of pure heart. (2Tim 2:22).

10. Sin: Sin and insensitivity to it has been the bane of our society as engineered by our politicians. As Christian leaders we must recognize sin for what it is. You need to keep off sin so that you can float and flow in the spirit always. (1John 2:1)

11. Thoughts: As a politician, if you focus your thoughts and ideas on the world you will miss the mark. Your focus should be to make this world what God intended it to be. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (3:2-3)

12. Vision: let your vision of life be wholesome so that your deed will be acceptable to God and appreciated by men for this reason I left you in Crete, that you should order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city and as I commanded you (1Titus1:5)

13. Peace: certainly, you need peace to forge ahead but you should not go about seeking peace in the manners of unbelievers. You cannot buy peace. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you (Is 26:3)

14. Worry: politicians worry a lot. Be different, we agree that there are many things to worry about. You must learn to center on issues of the moment and leave your worries to God. Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you (1 Pet 5 :7)

15. Satisfaction: politicians are known to have insatiable appetite for good life. Show a good example by being different. Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb 13:5)

16. Prayerful: sometimes, things turn out the way we never expected; we need to be patient and prayerful. Every other politician is an incurable optimist, but you must be a politician of faith. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer (Rom 12:12)

17. Self-esteem: many are of the opinion that politicians do not and need not have self-esteem, this is not true. As Christians we must be honest in the assessment of who, we are and what we can do. We must learn to respect ourselves without being puffy we must not think more highly of ourselves than others. We must be sober at all times (Rom 12:3)

18. Depression: as you move along in politics, you cannot expect things to be smooth sailing all through. The rough edges you encounter may be God's own way of putting you in proper shape for his services even in the office of a counsellor, legislator, governor or even president. All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:23)

19. Failure in politics: failure is always lurking in the corner. You must learn to ignore failure. Those who are afraid of failure cannot recognize when success is about to come. The feeling of failure can be overwhelming and paralyzing, we must rely on Christ always.

20. Complex: you must abhor complex. It is said that our image of ourselves is constructed from the opinions related to us by our parents, friends, co-workers and relatives but we must learn not to lay too much emphasis on what we are but on what Christ can make us become by his power. That you do not be sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:12)

21. Family: finally, the last step will land you in where you made your first step into politics – your home. Always remember that you owe it a duty to every member of your family to be a part of it always, you must not neglect

them. The bible says that those who neglect their immediate household are worse than infidels. We would wish that Christians rather than distancing themselves from everything, they should affirm, "God has raised them up for such a time as this" we should not allow circumstances to force us into a reluctant involvement in the political and economic development of our nation. We must cheerfully and willingly be involved.

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