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THE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO CHRISTIANS' INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL AFFAIRS FOR DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This study seeks to address the need for Christians to get involve in civil affairs in Nigeria with the aid of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God otherwise, the concept of the sovereignty of God expresses the activity of God as king in his creation. It reveals the rulership or government by God through Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God as a theological concept is too broad; to be precise, Martin Luther's and John Calvin's views of the concept are considered. Both concepts agree that the kingdom of God is God's activity evident in Jesus Christ. Descriptive method through a body of related literatures and biblical admonitions were used to gather information. The paper noted the porous situation of Nigerian society before and after independent as well as the fact that in the kingdom of God, God is active in the affairs of people notably Christians who are submissive to him in all spheres of life even civil affairs irrespective of the level of porosity. The paper recommends that Nigerian Christians should not shy away from secular affairs thinking that it is filthy. They should be at the forefront leading people to righteousness thus the kingdom of God or the reign of Christ should be fully obeyed and preached by Nigerian Christians.

Keywords: Kingdom of God, Democracy, Rulership, Righteousness and Sustainability

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Introduction

The history of Nigeria appropriately commenced in 1914, when the southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated. Nigeria was by then governed by colonial administration. In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from the British colonialists. Before then Nigeria had contact with Christianity that has spread throughout the country. A source even states that the independent Nigeria was made up of more than sixty percent Christians of at least those who go to various denominational centers every Sunday¹. Even in the 2014 rating of the predominant religions in Nigeria, the population statistics affirmed Christianity as the largest religion in Nigeria, putting Christianity at 50.5 percent, Islam took 43.5 percent and African Traditional Religion had 6 percent². But with this number, not much has been felt among most Christians in terms of impacts, in the area of civil responsibility.

The fact that the coming into existence of any nation is traceable to God links the importance of the kingdom of God to Christians in Nigeria. The kingdom of God is understood by Christians as the reign of God or the sovereignty of God or the rule of Christ (the incarnate *Logos* of God) over all lives³. Nigeria as a nation is endowed by God with great physical, natural and human resources; it is billed for economic and political viability. But, it could be observed that some Christians in public services do not apply the norms of the kingdom of God to enhance sustainable development in the discharge of their various duties and obligations. Hence, fifty-five years after independence, there is still little to show in the area of socio- economic, political and religious development and self-sufficiency. Instead, these years are marked with corruption and other social vices in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe identifies the problem of Nigeria to be that of leadership, in his words, "There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leader to rise to the responsibilities, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmark of true leadership."⁴

It is therefore obvious that Christians form part of the leadership structure of Nigeria. With the kingdom of God, Christians in Nigeria are given the great responsibility by God to rescue the nation. Certain standards have been laid down in the Bible for the Christians to enhance efforts in nation building cum civil obligation. If Christians pick up the challenges and dare to discharge both the spiritual and civil responsibilities conscientiously

to the nation, there will be a reduction in crime, corruption and other forms of social vices that are destroying and denting the image of Nigeria in no small measure. If Christians are not conscious of the principles of the kingdom of God in their service demand in any sphere they are called to serve, there would be effective governance and sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts

Among other difficulties which may impede the study of any subject that of language holds a leading place. Terms are relative therefore necessary to define some terms as used in the work.

Civil Affairs

The whole concept of civil affairs relate with the citizens of a state and their activities in an establishment that is not under any religious control. A citizen is a person who is a legal member of a state or country. He/she owes allegiance to the country he/ she resides, enjoys full civil and political rights and should be ready to put his/ her life at stake in defense of the state. It can also be said that not everybody who resides in a particular country becomes a citizen. For example, foreigners are not citizens of a country in which they reside unless they naturalize their citizenship.

Citizenship therefore, refers to the citizen's rights, duties and obligation in a particular country which he/ she belongs. Christians hold dual citizenship, they are citizens of the kingdom of God hence they are called Christians. At the same time, they are citizens of the state (country) they belong by birth, marriage or naturalization. Then they hold a legal membership of that country and enjoy full civil and political rights. Whereas it is expected of the citizens to put their life at stake in defense of the country they belong, the Christian in the state or country should be at the forefront defending the truths and discharging his/ her duties passionately.

Politics

To understand the English word "politics", it is helpful to turn to the first users of the word; politics comes from the Greek word πολιτική (*politike*), which means a state or community with an organized system of leadership, government and law enforcement⁵. Although the term often applies in relation to a state, the above definition applies to all human organizations which do not have to exclude the Christian.

For Yamsat, politics is about fair sharing which includes the sharing of power, the sharing of resources and the maintenance of justice for the good of the citizens of the country (nation).⁶ More about it is that politics is about how people in a given country are to relate to one another, how they can organize and develop their resources for the benefit of all the citizens and how they can best protect their own interest. Christians in any given country owe such country their obligations and duties to making sure that the country is doing well. By doing so they obey God or response to the divine command which shows regard to how humans should relate to one another.

Civil Obedience

Civil relates to rights, duties and obligations of the people who live in a country. But in a limited sense, civil is connected with people who are within the bound of a particular country excluding the military ones. Moreover civil in this work relates to persons including Christians who enjoy civil rights of a particular country who in turn ought to discharge civil duties and responsibilities expected of them by the country. Civil obedience requires those who enjoy protection from the state to be loyal to the authority of the state.

Kingdom of God

The phrase, "kingdom of God" is derived from the New Testament, *ἡ βασιλεία του Θεου* or *ἡ βασιλεία των οὐρανῶν* that is, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven, which are identical in meaning. In the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, the phrase means the sovereign activity of God as king in saving humanity, overcoming evil and establishing the new order.⁷ This expression shows that God is the heavenly king whose kingdom extends to all the spheres of the earth. In the Bible, the expression, "the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19) enjoins everybody to submit to God's rule or sovereignty. The coming of the kingdom of God which is prayed in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2) is an indication that God's will is significantly anticipated in the earth. Jesus' life and work exhibiting life of obedience to God, justice, fair play and peace became the kingdom lifestyle and example to all Christians.

Theological Perspectives of Civil Affairs From Old Testament Perspective

The Bible in the Old Testament promotes civil responsibilities. Every aspect of the Israel's life as contained in the Old Testament is seen as God's initiative. This includes her political life-God appointed leaders and kings. The systems favourably used were theocracy and monarchy, which involved the priests, prophets and kings. The priest and prophets were unavoidably performing functions that had social economic and political implications. The prophets were not prophesying in vacuum. For them to be worthy of their titles, their messages were not only to concentrate on spiritual welfare of the people but also to be socio-politically and economically relevant. For example, prophets like Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea and Haggai condemned the idolatry and backsliding of the people of Israel as well as moral bankrupt, political alliances with ungodly nations, injustice in governance, economic exploitation and forced labour.⁸

The king and leaders in the Old Testament were equally interested in civil affairs. For instance, Moses could be seen as the father of nationalism.⁹ He cared about the welfare of Israelites and responded in leading them out of the bondage of Egyptians. In the same way, Joseph can be regarded as the prime minister and economic adviser whose advice to Pharaoh in Egypt on agro-economic policies brought about plenty in Egypt instead of famine. Among their neighbouring nations, the Israelites benefited from these policies and later packed to live in Egypt.¹⁰

In short, the life of the Israelite was about the spiritual wellbeing as well as material which constituted the economical, political, social and cultural affairs. These areas are what are today called the secular sphere or civil affairs. The Ten Commandments guided the Israel's responsibility toward the spiritual and material spheres. The first four were to guide their relationship with God while the last six controlled their excessiveness with one another in the society.¹¹

New Testament Perspective of Civil Affairs

The early Christians saw themselves as the new Israel or perceived themselves as the assembly (*ἐκκλησία*) of God. The New Testament in the Gospel and Letters especially written by both Paul and Peter reminds Christians that they are to be subject to every governing authority on the grounds that such authorities are instituted by God for the good of the people of a nation.

In the Gospel, the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it is lawful for believers to pay taxes to Caesar, a secular authority (Mark 12:15). Except that the question was not indeed trivial, it has the capacity to generate conflict between Caesar (representing civil authority) and God (or the church representing the spiritual authority). Jesus would not allow such an unhealthy development. So he took time to place the issue within its proper perspective and said thus: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17)¹². The lesson here is simple; the Christian is at the same time a citizen of the state and a member of the church. Moreover, such a Christian should find out what belongs to the state and to act according to the state demands whereas he/she is also expected to act according to the demand that belongs to God.

In the Letters, Paul and Peter relate the theme of Christian responsibility to secular sphere as obedience under duress. To Paul, Christian responsibility to civil affairs should be created from a sanctified conscience that is, a Christian whose conscience has been purified by the Word of God should obey the laws of the state, then for two reasons: first to keep from being punished, and second, just because he/she is Christians and much is expected of a Christian, he/she should show act exemplarily. Payment of taxes is for these same reasons (Rom. 13:5-6). But, where there are corruption, cheating and malpractices of course the law of the nation is against these acts, the same Christian conscience will motivate the Christian to refuse participating in such acts. Peter gives the phrase, "for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13) as reason for obedience. Other ingredients that are demanded of a Christian are, obey every law of your government, show respect for everyone, love one another everywhere, fear and honour the government (1 Peter 2:13-17). Within proper perspectives, the duties and obligations of the Christians should bring no confusion at all. When it is time to pay tax, the Christian should step forth and do so to the government of the country. God does not expect the Christian to use the designated official hours of government services to do church work, if he/she is a government worker; nor should he/she spend all his/her time in the office, in the name of official work so that there will be no longer to engage in the Christian service.

Relationship between the Kingdom of God and Civil Authority

The theology of the kingdom of God is traced to the Bible; indeed, it becomes one of the greatest themes of the biblical messages. The phrase the kingdom of God does not appear in the Old Testament, but *malkuth* which means "sovereign rule" or sovereignty of God which considers God as the eternal king actively ruling over all people. The Psalmist confirms this thus, "your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures throughout all generation" (145:13). The Old Testament prophecy reveals that the kingdom will be established by God himself.

Consequently, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the Word of God has established the Kingdom of God. In his person, the kingdom of God has come among human beings and the Old Testament hope was being fulfilled. The world was created without sin but when evil entered into the world, it became corrupt (Genesis 1). It therefore follows that those who do not conform to the corrupt nature of the world and who obey God in Christ are under the kingdom of God. Martin Luther adopts the idea of two kingdoms to differentiate between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. For him, the kingdom of God belongs to the believers in Christ. Jesus Christ becomes the king of the kingdom of God, he rules this kingdom with Gospel, grace and Spirit¹³ whereas the kingdom of the world is through the temporal leadership of this world. In his words, Luther adds, "... God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ, and the temporal, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that no thanks- they are obliged to keep still and maintain an outward peace."¹⁴

From the above, it is possible to say that every Christian who does God's will willingly belongs to the kingdom of God while the nominal Christians and non-Christians belong to the kingdom of the world, such people are restrained and forced to do good in the society. John Calvin uses the concept of the divine sovereignty to refer to the kingdom of God. He holds that every sphere of human authority is under the sovereignty of God¹⁵. This expresses the power and authority of God as being subject to none as seen in the creation and continuous rulership of God over all things. Calvin adds that the sovereignty of God implies that God rules over heaven and earth in providence, and asserts as follows:

...that the universe is ruled by God not because he watches the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises special care over each of his works. It is indeed true that the several kinds of things are moved by a secrete impulse of nature as if they obeyed God's eternal command and what has once determined flowed on by itself.¹⁶

This means that God does not remove himself from the world to manage itself. Every sphere of human existence namely, politics, governance, commerce, industry, economic, legal as well as the church are under the sovereignty of God. God is still interested about how the affairs of these spheres are managed.

Calvin believes that the sovereignty of God manifest itself in a special way through Christ whom he calls the "the Anointed of God" and as the embodiment of the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and of the fear of God¹⁷. This implies that the lordship of Christ is uncompromising, it is superior. Those under this kingdom should not compromise Christ's standard while engaging in secular activities. All Christian traditions believe that the sovereignty of God must be recognized in all spheres of life including civil affairs. Although, it is not clear to conclude that the kingdom of God refers to the church, the kingdom is larger than the church. But this paper supports that the church is very close to the idea of the kingdom which involves the believers in Christ and the church which refers to the body of Christ called out from the world (1 Cor. 12:27-28, Eph. 1:22-23).

However, there is a common basis for Church or Kingdom and civil authority in the Bible. Both owe their existence in God's sovereignty. Despite the harmony and inspiration of the two they have distinct roles. Meter identifies their distinct roles such that the church or kingdom of God is billed for building up of the body of Christ while the state finds its purpose in the maintenance of law and order in the civil society¹⁸. Moreover, the duties of the civil authority to the church include the state's place to recognize the existence of the church, protect her and encourage her in her promotion of ethics and morality, which aim at stabilizing the society. But, the civic authority should not establish a state church if done, it means that government wants to determine on the liturgies and rituals of the church. It is church's voice against the bad doing of the government.¹⁹ The duties of the kingdom of

God or Church to the civic authority comprise the following: the church does not have to encroach on the domain of the civil government in order to decide or determine how state or civil affairs should be run. It can only exert an indirect influence on it by affecting the consciences of Christians who are also members of the state with the Christian ethics.²⁰

Christian Approaches to Civil Affairs

In this paper, the approaches are grouped into three (the grouping may be more than the ones shown here). Here, Christians fall into separating, identifying, and transforming groups. They are as shown below:

The Separating Group: In this group, the Christian always overemphasizes the conflicting values that exist between the realms of the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. According to this approach, the Christian may have an uncompromising command to withdraw from the world. This is always supported with the biblical passage such as, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common... therefore come out from them and separate from them..." (2 Cor. 6:14-17). However, passages like this should not be used in isolation of the actual setting. But, the separating group uses the passage in its rough state to condemn everything about the secular affairs. They hold that there can be nothing to do with secular affairs. They withdraw from politics and any administrative position so that they may not be corrupted or tainted by the world.

The Identifying Group: Unlike the separating group who see no possibility of Christian involvement in secular affairs, the identifying group tries only to identify with secular affairs. They claim to follow the example of Jesus who identified himself with the government of his day; he paid tax to Caesar's government (Matt 22:21). Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ urges Christians to submit themselves to civil authority because they have been instituted by God (Rom. 13:7). This group maintains that a Christian should not despise the civil authority set up. Her role to the government of the day is partial such as payment of tax, keeping the law and being careful not to contravene the law of the land.

The Transforming Group: The transforming group sees the possibility of a Christian's strong involvement in the civil affair of his/ her country. Such Christian can participate in politics and other governmental affairs with the aim of bringing changes and maintaining sustainable democracy in the country. Joseph was involved in the administration of the Egyptian state. The Old Testament prophets acted as religious elites and at the same time political and economic watchdogs of their contemporary societies. In the New Testament, some were in civil affairs called to be followers of Jesus Christ such as Zacchaeus (Matthew 19). Ethiopian Eunuch was a minister of finance (Acts 8:26ff) and others like Nicodemus. This group holds that one cannot correct a society or organization from outside. Christians in this group are allowed to get involved in politics and governance of the state because they see them as fair sharing not of corruption. They discharge their duties and obligations faithfully. They also enjoy their citizenship rights with respect to the rule of law.

History abounds with men and women in Nigeria who hold this view. We have Christians like Akanulbiam who was a missionary and at the same time educationist; he saved as a medical doctor and administrator. The source asserts thus:

And Sir Francis Akanulbiam was sworn in as the new Governor of the Eastern Region of Nigeria at a colourful ceremony... in the years that followed; Sir Francis laboured much to influence his subject with his deeply seated Christian virtues. One remembers how he influences the Okpara Cabinet with his Christian principles of honesty, fear of God and humanity. He always ensured that cabinet meetings were constituted with a short devotion.²¹

Francis Akanulbiam was a Presbyterian elder of the Reformed stock. An example of a woman who believed in transforming the society was Mary Slessor, a missionary, a proconsul of Okoyong, a magistrate at former Enyong Division, Itu Province stopped the killing of twins in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Abraham Kuyper a prime minister who transformed the Netherland government to a godly state was equally a Presbyterian or elder of the church²². However, this approach supports Jesus as a transformer who needed

not to create a new human society but his earthly ministry was geared toward transforming the existing one. He played the role of a saviour as well as a transformer.

Recommendations for Christians' Involvement in Civil Affairs of Nigeria

- With reference to the kingdom of God, Nigerian Christians should involve in civil activities of their countries, they are to obey the civil laws and as well as heed to the divine laws. Then they will still maintain their position as Christians.
- In the midst of corruption, the Kingdom of God requires Nigerian Christians to get involved in leadership and governance of the country. They should lead by examples in order to transform the little corner where they are found.
- Nigerian should not shy away from secular spheres perceiving them as full of dirt; this is how many Christians conceive politics to be. Christians should brand themselves as true light, true salt and true leaven of the earth, and should speak against all social evil and corruption in Nigeria. They should be at the forefront leading people to righteousness thus the kingdom of God or the reign of Christ should be fully obeyed and preached by Nigerian Christians.
- Also, Christian duty to the state demands the Christian to be subject to the governing authorities (Roman 13:1-7) but not with blind spirit. However, it is hoped that since these authorities were instituted by God for the purpose of peace and stability, they are not against good works but hold their power against what is bad. It is in this way that the Christians have to obey them as law-abiding citizens.
- The church must call on its members who are in responsible positions in public services to stand for honesty and integrity at all times with respect to the kingdom of God. They will therefore become epitomes of right decorum and dignity against corruption and other vices in the nation.
- The Nigerian church must restore the kingdom ethics to itself before relating it to the society. The church should be obedient to the kingdom of God in matters of church doctrine, discipline, election into church offices as well as teach its members social responsibilities.

- The transforming group should be the standard for Christians in civil affairs adopting the biblical directives for obedience to transform the Nigerian structure and system from the corrupt state to a desirable one.

Conclusion

Nigeria had faced the challenge of lack of human dignity and ineffective management of natural resources endowed by God. This challenge has fouled up by years of slavery, centuries of colonialism and imperialism and post-colonial era of violence, loss of image, bribery and corruption. These and many more have opposed sustainable democracy and impede development in the country in a greater measure. Thus the kingdom of God has become a serious call for responsibility to Christians in civil affairs. The kingdom of God is a necessary responsibility to all Christians who belong to both secular and ecclesiastical spheres in Nigeria. The kingdom of God is acknowledging the reign of God's sovereignty everywhere Christians are. It is also acknowledging the fear of God by all Christians in discharging their responsibilities so that there will be a meaningful sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

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