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Biblical Perspective on Christians Participation in Politics

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Abstract

The paper was influenced by these questions, Should Christians participate in politics? What relationship exists between Christians and politics? How does Christianity affect the politics? Thus, this paper attempts to answer these questions. More importantly, the paper will educate and inform the readers both Christians and non-Christians at large to know and understand that politics does not deny eternal life, but it is the attitude of some politicians that make it bad in the sight of God. Hence, Christianity and politics are essential tools for both human beings and nation growth and development.

Keywords: Biblical, Christians, Politics, Natives, State, Country

Introduction

In every sphere of life, human beings exercise power and authority which bring meaning to the way we live or do things.¹ We live in a world shaped by false Post-Enlightenment divisions between private personal faith and public political life.² Thus, humankind lives in a Post-Christendom world where old understanding of the relationship between Church, state and society no longer apply.

Christianity and politics are two different entities that help in the growth and development in human existence, both have parallel practices but they share common goals which are useful to human beings.³ This implies that both Christianity and politics have positive effect on humans' life.

The early missionaries distant Christianity from politics especially in some African countries and this made some Christians registered displeasure towards politics, and they transferred the wrong notion of politics to their children where the children overlooked the importance of politics to human existence. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate whether Christians can be involved in politics or not. The significance of the study is to educate Christians and society at large on politics. The paper also covers the meaning of politics, the need of Christians in secular politics, the obligation and the effect of Christians on politics, summary and conclusion.

The Meaning of Politics

The word politics comes from Greek word "politikos" which means the citizen.⁴ The "politikos" refers to the science and art of civil government. The word Politics originated from ancient Greece and has its root word from "polis" as far back as 2,800 years ago, which Politics is the "enforcement in which order is carried out continually within a given territorial area by the application and the exercise of such

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¹ Birkhause K., Christianity Today (New York: Power Dominion Press, 1998), 10.

² Philip Field, Christian in the World (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2009), 52.

³ Michael H. Carson, the Christian and the State (England: Staples Printers Limited, 1960), 89.

⁴ Thompson F. Donald, the Democratic Citizen (United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 74.

power.”⁵ Lasswellian also concludes that politics is the status and expression of power to the distribution of resources for the betterment of the citizens.⁶ In my point of view politics is the way we live, do things and make decisions. The main purpose of politics is to enforce law to govern citizenry for their betterment, growth and development of such natives.⁷ Thus, the government must show love, kindness and make equal distribution of resources to the people.

Politics can be operated in worldly and in Christian realm.⁸ The worldly politics involves the formation of political parties whereas Christian politics is done in spiritual perspective.⁹ In secular politics people normally mount platform to campaign for their parties to win power. In Christian politics the leaders are selected through nominating committee without doing any campaign.

Essentially enough, Christians can register as voters to elect leaders at presidential, Parliamentary, District, Municipal, and Metropolitan Chief Executives at various Assemblies.¹⁰ Christians can also be elected as a President, Member of Parliament, Minister of State and as a District Chief Executive through their own freewill without any endorsement by the Church. In Church system, many Christians run representative system of government to select the leaders which is also a form of democratic politics.

Politics in the Secular World

Politics is about the acquisition of power and the use of such power for the development of the indigenous people.¹¹ Politics in the secular world is the formation of political parties with the common interest and ideology with the sole aim of winning power to implement their plans and policies on the citizens. Nkem Onyekpe defines the term secular politics as the struggle for power which itself is the authority to formulate and execute decisions and policies which accepted by the society for the benefit of the people.¹² According to him, the struggle for or the acquisition of power and the reaction of the society to it, depend greatly on the level of political development of the country.¹³

Hence, it can be observed that politics is all about struggle for power as it relates to use and control of such power in

governance. Thus, politics involves stage of governance and how the political leaders acquire their mandate.

According to Aristotle, states are classified into monarchies, aristocracies, democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies.¹⁴ Generally speaking, no form of government can be considered as perfect and absolute in governing the citizens of a given state.¹⁵ This is because government is created by people which can be abused by such people in power and rule for their own selfish interest. Here, humanism and egoism are usually expressed by the leaders or the rulers of the state.

Politics in Christianity

Christians refer to a group of believers who share common faith and doctrines with the aim of attaining salvation (Dan2:20-21, Rom13:1-2, NKJV).¹⁶

Some Bible scholar like John Calvin emphasizes the idea that Christianity is concerned primarily with conceptions of God, divinity and the power and order of human existence.¹⁷ Other scholars also stress that Christianity serves to draw distinctions between sacred and secular world.¹⁸ The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), focused on the symbolic power of Christianity and its ability to influence how people understand their place in the world and also to impart meaning to the actions they undertake into heavenly kingdom.¹⁹ The above statements divulge that Christians should not partake in secular politics, because it deceives and divides people on this earth. Christians should direct and help human beings to earn eternity.

Christianity is also present in world politics in ways far less dramatic and violent.²⁰ For example, millions of Catholics around the world recognize the spiritual authority of the Pope as the final arbiter, globally, of matters relating to Church doctrine. The strength of the Christian Evangelical movement in the United States has been a major factor in the political success of that country's Republican Party in recent years.²¹ The political theorist William Connolly (2005) identified the United States as a new form of theocracy on the relationship between belief in God and absolute faith in market capitalism.²² The above assertions indicate that some groups of Christians believe to be involved in politics while others disagree for Christians to join politics.

⁵ Bright Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for New Age* (United States of America: University of California, 1984), 225.

⁶ Charles H. Mansfield, *America's Constitutional Soul* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸ Maclean Fiorina, *The Divided Government in America* (United States of America: Cambridge University, 1994), 38.

⁹ William A. Harper and Thomas R. Malloch, *Where Are We Now: The State of Christian Political Reflection* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1981), 464.

¹⁰ Michael Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Publications, 1957), 321.

¹¹ Paul Marshall and Enoch Vanderkloet, *Foundations of Human Rights* (United States of America: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), 48.

¹² Onyekpe Nkem, *Politics and Political Power* (Nigeria: University of Ibadan Printing Press, 1999), 61.

¹³ Hans Maier, *Revolution and Church: The Early History of Christian Democracy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 523.

¹⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 177.

¹⁵ Morris E. Irving, *The Christians Democratic Parties in Western Europe* (London: George and Unwin Publishers, 1979), 639.

¹⁶ George L. Hunt, *Calvinism and Political Order* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 411.

¹⁷ Richard Mouw, *Political Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976), 17.

¹⁸ Waldo Beach, *Christian Ethics in the Protestant Tradition* (United States of America: John Knox Press, 1988), 2.

¹⁹ Sampson W. Reid and John Calvin, *The Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 66.

²⁰ Mark Gibbs, *Christians with Secular Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 173.

²¹ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 9.

²² Davison J. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 25.

Should Christians participate in Politics?

The notion of whether or not politics and Christianity should be kept apart is highly controversial in today's world. While Christianity has often been ignored as an important political factor, it is becoming increasingly clear that it plays a substantive role in world politics, both internationally and locally.²³ Conflict normally arises in politics because most Christians do not involve themselves in democratic governance.²⁴ Some Christian believers are of the notion that politics and Christianity should be kept separate on the basis of liberal perspective.²⁵ They accept the liberal ideas of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson which states that there should be a separation between Christians and politics to avoid disunity and conflict.²⁶

Apostle Paul declares that "for we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19, NKJV).²⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, the 17th Century political thinker believed that Christianity is the foundation of state and natives, therefore the political leaders should attach more importance to it, since it is the source for growth and development of every country.²⁸ Montesquieu, a great French politician confirmed that Christians should be part of politics in that Christianity provides unity, harmony, tranquility, peace and social stability for the indigenous people in the community.²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, another 17th Century historian and politician argued that Christians and politics should go hand in hand since Christianity is vital for growth and development of a nation.³⁰ The implication here is that politics is not all that bad, but the way Christians go about it may create division and rancor among themselves and other indigenes. Here, it is established that politics does not deny eternal life, but the attitude of some politicians make it bad in the sight of God.

Biblical Perspective on Politics

Many Christians have approached politics as lies outside their primary realm of responsibilities. Politics is often viewed as "part of the world" where people do not show love to their brethren but only for their selfish interest.³¹ Often times our Christian life becomes confined to personal godliness, to church activities like attending prayer session, youth meetings, and Bible studies.³² From this point of view, the Christians' involvement in politics is seen as a step into the secular world. The relationship between church and world, then the sacred and the secular, is wrongly analyzed by some believers in Christ.

²³ John Bready, *The Gospel and Politics: Five Positions* (Toronto: Christian Service Institute, 1958), 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 640.

²⁵ Robert F. Booth, *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 11.

²⁶ Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes towards War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 44.

²⁷ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and Wayne H. House, *New King James Version Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007), 1862.

²⁸ Henry Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State* (Philadelphia: Christian Service Institute, 1972), 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹ Samuel Aruwan, *In Need Of Political Agenda* (Kaduna: Development and Rights Advocacy Publications, 2013), 195.

³² *Ibid.*, 220.

Notwithstanding, in ancient Israelite God ruled His people through theocracy.³³ Here, God governed His own nation Israel and exercised the ecclesiastical duty on them. Moses, a prophet, a priest and ruler instituted the representative government by "making rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens" (Exod 18:21, Remnant Study Bible).³⁴ The men of Israel asked Gideon to rule over them and their sons (Judges 8:22, Remnant Study Bible).³⁵ King Saul and David ruled over people of Israel respectively (1 Sam 9:1-26, 16:1-23 NKJV).³⁶ For instance, Daniel interpreted king Nebuchadnezzar's dream for him where he was rewarded and ruled some subjects in Babylon (Dan 2:36-45, NKJV).

Christians Duties to the Politics

Christians have special duties to perform in every community. These obligations include humility, respect, obedient, loyal to and prayer to the rulers of the nation. Paul affirms Christians to give our "supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanks to kings and people in authority, that we may lead a quiet, peaceable and godly manners acceptable by God" (1 Tim 2:1-3, Remnant study Bible).³⁷ This discloses that Christians should prepare to serve and support any government that comes to power.

The Relationship between Christians and Politics

The relationship between Christians and politics is a historically complex subject where they agree at a certain areas and disagree on other issues. There have been a wide variety of ways in which political thinkers have conceived the relationship between Christianity and politics where many Christians argue that Christianity directly supports a particular political party ideology and philosophy.³⁸ Along these lines, many political thinkers have argued for Christian communism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, Christian libertarianism, Christian democracy which are practiced in Roman Catholic and some Protestant Churches.³⁹ A Christian school of thought believes that Christians should have little or no interest to participate in political governance.⁴⁰

One of the great tragedies of the Protestant Reformation was the great Reformers like John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther who developed a law of governance and Church system, to combine the politics and religion together.⁴¹ The Reformers did not bring about any radical change in the sphere of political science and philosophy to suite that of Church system.

The German scholar August Lang divulged that "when Christians involved in secular politics, theological disputes,

³³ Edmund Clouse, *The Four Christian Views* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 18.

³⁴ Remnant Study Bible with Ellen G. Comments (United States of America: Remnant Publications, 2009), 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 482.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1431.

³⁸ Richard Mouw, *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 115.

³⁹ Zamani B. Kafang, *Christian Integrity and Politics in Nigeria* (Lagos: Zoe Publications, 2011), 37.

⁴⁰ Bob Goudzwaard, *A Christian Political Option* (Toronto: Wedge Publishers, 1984), 209.

⁴¹ G. T. Machen, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 233.

division, disunity and religious controversy abound to occur.”⁴² Again, politics in actual sense is permeated by humanism and egoism.⁴³ Thus, people enter politics with the view of satisfying their selfish interest. The politicians do not think about the welfare of their subjects when they get power, but they are only interested in their humanly ambitions. This is contrary to the ideology of Christians which lay more emphasis on the welfare of the masses. In short, politics brought about chaos and divisions among the reformers and their Churches.

The Need for Christians to be involved in Politics

Christian school of thought believes that a Christians' citizenship is in Heaven therefore there is no need to partake in politics.⁴⁴ This shows that a true Christians should neither vote nor be voted for any governmental position.

As individuals, Christians are free to enter politics. There are numerous references in Proverbs to righteous and wicked rulers. Of course Proverbs defines righteousness in terms of social justice and equality, not one's own interest and right but in the sight of God.

It is therefore clear that, when the righteous persons are in authority, the people rejoice but when the wicked leaders rule, the people mourn (Prov 29:11-14, NKJV). In this case, what makes politics good or evil is determined by the caliber of people who get involved in the game of politics. If the righteous Christians are involved, the citizens will enjoy good governance and high standard of living and vice versa.

Spiritual duty to God

The first obligation that the Christian has to be involved in politics is what it tagged as “Christians as a sources of Spiritual duty to God.” Matthew asserts that Christians are the salt on the earth and the light in the world (Matt 5:13-14, NKJV).⁴⁵ Our spiritual obligation is that we should be good citizens to direct other people in the world, hence Christians must have a change in behavior.

Social Duty to Other People

The second obligation for Christians to be involved in politics is what it is termed as the “social duty to others”.⁴⁶ Our social obligation to the nation is that we must be ready to run public offices, handle legislative, judicial and executive positions.

Ethical and Moral Duty to Truth

The third obligation that we as Christians have to be involved in politics is what it refers to as “the ethical and moral duty to truth”.⁴⁷ Our moral obligation to truth says

that if Christians hold governmental position we should be more responsible statesman than non-Christian politicians. This shows that Christians should be honest and transparent in our national assignments.

It is sad that many people in the state are not honest. It is only in the pursuit of truth that any society can have the kind of values that makes life better and the pursuit of happiness for worthwhile living. Thus, laws and policies must be based upon certain unalienable rights that come from our Creator. The Ten Commandments has established eternal standards of right and wrong that any civilized society must be based upon. All those who run for such offices must hold fast to the moral obligation of truth. Therefore, Christ's believers in politics should be in good morals. Here, they must disclose practical Christianity.

Faithfulness and Righteousness to duty

Jesus Christ has called all Christians to be “His righteous people”⁴⁸ to shine throughout the whole world (Psalm 4:1, 11:7, Luke 1:75, Philip 3:9 NKJV). Therefore, if Christians direct non-Christians the best way to do politics, many politicians will turn over a new leaf thereby bringing peace and development of the nation. The followers of Christ who engage in politics must uphold the Christians' principles of truthfulness, faithfulness and honesty to influence the nation.

Eternal Duty

The final obligation that we as Christians have to be involved in politics is to help and fulfill what is called the “eternal obligation”. Our eternal obligation is that we must also be willing to suffer the consequences of pains that come into our way. However, if Christians are involved in politics they can assist politicians to draw closer to God by sharing His word continually in various offices.

The eternal duty is about Christians are serving humanity and standing before God in eternity and giving account to Him.

The Effect of Christians on Politics

Godliness is needed in the political circle. Danladi Musa, a politician once said “it is now generally accepted that one of the main ways that Christians can positively influence the society and make a difference is to get involved in politics, business and social activities.”⁴⁹ By so doing Christians will truly become the light and the salt of the society. If this is to be achieved, Christians in politics should exhibit good conduct for other people who are unbelievers to follow that good example. When Christians are involved in politics they can change the way the rulers do things. With this positive impact from the Christians the state will get good leaders to build and develop the nation.

Politics is a significant tool for the development of every society today, if the people have good leaders representing them in the political arena. The representative of the people at legislation, executive and judicial level is very essential because they champion for the growth and development of every country.

Hence, such political positions require natives who have

⁴² David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society* (Great Britain: Stanford University, 1984), 12.

⁴³ Daniel Bonevac, *Today's Moral Issues: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives* (United states of America: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1992), 73.

⁴⁴ Philip Turner, *Christian Ethics and the Church* (United States of America: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 235.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 1497.

⁴⁶ Meeks A. Wayne, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 157.

⁴⁷ John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (New York: T&T Clark, 1998), 118.

⁴⁸ Stephen Satris, *Taking Sides* (United States of America: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 302.

⁴⁹ David Lyon, *a Christian Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 33.

good reputation and morals where such people can be gotten from the Christians.

Summary and Conclusion

Politically speaking, politics is a duty for Christians where we can shine and become true salt to humanity. The world needs change and it is only the elect (Christians) that can behave like salt and light on this earth to change many people for betterment.

Thus, this work holds that the Church should not endorse any candidate to do politics⁵⁰, but we should allow the individual members who are interested to join politics in peaceful, conducive atmosphere and in Christian manner to do so. When Christians are in politics we can demonstrate positive Christian and ethical qualities like transparency, faithfulness, honesty, decency, modesty, simplicity, efficiency and excellence. By so doing non-Christians and people without these characteristics will emulate them which can transform a nation for growth and development. For instance, as Apostle Paul indicated "I exhort first of all the supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for kings and all who are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim 1:1-4). Therefore, Christians can be guided by (1 Tim 1:1-4) when engaging in politics. Thus, Christians in politics should have interest and desire to help people to be saved, and exhibit good and peaceful life where one can live his Christian faith without any interference.

In conclusion, politics itself is not bad, but it depends on how individuals go about it, which will make it good or bad. In this instance, Christians in politics should put God first in all their endeavors and allowed themselves to be guided by the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Seventh-day Adventist Church position on politics is that a Church member may engage in partisan politics, but if that person is a Church worker he must resign from his work. All Christians uphold the objective and view of maintaining peace and tranquility in their Churches, society, community and the nation at large, therefore the believers in Christ should unify people and champion for growth and development when they enter into politics.

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