CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND COUNSELLING FOR VALUE RE-ORIENTATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT
Christian religion by its nature inspires feelings of godliness, integrity, honesty. perseverance, goodness, rectitude, brotherly kindness, love, peace with God, and with others. This may be a powerful instrument for fostering honesty in our political leadership. Politics from every indication is the pursuit, possession, and exercise of power in a society as well as the ability to impact the society uprightly. There is always a meeting point between Christian religion and counseling for re-orientation in political leadership. Religion no doubt has been a strong determining factor when it comes to the issue of governance and policy formulation. Looking at Nigeria, for example, we have Christian religion as one of the dominant religions which affects political leadership and the effect could be positive or negative. Many studies have been undertaken on the relationship between Christian religion and counseling for value re-orientation in political leadership, however, the aspect of the direct effect of Christian religion on counseling for value re-orientation is somehow neglected. This neglect has prompted this study which is aimed at exploring the effect of Christian religion on counseling for value re-orientation in political leadership in Nigeria. The study relies mainly on data obtained from secondary sources such as publications of relevant agencies, newspapers, unpublished works, and internet materials. The data will be contextually analysed to provide insight in terms of effect of Christian religion on counseling for value re-orientation in political leadership in the country.

Introduction

Man has been described as a social, religious and political animal because man is always engaged in the process of influencing and at times using threat on others and thereby, directly or indirectly being engaged in politics and power play knowingly or unknowingly. Since man is a political animal, we must not downplay the issue of right and wrong, good and bad which are part of the societal codes of conduct that serve as a guide and regulate human behaviour for the general good of all. In any society where the expected behaviour is not properly followed the outcome will always be negative. For example, some of the ideal and acceptable behaviours we have are hard work, integrity, contentment, accountability and transparency while selfishness, dishonesty, laziness are some of the negative vices that are

not acceptable by the society. When our Christian politicians fail to adopt these acceptable Christian moral standards in politics, then the result could be disastrous and the society will be disadvantaged.

Christian religion by its nature inspires feelings of godliness, integrity, honesty, perseverance, goodness, rectitude, brotherly love, peace with God, and with others. This may be a powerful instrument for fostering honesty in our political leadership. Politics from every indication is the pursuit, possession, and exercise of power in a society as well as the ability to impact the society uprightly. One cannot deny the fact that there is always a meeting point between Christian religion and counseling for value re-orientation in political leadership and this interplay between the two has generated a lot of response from many people. Religion no doubt has been a strong determining factor when it comes to the issue of governance and policy formulation. Looking at Nigeria for example we have Christian religion as one of the dominant religions which affects political leadership and the effect could be positive or negative.

It is a known fact that Nigeria as a nation is at cross-roads when it comes to the issue of moral decadence in politics because many of our politicians are after what they can grab to make them wealthy rather than serving those who vote them into the political office. Okalawon (2022) pointed out some of the immoral behaviours displayed by both Christian and non-Christian politicians which are fraud, embezzling of public funds, brazen corruption in high places, exploitation of the poor, discrimination, looting of treasury. This can be evidenced by what is presently, happening in the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction.

Uyanga (2023) supporting the aforementioned viewpoint, provides evidence that that corruption is pervasive in contemporary society, particularly among political leaders, to the extent that the political system is on the verge of collapse. He goes further to say that corruption appears to be ubiquitous and comes in various forms, from massive contract fraud, embezzlement and money laundering. These corrupt acts are perpetrated by professing Christians, Muslims and other religionists.

What is responsible for this state of affairs in Nigeria? The present study attempts to provide answers to some of these questions. This paper therefore, seeks to examine the place of Christian religion and counselling to create this awareness among our Christian politicians to restore the long-lost values. In other words, it sets out to explore the effect of Christian religion on counseling for value re-orientation in political leadership in Nigeria.

Materials for this study were collected from secondary sources such as the internet, Christian publications, newspapers, and the Holy Bible.

Clarification of Concepts

To have a better understanding of the topic under discussion, some key concepts wereclarified. These concepts include Christian religious education, counselling, value-reorientation, politics and leadership.

Christian religious education

Christian religious education aims to shape students' character for successful living and acceptance before God in worship, guiding them toward the attainment of human and Christian ideals. Abolarin and Babalola (2020) claim that Christian religious education is designed and integrated into the school curriculum, and the teaching is based on a Christian religious worldview. Alongside the teaching in school, it is taught at home since the home is the first school in a persons' life. Christian religious education according to Okeke (2017), ispart of the holistically oriented education that guides the students toward progressive habits for social responsibilities for the community that they belong to. In my own view, this type of education should guide students to emulate the characters of our Lord Jesus Christ and these characters includes love, integrity, humility, obedience, gentleness, and the fear of God.

Christian counseling

Through the incorporation of theological notions, Christian counseling is the type of treatment that combines traditional talk therapy approaches with Christian beliefs and practices. It focuses on how Christians navigate spiritual issues and challenges in their daily lives. It focuses on the navigation of spiritual

concerns and everyday life struggles encountered by Christians. It is the type of counseling that is Christ-centered and focus on understanding of scripture based knowledge and principles to help an individual live as a Christian in the image of God. This implies that these principles taught should be practiced in our daily living.

Value Reorientation

This is the process of changing or readjusting and bringing back into existence the good values. It is the efforts to inculcate acceptable values in the individual to ease the moral issues confronting the society. Value reorientation is the principle of right and wrong that is accepted by an individual or the society. Value reorientation as inculcating good values that can help Nigeria out of her numerous predicaments and can refocus the nation through greatness Njoku (2011). For purposes of this paper, value reorientation is a deliberate attempt to change our value system from materialism to integrity, or the process of adjusting or aligning behavior, attitudes, beliefs of people in a different direction among Nigerian politicians especially Christian politicians. By implication, this means counseling them to change their perception on corruption, embezzlement, dishonesty and general indiscipline which are against Christian ethical values.

Politics

Politics as a term is derived from the Greek word 'Polis' (city) and teche (skill). Gudu and Anjov (2023) defined Politics as the process of acquiring and exercise power, authoritative allocation of values such as respect, power, position. Since man is a social animal who cannot function in isolation because he is not self-sufficient, his natural instinct to survive therefore, motivate him to live a collective life. Hence, the art of mobilising men to live in a society and interact with one another for the purpose to realise their social nature as well as societal goals. Going by the definition given by these authors, politics is not a mere institution of governance but attempt to get power from where, how, and when. In other words, it permeates every aspect of human endeavours such as religion, education, and family.

Discussion

In Nigeria, some professing Christians are nominal, not really committed to Christ and that affects the way they practice politics. There is no difference between politicians who are Christians and those who are not when it comes to the issue of corruption. Once Christians step into politics, they forget their callings as Christians to be the representatives or ambassadors of Christ.

Prior to the institution of monarchy in Israel, the leadership was in the hands of prophets who had executive and as well as judicial powers. Later on, it became necessary to institute monarchy through Prophet Samuel based on the request of the children of Israel. It is worthy to note that the legitimacy of the institution of this monarchy was derived from God but Samuel was only used as an instrument. This system of government in Israel is an indication that politics started long ago. As earlier stated, human beings generally are political animals who are all politically minded. Joining politics as Christians is a good thing if the Christian can carry Christ along with him, but the Christians who are supposed to be the light and living epistle to the world have made the whole system corrupt instead of influencing the politics by applying God's moral standard as politicians to change the society in which we find ourselves. Through the application of God's moral and ethical standard into our politics, there will be honesty, integrity and transparency and these principles include:

Fear of God

As we all know, the fear of God and adherence to his commands are the foundation of values in religions especially Christian religion. Edet in Atoietal (2020) pointed out that, fearing God and adhering to his commands is the source of religious systems which in return serves as the basis of certain moral values. The important aspect of Christian religion is the inculcation of moral values into the adherents which regulate human actions and give meaning to life. Christian religion counseling has continued to serve as mechanism which reminds people of what is right and what is wrong, good and evil, just and vice. Most importantly, Christian religion counseling is one avenue in which Christian politician's morals can be enriched for the good of the individual and the society at large

(Abolari& Babalola, 2020). Stressing the importance of Christian religion counseling Gudu and Anjov (2023) opined that religion shapes the moral values and characters of people in the community which politicians are not left out because through Christian counseling, religious ethical or moral values such as accountability, contentment, servanthood, hard-work honesty, justice and impartiality can be re-orientated.

Austin, (2021) used the example of Daniel and encouraged Christian politicians to emulate the life of Daniel who because of his fear of God refused to compromise his faith but lived a consistent life from the beginning to the end. Okanlawon (2022) supporting Austin added that Daniel was never afraid to face any consequence of his action while carrying out his assignments to please God. He was consistent in his fear of God and maintained a good name and was above reproach (Daniel 1:20, 21; 5:11; 6:3, 5). He never allowed the pleasure in the king's palace to corrupt him because of his fear of God rather, he pursued excellence (6:4, 6:3, 6:10, 20). Through Christian religion counselling, our politicians can emulate the character of Daniel which was the source for his actions by allowing God to control their hearts. It is only when this is done that they can always acknowledge and reverence God and determine their core values based on the Bible. This will help them to make decisions that will glorify God and in return correct most of the ethical and moral dilemmas we face in this country.

Servant-Leader

Through Christian counseling, our politicians may be reminded of the principle of servant-leader which is the heart of Christian ethics and is focused on leadership. A leadership based on the Bible and example of Jesus is a servant that washed the feet of his followers. A perfect model of a servant-leader is Jesus himself who fostered the growth and well-being of his disciples. Our Christian politicians should follow this example of Jesus by becoming servants and leaders at the same time. Mark 10:41-45, Matthew 20:20-28, Luke 22:24-27, John 13:3-10 and Isaiah 49:3, 5-6 all echo the theme of servanthood.

Contentment:

The Bible in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 talked about godliness with contentment which is a great gain. Going by these verses of the Bible, Christians are to shun acts of greed which is one of the ethical problems in our society today. Through Christian religion counselling, our politicians can learn the act of contentment and shun greed. Majority of our politicians today want instant wealth and power at all cost. This pursuit can be an all-consuming obsession that leads to unethical or illegal behaviours called greed.

The place of Christian Religion counselling in good governance as noted by Ogbuechi (2017) cannot be over emphasised. She opines that Christian politician would undoubtedly have to choose between two unfavourably options: either carry out the tasks for which they were elected and enjoy the blessing of God and the gratitude of their constituents without enriching themselves, or grasp all the funds intended foe social development and enrich themselves at the expense of Gods' wrath, the peoples' curses, and a bad reputation. Christian religion counselling therefore, can bring about change of attitude among our politicians through counselling to equip them for the task ahead by helping them to avoid bribery and corruption and work toward the development of the nation when they assume political offices.

Accountability and integrity:

Gudu and Anjov (2023) asserted that accountability is one of the fundamental principles of human life and any organization that plays around with it will fail and any society that does not include it into its system of governance is doomed. In the same manner, any individual who does not adopt it as a way of life will never succeed. By implication, a politician may misuse the things entrusted to his care and those who elected him may lack the resources to question him but he is answerable to God whose eyes are constantly watching his thoughts, motivations, and actions. Several examples from the Bible shows that God is a God of accountability therefore, every man will be held accountable for his actions either here on earth or in the hereafter. It is however disheartening that politicians who claim to be Christians and are aware of this fact are constantly entangled in the web of corruption and forget this ethical value as followers of Christ.

Ogunewu and Adesegun (2011) used the life of Samuel who was a Prophet in Israel as a good

example of public accountability. He was a man who served God and the people of Israel throughout his entire life and challenged the people in a public speech to testify against him and his administration in terms of mismanagement or corrupt practices. But the people could not find anything against him (1Sam. 12:3-4). In like manner, God expects this type of accountability from our Christian politicians whose hearts are nerved with holy fervor, who are not easily moved but loyal to a sense of right and duty, whose moral integrity is firmed and who is willing to lay down every selfish interest and give all to serve the people.

Righteousness

Tutu (2017) maintained that as Christians, we are called by God to be "His righteous people" and to show forth that righteousness throughout the entire world (Psalm 4:1, 11:7, Luke 1:75, Philip 3:9). if Christian politicians emulate Christ and demonstrate the righteousness by directing non-Christian politicians the right way to do politics, many politicians will change for the better. This can be achieved through Christian religion counselling to enlighten Christian who are into politics to uphold the Christians' principles of righteousness and honesty to influence the nation positively by becoming the light and the salt of the society.

Transparency:

Transparency according to Jashri and Pepaj (2018) is the process of being open, straightforward and truthful. It means being open and making information public and a mechanism for promoting good governance. There is a need to counsel Christian political leaders on transparency because as Christians, we are called to be honest in whatever we do. With proper counseling, our political leaders will take proper decisions and make policies that will be based on Christian ethical standards. Lack of transparency has become a serious issue in the Christian and circular circles and has received significant attention recently seeking solution to this moral and ethical problem. Ephesians 5:8-9, 4:25 clearly states that as followers of Jesus, we have been taken out of darkness and brought into the light. Because of this amazing gift, we are therefore commanded to walk continually in the light. By implication, this means that since we have full assurance of the forgiveness of our sins in Christ, we are to live truthfully with one another. In the light of the above, Christian in politics can receive counseling on how to follow the example of Jesus who was transparent in his dealing with his disciples and act likewise with those that elected the into the office.

Adding to the above, Gudu and Anjov (2023) submitted that Apostle Paul also exhibited transparency because he never failed to admit his weaknesses while encouraging his son and disciple Timothy, he mentioned his past as a blasphemer and a persecutor who saw himself as a fellow servant of God who needed Christ's mercy the most (1 Tim. 1:13-16). Jesus and Apostle Paul are role models for transparency and worthy of emulation by Christian politicians in their practice of politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Christian religion by its nature connotes feelings of godliness, integrity, accountability, honesty, perseverance, goodness, rectitude, brotherly love, peace with God, and with others. This may be a powerful instrument for fostering honesty in our political leadership. Fostering the practice of Christian ethics can be done by creating awareness to re-orientate the conscience of our political leaders through Christian counseling during seminars, workshops, and publications to know that as Christians, we are called by God to be "His righteous people" and to show forth that righteousness throughout the entire world. Our politicians need to be guided on how to emulate Christ and demonstrate Christian ethical standards to change the political arena in the country for the better.

Political leaders through Christian counseling should be challenged to avoid the easy path of flowing with the world and develop a coherent Christian political perspective guided by Christian values and ethical standards that will help them take right decisions because when our Christians politicians fails to adopt these acceptable Christian moral standards such as contentment, righteousness, transparency, accountability, servanthood in politics, the result could be disastrous and the society at the disadvantage.

It is therefore recommended among others, that:

a) There should be constant Christian counseling for our politicians to remind them of the importance of Christian ethical standards in politics.

b) Politicians should also be made to understand the need for them to emulate the biblical principles of leadership as demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ.

c) The principle of integrity and the fear of God should be the standard of leadership for all political office holders.

d) Christians should adopt a different perspective on godliness in order to combat these issues rather than add to them. Christianity guarantees that its followers live a holy and godly life in addition to preparing them for an afterlife beyond this one.

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