

Democracy and Church in Nigeria Today: Implications for Good Governance

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The thrust of the paper shows that with the application of the tenets of Democracy, the Church in Nigeria has significant role to play especially in governance issues. The Church cannot be delinked from the state since they need each other for the peaceful co-existence of various groups in the society. Accordingly, Democracy and Church in Nigeria today are partners in progress and not strange bedfellows. Undoubtedly, room for improvement exists still as both are geared towards the social, spiritual, cultural, economic, scientific and technological development. Their ultimate goal is to equip the people with self-transforming knowledge which they will use to change their environment and execute whatever task that they are assigned. Consequently, using an expository investigative and analytic method, the paper challenges that the issues of good governance must be carried out continuously to ensure harmonious co-existence and attainment of a just and nobler society. The Church, as the harbinger of hope, must be at the frontline to fight every ugly behaviour against the principles of democratic governance.

Keywords: Democracy, Church, Good Governance, Consultation, Association

Introduction

Ever and ever again, questions are agog about whether democracy and church share anything in common in the quest of promoting good governance. These questions issue from myriads of standpoints which are premised on many assumptions. For instance, it is readily assumed in Nigeria today by not only the man/woman on the street but also by some very informed people that the church is not a democratic society. It is therefore not uncommon for one to hear or make such statements as “the Church is not democratic”, “the Church is hierarchical”, “you cannot get justice in the Church”, “the Church belongs to *Fada* (father)”, “Democracy does not exist in the Church”, “the Church cannot fight for justice since they have no machinery for it”, to mention but a few.

An examination of the issues of democracy and church carries such grave import that scholars, theologians, and canonists seem never tired of reflecting over their meaning and relevance to good governance, adherence to laws, respect of human rights, and observance of social justice to all humankind. Generally, thinkers have reflected on the tensions between the socialization of a democratic nation’s subjects and the evangelization of its citizens by the church. Theoretically, there appears to an agreement over the view that together they define possibilities of national and spiritual development as it is inconceivable that development can come about

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without the citizens of a receiving country being religious. How plausible is it to conceive of development where there is no system that guarantees the freedom, rights, and responsibilities of the citizens? In a developing nation like Nigeria, the challenge to foster strong national sentiments and over all sustainable development appear priceless.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to show that with the application of the tenets of democracy, the church in Nigeria has significant role to play especially in governance issues. The paper argues that the church cannot be delinked from the state since they need each other for the peaceful co-existence of various groups in the society. It is crucial for the government, the civil society, and stakeholders to appreciate churches, which strive to ensure that a just society by a just leadership prevails in order to enjoy the dividends of democracy. But let us first discuss the meaning of democracy.

Exploratory Framework on Democracy

Democracy is a concept that conjures a variety of meanings and connotations as expressed in totalitarian democracy, liberal democracy, populistic democracy, political democracy, and participatory democracy as represented by the 18th century political thinker, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Etymologically, the root of the concept is traceable to the Greek city states and a derivative of two Greek words-*demos* (people) and *kratia* (authority, rule, or power) (Nwaokugha & Anagwo, 2019, p. 191). The two Greek root words, when put together, translate as sovereignty belongs to the people or power belongs to the people. Hence, democracy is interpreted as the power of the people. The situation involves the entire population of free-born citizens participating directly in the government decisions of the city state. In opposition to autocracy, democracy stands for a process by which the will of all representing the will of the majority is pursued.

In the cradle of democracy (the Greek city states), every individual practically participated in decision making which could only have made possible by their small number. Democracy means literally rule by the people. Practically today, for communities of scale with populations in the millions, this can only be done by delegation or representations. This trend is not tenable in modern nation states due to high population and other complexities; hence, democracy has been representational. Accordingly, Abraham Lincoln defines it as “government of the people, by the people and for the people” (“Defining Democracy”, 2022). This is one out of many definitions by different authors. The concept of “democracy” has been so bastardized in both industrialized as well as in less industrialized societies and yet pursued with some madness that it is sometimes seen as “*democracy*”, “madness” of the people of different intellectual disposition, ideological learnings and global bloc identification that the concept is described as “*democrises*” (Eboh, 2003, p. 63). As a form of government, democracy has been defined in terms of: (1) sources of authority for government, (2) purposes served by government, and (3) procedures for consulting government. Some of the basic features that make democracy the best form of government include: free and fair elections, majority rule and the protection of rights of the minority, freedom of the press, separation of powers, and independent of the judiciary (Elechi, 2015, pp. 263-266). All these coupled with transparency and accountability allow for development.

Basic Elements of a Democracy

Certain institutional requirements built into the system distinguish democratic regimes from others. Among these elements are the principles of consultation, freedom of expression of opinion and association, rule of law, public accountability, human equality, and representation. Let us briefly discuss them.

Principle of Consultation

Consultation is critical to such fundamental moral principles as consideration of interest and respect for persons, both of which are central to democracy. In the absence of consultation on major issues touching the citizens directly or indirectly, the system could be termed totalitarianism. Political association these days cannot warrant the original meaning of the concepts, hence, consultations have to be made either through elected representatives or referenda (Elechi, 2015, p. 263).

Freedom of Expression of Opinion and Association

This is logically necessary for democracy in the sense that lack of provision for it renders meaningless the principles of consultation (Adewole, 1995, p. 50). With such provision groups are afforded the opportunity to articulate and state their claims. It is through the principle that minority interests can be protected and moral principle of liberty affected. This is the principle that guarantees that true and objective opinions are gleaned from those to be consulted and the possibility of opposition groups whose critical positions serve as effective check for the abuse of power. M. P. Eboh puts freedom in a democracy in the right perspective when she writes that freedom in a democracy is not-do-as-you-like, implying that democracy demands from citizens the highest display of a sense of moral rationality in citizen's daily conduct and general activities so that citizens' freedoms do not turn out to be sources of trouble to citizens and their state (Eboh, 2001, p. 15).

Rule of Law

This makes presumption that those in authority who must exercise should do so in order to conform to constitutional provision and laws governing interpersonal relationships. Where rule of law is observed in the breach, all other conditions of democracy will be more than formal procedures on which government can always ride roughshod. The law is higher than any given individual and should apply equally to all. The law is the instrument which embodies the will and command of the people. The law is indeed the master, and indispensable organizer by which the people govern themselves. To have no ruler is possible but, to have no law is chaos and anarchy. Thus the law is a foremost instrument of ruling and especially of democratic ruling. Law is the ordinance of reason made by competent authority for the common good or the good of all: The good of all is the main motive of men coming together in the polity and law-giving and obeying ensures that all work and act to achieve and promote the common good. If there is no law or if laws are flouted or weakly enforced, there is chaos. Chaos or lawlessness can result in injustice, corruption, and eventually in self-destruction of society.

Public Accountability

This is the process through which a government can be taken to task. This is closely related to honesty and transparency. To ensure trust and transparency, accountability is the watchword. As accountability is to the people, this principle enables them to decide whether a government has distinguished itself as to merit a return at the next election. This is where the sovereignty of the people is evoked. Elections therefore serve as moments of accountability (Elechi, 2015, p. 264).

Human Equality

This is the belief in the political equality of all before the law, in dignity of persons, in voting rights, in rights to opportunity. These assumptions lead people to have certain expectations and certain ways of doing things which eventually mark out democracy as not just who rules and for whom, but more especially how. The how of the ruling is the question.

Representation

Democracy means literally rule by the people. Practically today, for communities of scale with populations in the millions, this can only be done by delegation or representations. People want to rule themselves because they cannot entrust ruling to one man for fear that he turns out to be a tyrant or dictator. They cannot entrust it to a few people for fear of oligarchy who might be tempted into catering for the interests of the few to the detriment of the many. In the all-important matter of power in pursuit of the common good, they want to entrust none but themselves, and the most realistic way to do it is to select people's representatives by way of voting and elections. Representation makes regular elections necessary in democracy in order to enable the people to renew or withdraw their mandate (Nwaokugha & Anagwo, 2019, p. 192).

Salient Considerations on the Church

From the earliest times, those who have gathered in the name of the Lord are designated as the church. The English word "Church" is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* is a compound of two segments: "*ek*", a preposition meaning "out" or "out of", and a verb *kalein*, meaning "to call". As a composite, *ekklesia* means "to call out". The followers of Christ are thus "those who are called out". This was a familiar idea for Jesus' earliest followers. For them, and for the many who would come after them, Jesus said: "I will build my church (*ekklesia*)". Accordingly, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* refers to "Church" as "all Christians regarded as a group" (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: New International Edition*, 1995, p. 309). This implies that all must have a similar faith or belief that cements or bonds them not only during worship but in their lifestyles as well. The faith guides their daily lives and behaviours with Jesus Christ's teaching.

Just as the media form the 4th estate, after the three arms of the government, namely, the executive, legislature, and the judiciary, in the same way, the church is the 5th estate tasked with keeping in check the excesses of the governance and leadership in place. This is because she is an institution of high moral standing. The churches are to be prophets of our time. The word prophet is derived from the Greek word "*prophetes*" meaning "One who speaks before others". In the Greek understanding, the word almost always connotes "one who communicates divine revelation". He/she foretells, announces, and proclaims the word inspired by God. It is one who speaks the mind of God. Like the functionality of the Bible (2 Tim 3:16), the prophet rebukes, corrects, reprimands, pronounces, praises, and so on, as he is inspired to prophecy. Someone once described a biblical prophet as "one who comforted the disturbed and disturbed the comfortable". Churches ought to be prophets of this generation, even in the political space. Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and a host of other prophets denounced kings and other nations for their irreligion and corruption. Prophet Nathan accosted King David with Divine verdict when he slept with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. At the end, David prayed and composed the famous Penitential Psalm 51. Elijah went to King Ahab to deliver the Divine package of wrath that would befall him for unlawfully usurping the land of Naboth. Whenever Israelites of old transgressed, prophets were sent to speak the mind of God accordingly. The exodus-experience is ever-there to affirm this position (Exod 15:22-27, 16:1-36). Paul admonished Timothy saying: "preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season: correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim 3:2). They should have proactive/prophetic voice against a widespread dictatorial leaders, nepotism, tribalism, human rights abuse, bribery, and corruption.

Churches too are gatekeepers for playing a watchdog role towards shaping the socio-political destinies of its nations. By watchman/woman (otherwise called stewards) we mean a person whose duty was to stand on the

tower on the walls or at the gates of the city. He patrolled the streets, and was required to call out the hours of the night (2 Sam 18:14-27; Songs of Songs 4:7; Isaiah 21:11-12). This is by ensuring that citizens are governed in a moral, ethical, and a just manner. The church is the “salt of the earth and light of the world” (Matt 5:13-14).

The Role of the Church Towards Good Governance in Nigeria

By good governance, we mean a leadership that allows different opinions and fair and equal treatment of citizens without any form of segregation based on age, gender, status, and religious affiliation. It is a governance that regards justice as the highest virtue and ensures peace, progress, and stability of a society. This is what the churches have been aiming at when engaging themselves in political issues that have implications to the lives and welfare of a country’s citizenry. Unfortunately, Nigerian politics has never been on an even and regular surface. Her democracy has been that of abuse of human rights, injustice, recklessness of the executive, abuse of power and corruption everywhere. Previous elections in the country have witnessed killings, dishonesty, bribery, corruption, and many other irregularities. The same people one finds in the various traditional religion, mosques, and churches as members are the same who engage in politics. There seems to be a big gap between what is preached by the church and practical political life outside these church premises. Church is generally and wrongly seen as having no relevance to practical life. It is a spiritual exercise that is linked to God alone: “Give back to God what belongs to Him and to Caesar what belongs to him” (Matt 22:21). If this perspective were to be right of the Church, then the Church would have no role in community building and will not make any contribution in the democratic landscape. The contradiction between principle and application, between church and democracy can be regarded as false alarm because the church influences life practically in the community.

Accordingly, the church can assist the faithful to work better and can create advances for sustainable and viable economic growth or development either now or in the future. Church encourages transparency, good governance, stability and fight against graft and corruption. Church in mission countries is key to future economic growth and lasting democracy leading greater political stability and improved standard of living. The benefits of church go well beyond the individual and ensure an impact in the society as a whole. Here, we want to x-ray some of the functions of the church in the pursuit of good governance.

Active Participation and National Unity

A pluralistic nation like Nigeria is an aggregate of divergent cultures, language barriers, and above all, multiple religious groups. In this multi-religious outlook, some people have been so carried away in the struggle to uphold their ethnic and cultural differences which exist between groups and individuals but are in themselves sources of disunity and may become serious threats to coherent and co-operative democratic process. And this has been witnessed in the Nigerian situation which impels groups and individuals to fall back upon primordial or ethnic identities that have tended to arise when one group believes it is subjected to unfair treatment, unequal opportunities, or some other form of under-privilege. The strength of these primordial loyalties has been demonstrated in the country, which goes to testify the difficulty of eradicating such sources of discord or disunity and of creating strong national sense of attachment. Indeed, it is an acute malady, which plagues not only Nigeria, but also the continent of Africa as a whole. Really the differences between groups within a single nation are so enormous and so basic that recent policies of searching national integration, and

the attempt to create a common national culture and a shared belonging identity, have been questioned and the alternative approach of looking for functional integration in which groups are bound together by common interest and consensus has been visualized as or likely to prove valid.

Notwithstanding the fact that a lot of strategies and policies have been adopted towards good governance, but if the full import of active participation, it will present a better prospect for attaining national unity, political stability, egalitarianism and preventing conflict situations. The justification for instance is the fact that active participation in politics naturally produces in us the consciousness of the citizens. It helps to bring out the many-sided aspects of the nation, with the rich inexhaustible content of his life, and thus manifests the rich possibilities among the citizenry. It elevates our minds above the things of this earth and of self. It broadens our sense of unity with the sympathy for our fellow members of the body of Christ, a human family feeling for all mankind. It will be similar to the conscientisation in education which Paulo Freire (1972), the erstwhile Brazilian educator advocated in his process of growing in awareness. For him, it implies a commitment to “critical insertion into history” in order to create history (Anagwo, 2009, pp. 40-45). Unarguably, the political role of active participation here is to achieve national unity.

Political Participation and Democracy

With the successful passing into law the Amended Electoral Bill signed by President Muhammad Buhari on 25th February, 2022 (The Cable, 2022), Nigerian democracy is coming of age to be reckoned with among the comity of nations. The country has demonstrated that power rests with the people and not with the leaders. The executive authority is ultimately accountable for all its decisions and actions through their elected representatives at the federal, state and local government levels. With the experience of the amendment of the electoral bill and the working of democracy, the natural tendency of the vast majority of Nigerian citizens appears to be the feeling that with the bill saga over and the preparations of the election of the new government, come 2023, they would manage the affairs for them. The task includes the responsibility of all to stand with and promote human rights, economic, social development, and environmental concerns. It calls for special concern to those in need of identification with them.

While linking what the church teaches, the process of political participation, our attention is to be drawn to a new concept that hitherto seems to be very much neglected. This is a rather new understanding advocated by the church on patriotism whereby the citizens participate effectively in the act of governance and the affairs of the society or community in which they find themselves. This even compels the believing community to become aware, get involved, and exert influence on political affairs with implications for economic and environmental issues. The relational wholeness understanding of participation in the affairs of the nation as taking part in electoral processes, paying of taxes, participating in communal work, etc., provides the identity and work plan for the faithful to travel along the way of conversion, communion, and solidarity with everybody. However, democracy does not mean that any of its citizens can be contented to let the other people to think for them or shoulder their social and political responsibilities and duties for them. People should understand that in a real democracy, the responsibility of doing the thinking lies on each individual. As a citizen, one must make his/her own contribution to the best of his/her ability and to the service of the nation.

No nation with a goal for democracy can afford to have as her citizens passive, dormant, indifferent, ignorant, and idle subjects. No wonder, the under-current working principle for an average American is “Think not what America can do for you, but what you can do for America”. The members of the democratic society

must be citizens and the ideal of citizenship can only be achieved if the individual is armed with the requisite knowledge of the nature and functions of the state working of the democratic machinery. Effective political participation and the possibility of achieving a democratic nation imply that everybody must participate in projects of ensuring that good governance is enthroned and maintained. It is not an individual affair. It is a collective responsibility thrown upon the members of the church to ensure that social regeneration is achieved in the society.

Democracy and Leadership Training

Leadership training is very important as we navigate on how democracy can facilitate political development. The church should collaborate with the government to endeavour that the electorate are given proper education about their civic rights. Leaders should imbibe good moral judgement so that while in the office they will act accordingly. Public office holders should be made to give account of their performance after leaving office and anyone found wanting should be made to face the full force of the law. Admittedly, any community without effective leader is doomed. There must be sustained attention to provide manpower for leadership positions. Granted that formal schools continue to provide leaders for the society, the church can still collaborate in the spirit of active participation of the faithful to complement the effort by advancing the spiritual dimension of leadership especially by providing leadership training centres. Such leadership training will play positive role in the historic task of rebuilding and rebranding Nigeria. Through the authentic spirit of active participation those who have been educated and influenced by negative perception about leadership will be exposed to rediscover the authentic meaning.

Consequently, the writer has argued in this paper that the way the church can promote good governance has the responsibility of achieving national unity, political participation, democracy and leadership training which are essential components needed for political development of any nation. There is no gainsaying the fact that other specific methods are indispensable in the mobilization of the people to participate in political development. These methods include the effective use of audience participation, public media, dance-drama, songs, role-playing, discussion, study circles, workshops, symposia, and colloquia. Active participation is a vital aspect of political development. Thus, it can enhance popular participation by providing continuous information in explicit terms through various ways and methods. Through these means practical information on communal living, political participation, and leadership training can be imparted. Conscientisation of the societal values can help them to have positive image on how to control their environment. Accordingly, Emmanuel C. Anagwo avers that active participation in politics is the best defence against the evils manipulating contemporary society. Politics is the best place to facilitate the transformation of the society, be it secular or religious. It is the responsibility of the church and the people to see that the government performs its duties and that the right persons are put in office and constantly reminded of their duties. It is only through this way that the social conditions will be improved upon, that the community will enjoy healthy lives, there will be job opportunities, unnecessary wars and conflicts will be resolved and eradicated, and so many other vices will be checkmated (Anagwo, 2016, pp. 10-11). Above all, churches must continue to collaborate with the government at various levels, civil societies, individuals, and other groups that advocate for the truth, justice, and believe in the well-being of the society. As church leaders, the clergy should not pride themselves in their self-effort; instead, they should understand that other stakeholders are needed in order to have maximum success.

Implications for Good Governance

Democracy was originally applied to good governance of a state. But in relation to the church as the 5th estate in governance, she is tasked with keeping in check the excesses of the governance and leadership in place, by virtue of being an institution of high moral standing. Admittedly, the implications for the 21st Christianity are the alternative means of reversing the ugly trend of apathy to democratic tenets in Nigeria which can never be over-emphasized. The need for the church is to heal the nation from political and spiritual sickness. Accordingly, the church should operate peaceful co-existence which should be open and flexible system that incorporates everybody irrespective of the geographical, language, and cultural orientations. This is predicated on the role of the church to resolve conflicts and enhance peace as an ongoing process of healing broken hearts and ensuring that justice prevails. It must be by pointing out at governance issues that affect the daily living of citizens whether or not that they compromise peace. Again, those who participate in the governance of the society must treat others as fellow compatriots in the journey of faith. As such, those who lead in the church and the society must always have interest and values of the people at heart.

Besides, self-criticism should be explored by all stakeholders who are at the helms of the affairs of the society like the government and the church leaders. Like the prophets of social justice (Amos and Isaiah), government, voluntary agencies, and church leaders must have concrete programmes for political development. This sort of arrangement no doubt will provide the necessary link that the people ought to reap the dividends of democracy of practical action. They need “a listening Church” (Uzukwu, 1996) as well as “a prophetic Church” (Ehusani, 1996a) that identifies with his people. This is in tandem with the ongoing processes of preparation towards the Synod on Synodality, with the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”, which was solemnly opened by Pope Francis on 9th to 10th October 2021 in Rome. In her wisdom, the Synod is a two-year exercise of renewal and animation in the Church which will be concluded with the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. Like a listening church advocated by Uzukwu, consultations with and among different segments of people within and even outside the church are intended to include as many groups and classes of people in the decision-making processes of the church. As the Synod is to ensure that the views of the “marginalized” are properly represented within the synodal dialogue, this allows the church to better listen to different segments of the faithful and incorporate their perspective and experience in its mission. Accordingly, Uzukwu’s treatise is a new way of being church which is more engaging and more inclusive for all the faithful as well as to offer more meaningful ways of listening and deciphering contemporary realities; or better still, reading and interpreting the signs of the time.

Furthermore, the powerless should be empowered to seek for assistance when there is need. This is the highpoint of the New Evangelization where traditional education should be elevated to a higher education: “that of education for people’s empowerment, education in fundamental human rights, and the organization of basic communities to facilitate mass mobilization for social action” (Ehusani, 1996b, p. 7). The sinful world that violates God’s expectation and principles has led to various problems that bring confrontations between leaders and their subjects. The dictatorial leadership in Nigeria indicates selfishness and the absence of God’s virtuous gifts. Therefore, churches that believe genuinely in democracy which is guided by justice cannot be quiescent in contexts that violate it. Activities should particularly focus on developing independent and critical judgement and enhancing the abilities needed by every person in order to adequately face the challenges affecting living

and working conditions in the management of socio-political affairs at all levels of the decision-making process and the governance level.

No doubt, the culture of the rule of law, peace, and tolerance among the 450 ethnic groups in the country should be integrated within all levels of our educational system. According to Emeka Anyaoku,

We must return to basics by re-modelling our schools' curricula and encouraging our teachers to teach civic and the virtues of service to the community and country, in our primary and secondary schools; for it is only at this level of education that appropriate values can be effectively inculcated in the young thereby inuring them against inclination to corruption in later life. (Anyaoku, 2012, p. 2)

Massive campaign and raising awareness about the risk of not conforming to the rule of law should be clear and definite. At each point, defaulters should be properly punished to serve as a deterrent to others. In this way, the anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as well as other traditional institutions (like the local vigilante and the recent orchestrated call for state policing by some state governments) should be allowed to do their work properly.

Needless to reiterate that government must work to improve the quality of the standard of living of the citizens by empowering the citizens economically. With all the human and natural resources in Nigeria, all the six geo-political zones in the country must develop their resources for the development of the country. The era of depending on oil as the only source of economy has caused more harm to us than good. It has exacerbated the greediness in our leaders which has impoverished the nation. This therefore is the leeway to ensure that our dream of joining among the industrialized nations by the government propaganda machinery is realized. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia did that; we can do the same if we work towards reviving our battered economy by exploring other natural and human resources, thus, giving facelift to the conditions of our people.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to discuss what democracy and church assume as their basic tenets in order to evolve good governance. We highlighted how the agencies of democracy and the church may lead to good governance through the following variables: active participation, transparency, rule of law, accountability, human equality, and representation. These variables can be inculcated through the medium of the church and if properly applied can lead to good governance. Democracy and church in Nigeria today are partners in progress and not strange bedfellows. Although there is still room for improvement, both are geared towards the social, spiritual, cultural, economic, scientific, and technological development. Both are in the process of discovering and living truth as well as expanding one's vision of life and the world. Their purpose is to equip the people with self-transforming knowledge which they will use to change their environment and execute whatever task that they are assigned. In this way, the issues of good governance must be carried out continuously to ensure harmonious co-existence and attainment of a just and nobler society. The church, as the harbinger of hope, must be at the frontline to fight every ugly behaviour against the principles of democratic governance.

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