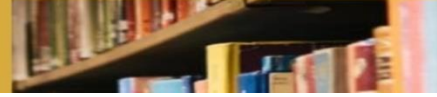


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.ASSESSING THE NEED FOR CHRISTIANS' PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Evang. (Dr/Amb) Venunye Kwaku AHAMAKAH

<https://mature.ictsp.org/>

ahamakahv@gmail.com: +233(0)556598714

Abstract

This study explores the need for Christians participation in politics. It also explores how individuals conceptualize their engagement in politics, the trends of politics among secular individuals and Christians in Africa. The study will to a large extent explore the relevant views that each group (secular individuals and Christians) carry about their active participation in contemporary politics and the views of the bible on such a sensitive topic. Christians acknowledged that there are lapses in handling morality issue such as corruption, favoritism and injustice, among others which the biblical spells and which need to be strengthened in the political space with all consciousness. However, some section of Christians and secular individuals as well posit that the level of impunity in contemporary politics in Africa as alleged and sometimes obviously displayed by players in this space, is unhealthy for anyone who is heaven conscious to actively delve into politics irrespective of their objective(s). Some section of Christians equally indicate things central to their faith and which will help them participate in politics. The researcher seeks to address the question: should Christians participate in politics? What must they do to change the history of politics in Africa? Is it possible to practice morality in politics in Africa? He will use interview on both social media and in person to solicit the views of people by sampling participants. The paper concludes with the implications for contemporary political conflicts and tensions to christians and some recommendations of the writer.

Introduction

Christians' engagement in active politics has raised concerns over the years and it has degenerated into argument among secular scholars, liberal Christians as well as conservative Christians. Whereas secular scholars and liberal Christians believe that whether one is into active politics or not, we are all politicians, other school of thought believe that Christians must not engage in party politics with respect to the trend of politics in Africa which has the tendency of soiling our image before God and thereby wrecking our walk and relationship with Him. This study seeks to find out what Christians must do or if there is the need for their involvement in party politics. It will also address what Christians can do to change the face of African politics. The study is narrowed to African politics.

According to Aguwa, (1993) as referenced by Baba D.E, (2022) noted:

the missionaries on the other hand detested and denounced such inhuman tendencies and thus got the support of the people through the exercise of an opposite policy based on kindness, patience, sympathy and friendliness. He further indicated that the mutual trust that grew between the missionaries and the political dwarfed the relationship between the missionaries and the political administrations. Another source of conflict between the missionaries and the political administrators was on the issue of the traditional culture and its practices of the people.

This study is relevant as it will clear confusions among Christians and secular scholars on the need for Christians to participate in the active partisan politics.

Literature Review

Boswell C. (2020), explains that 'we might start by defining politics as a process of competitive claims-making by rival parties, with the aim of mobilising support to put these programmes into action.' It further indicated that beyond this definition, it's useful to assess what the competition is about and the way in which it unfolds. Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines Politics as 'the activities of the government, members of law-making organizations, or people who try to influence the way a country is governed.' This definition accentuates the purpose for which Christians may want to delve into politics so as to have influence on decisions that are made on the citizenry from economic to moral tentacles. Politics, came to play in our environment to serve a purpose.

Boswell C. (2020), indicated that 'the classic answers to the question of what politics is about, is that politics is about who gets what, when and how. On this view, politics is essentially about settling contestation over the distribution of material goods.' Boswell, (2020), also explained that 'this may have been a fair characterisation of politics in the post-World War II era – an era that saw the rolling out of progressive taxation and welfare provision.' This means that politics encapsulates the welfare of the populace which is addressed by the distribution and provisions of goods and other social amenities.

However, according to Arendt (2005 cited in an article by The Open University), 'Politics does not have an 'essence' – it does not have an intrinsic nature, or an indispensable element

according to which we can definitively, and in all circumstances, identify something as political. Thus, there are no quintessentially political acts, subjects or places.’

These assertions by Arendt seem to suggest that anything can happen as far as politics is concerned and that threatens the objectives of Christians in partaking in politics. Christianity on the other hand, is defined as a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ for the salvation of His followers. Some section of Christians argue that since their mentor and father, Jesus did not engage in party politics, His followers also must not engage in such whereas others also share varying opinion.

Why Christians Should Delve into Politics

Okullu, (2003, cited Baba D. E, 2022) simply stated, ‘Politics and religion are inseparable. To suggest that politics should be left to the politicians and religion to the clergy, is a terrible intellectual arrogance.’ This implies that leaving the destiny of the country and the resources into the hands of the political class alone will be devastating. Hence the clergy or Christians in general must have their voices heard. Okullu, (2003), added:

this tends to suggest that through some mysterious processes, some politicians become specially qualified as to be the only ones to pronounce on political issues. All Christians are political, whether they realise it or not. But especially when they don’t realise it.

Jon, K. (2010), established that Christians must be involved in politics because they believe in a God who cares about His creation, as well as how we manage it. He indicated that:

the Bible is hugely political – in that it is about how God wants people to behave and act towards him, and towards each other. This involves economics and law because these are tools that need to be used to build justice. So often it is injustice which dominates God’s world and this grieves Him.

This, according to him means Christians can become an integral part of justice administration as God will position them as tools in government for such an important assignment.

L’ee D.R, et.al (2012), in their research, mentioned that:

Christians are inclined to denigrate those on the other side of the political spectrum; and each side is convinced that the other side is treated more leniently than their own side in the media, and by other third parties that try to give an objective account of matters under dispute.

They further question how Christians on the two sides of the political divide handle their divergences between their position in politics and the decrees of their faith or belief? This to him is a great concern since it might be a conflicting stance for a Christian to choose between political values and religious faith. They explained:

‘some, no doubt, have felt pressure to moderate their positions to achieve greater congruency with traditional Christian teachings. Others may have narrowed their reference group and, for those whose faith is highly central to their personal identity, engaged in persuasion.’

The Bible has warned that ‘when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan’ (Proverbs 29:2). For this reason, the church must not relent or fold her hands and stand aloof. She must participate and influence the politics of the day. The assumption that politics is a dirty game purely erroneous. Politics is not dirty; it is the politicians (not all of them) who make it dirty. And if politics is dirty, Jesus Christ has called the church or the Christians to bring sanity and light into where there is darkness.

Closson, D. (2015). Posits the following as some of his reasons for Christians to engage in Politics:

The Christian worldview speaks to all areas of life.

A frequently raised objection against Christian engagement with politics is that anything besides explicit preaching and teaching of the Bible is a distraction from the mission of the church. However, this is a limited understanding of the kingdom of God and contrary to examples in Scripture. The Christian worldview provides a comprehensive understanding of reality. It speaks to all areas of life, including political engagement. In fact, the Bible speaks about civil government and provides examples of faithful engagement. In the Old Testament, Joseph and Daniel served in civil government, exerting influence to further the flourishing of their nations. In the New Testament, Jesus engaged in holistic ministry, caring for the spiritual and physical needs of people. Feeding the hungry and healing diseases were an outworking and extension of the reconciliatory message of the gospel. Paul also advocates this approach: ‘As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone’ (Galatians 6:10). ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them’ (Ephesians 2:10).

According to him, the good things Christians do should encompass their involvement in legitimate political affairs because it is very pertinent. Per his opinion, every decision the decisions government of any country makes directly affects its people. Hence, Christians should include a political theology that recognizes every area life of believers.

Politics is unavoidable.

As ‘sojourners and exiles’ (1 Peter 2:11), it can be tempting for Christians to adopt a mindset that earthly governing systems are inconsequential to the task of furthering the gospel. But ask a pastor in a church that is now growing or a missionary attempting to engage in politics if politics is inconsequential. Religious liberty, passports and visas are not unnecessary luxuries. Because politics has real-world implications for Christian evangelism, missions and preaching the gospel, Christians ought to engage the political process by leveraging their rightful authority, advocating for laws and policies that contribute to human flourishing.

This implies that for the sake of what we stand to do and the support we invariably need from society, Christians cannot detach themselves from politics since there are implications because most decisions are made politically and resources that might help our ministry could as well be left in the hands of political few. Brown, M. (2022) indicated that there has been a political polarization that developed into an impending force which it seems challenging to

escape. She further indicated that God uses politics for a greater purpose as He works through political leaders to intercede in the political sphere to promote Christian principles.

Baba, D.E (2022 cited Danladi, 2009), posits:

the church is expected to assist members of the church to identify their gifts of leadership. Such people should be encouraged to go into politics to enable them use their gifts to serve people especially those that are marginalized and oppressed. The main aim of having Christians get involved in politics is not just for them to represent the church in the government, but more importantly to address the issues of injustices, corruption and bribery in the country.

He further urges that Christian politicians should to realize the need to uphold Biblical values as the ultimate above all other values and that values that go against the Bible must be rejected. Baba (2022), indicated that our Christian values must be transformed by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us. This should only be achieved through Bible Studies for politicians who are Christians and to also preach on themes related to values and how they affect our attitudes and behaviour in the political and religious space.

Gehman, (2008). Mentioned that:

if the church is to be properly and competently active in politics, then, she must have a proper and definite understanding of power in its various forms and dimensions, whether personal, domestic, social and political. She must harbor no power phobia, no power mania, and no power intoxication. She must realize that the reality of power is inescapable.

This means awareness of what Christians want to venture into with its implication can cushion them against manipulation. Anike, U. (2023), consolidates this by stressing what Mordecai said in Esther 4:14, Mordecai told Esther: 'For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'. Danladi, (2009), states that 'it is evident that when we get involved as a church into politics, we would gain experience in governance, provide security, ensured moral standard of living, and bring back human dignity and national development.'

Anike, U. (2023), consolidates Danladi's position that as we pray in Church and as Christians, we must also encourage Christians to participate in politics or we stop complaining of bad leadership. This is because if we are not involved, we cannot cause a change that society needs.

Keller, T. (2018) on the other hand, indicates that:

there are two main reasons why Christians should not equate their faith with their politics. First, it can give those who might be considering Christianity the false impression that following Jesus requires agreeing with everything that a political party stands for. Second, many political issues are not matters that the Bible speaks clearly about and therefore, Christians can legitimately disagree on how to address them.

By this assertion, Keller offers the platform for Christians to make informed decision on whether to join the political race based on their conviction of what Christianity should be. Machiavelli, N. (nd.) also reasons that:

Politics is the most precarious game. It can never be played in a decent and orderly manner. This practice is gradually crippling the Christian faith where men and women of God as well as the general Christian body have to be politically connected to be able to survive in ministry, business or even get employment. The younger generation are gradually being fed with this canker and it is sweeping them off their commitment to God as followers of Christ.

Some scholars share a different view as Danladi (2009), believes that ‘God fearing Christians can be effective in politics and make a difference and still and come out.’ He also added that for Christians to be effective, and change the political history of Africa, then:

- a.) a Christian politician must have a good relationship with God,
- b.) a Christian politician must have a meaningful relationship with God,
- c.) a Christian politician must have a close relationship with God.

To complement the above points, Christian politician must remember that to have a good relationship with God, the foundation is the ‘word’ because even Jesus Christ, our Lord and master used the word to defeat Satan when He was tempted. Hence constant reading and meditation will draw them closer and make them staunch in their faith. When these measures are observed, Christians in politics can change the political history in Africa and instill morality in the political environment.

Methodology

The researcher has used the qualitative research approach. He has used interview both in person and on social media platform for his data collection.

The interview has been conducted using random sampling. The sample population includes people of different backgrounds (social, political, economic, and educational) with focus on opinions on Christians participation in governance and politics. Questions were evenly distributed to both males and females as well. I have chosen this sample population to be able to have people who are informed about the topic under discussion. I have allowed participants to use any medium of expression (language- both local and English) to facilitate smooth communication. This aided me have varying revelations in my research as their backgrounds influence their experience about Christians participation in politics.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The table below shows the data of responses from interviewees.

Fig.0.1

RESPONSES	YES	(%)	NO	(%)	TOTAL NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	(%)
SCORES IN FIGURES AND PERCENTAGES	45	60%	30	40%	75	100%

Discussions

From the distribution above, it is clear that majority of the respondents made up of both Christians and non-Christians, have the highest percentage of 33.8% with their affirmation that Christians should engage in active politics whereas 22.5% are of the view that there is no need for Christians to delve into partisan politics.

The respondents who are of the view that Christians should delve into active partisan politics share the views of some of the scholars referenced above. Their position is that Christians need to be actively involved in politics to correct the erroneous impressions that are being peddled that there is no morality in politics. They strongly believe that Christians who are deeply rooted the teachings of their Lord Jesus Christ can be truthful and loyal in service and consequently curb if not erase corruption that has become a norm in our party politics. These opinions are loud and apt enough.

These can only materialize if those who wish to change the game of politics wish to change the game of politics are given the enabling environment. We can point at few politicians such as Nelson Mandela of South Africa and John Evans Atta- Mills of Ghana who were deeply rooted in their faith and even as they have ascended the highest office of their lands, they led impeccable lives as Presidents.

On the other hand, the respondents who share the view that Christians should not engage in active politics think that politics will corrupt the moral foundations of participants and they will lose their salvation. Some of these respondents have indicated that in an already polluted political atmosphere of ours, it will be difficult if not impossible for anyone to claim to be a game changer. Machiavelli, N. (nd.), said 'religion cannot influence politics and the church cannot control the state. In fact, the sovereign state enjoys absolute power over all individuals and institutions. As such, the church is subordinate to the state.' He has dichotomized religion from politics. To him, politics and religion cannot coexist if morality must be kept unadulterated. Machiavelli intimated that:

the state is the highest form of social organisation and the most necessary of all institutions. It stands on a wholly different footing and must therefore be judged by different standards. He said politics is an independent activity with its own principles and laws. State is non-religious and secular. It has its own rules of conduct to follow. This ideology, though logical, is utterly unhealthy though for christians participation in politics.

The respondents have alluded to viral videos on the internet where innocent people have been subjected to brutalities and people who speak the truth and make constructive criticisms are intimidated. In their response to my interview, a number of the participants cited the violence coupled with blood shed, burning of ballot papers among others that characterized the just ended presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana in 2020 and Nigeria in 2023 respectively. Inasmuch as the researcher with both sides of the argument, I equally believe that the political environment in Africa is not really safe for Christians to practice partisan politics.

Recommendations

Based on the outcome of my research, I recommend the following as measures to be considered.

1. Christians who engage in politics must at all times be firm in their decision and position. This is because along the line there will be pressure to have them succumb to popular decisions which might corrupt them if they do.
2. They should confidently name and shame those who put undue pressure on them. It is not always that silence is golden. When one is quiet under pressure, there is the tendency of compromise one day. Hence there is the need to speak.
- 3 Christians should at all times venture into politics with the heart of making something right and not as an opportunity to enrich oneself.
4. Christians in politics should disassociate themselves where they feel their faith is under a threat
5. The researcher should use questionnaires too to complement the interview and also allow respondent to give much explanations than he allowed.

Conclusion

Christians must see themselves as a recipe of change in politics to be able to maintain morality in African Politics. As the it is in Mat. 5:14-16 'you are the light of the world...'. It is obvious that even though Christians can venture into active partisan politics, there are threats to maintaining what they stand for in Christ. Those who may not have the courage to do active politics are equally encouraged per the outcome of the interview to also contribute to national development and should not be totally silent whereas those whose conscience cannot allow them to have anything to do with politics can equally pray for God to change the heart of those who feel politics is without morality and do ungodly things. There should also be unity among Christians to be able to rise in one voice against those who peddle evil in politics. we should also not create that sense of separation from the political arena in our children and younger ones in the society.

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Notes on Contributor

Venunye Kwaku Ahamakah holds honorary Doctoral/Ambassadorial fellowship and he is a Fellow Certified Christian Scholar (FCCS). He is the president in Council, ICTSP, Ghana Chapter and Global PRO, President, Prince of Peace Counselling Center (online Platform). He is a Senior High School teacher in Ghana. He has taught in a number of schools and provided Counselling services. He was formerly the Project Director at EPC CDC Dzalele, a former District Clerk at EPCG, Taviefe, a church choir zonal vice president and a former school-based Guidance and Counselling coordinator, etc. you can contact him on **WhatsApp:** +233(0)230274599 or **Phone:** +233 (0)556598714.

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