

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Christian Involvement in Politics: A Panacea for Moral Decadence Among Contemporary Politicians

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Abstract

In this contemporary age, Christian no longer see politics as unchristian and dirty game compare to how it was perceived before. The advent of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and its blocs, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Bible Society of Nigeria and Organization of Africa Instituted Churches has brought a new appreciation of Politics and government. Also in the recent years “one of the Pentecostal leaders, Rev. Chris Okotie” ran for presidency. Since then, the radical distinction between Christian body and state no longer stands. Christians are now seen as an important and necessary ingredient of the society that must be actively involved in the political activities in order to maintain its relevance as the light of the world. The challenges of moral decadence among the politicians should not be seen as the problem to some people; rather, it should be seen as the collective responsibility of every Christian. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to examine and encourage appropriation of Christian ethical roles and response as a panacea to moral decadence among the contemporary politicians. Therefore, through the descriptive research method, the writer elucidates the biblical perspectives of moral decadence, factors like injustice, separation from God, craving for material wealth and many others which are causal agents of moral decadence. The work also reveals that Christian as a moral agent plays cogent roles in many moral decisions. That is, standing for truth and justice, exemplary leadership and good governance. This could be done ethically through prayer of intercession, emphasis on biblical spirituality, expression of love and active involvement in the nation’s political system. The work recommends that, Christian should always stand for truth and that every Christian, as a body of Christ should respond positively and ensure that their involvement in politics would bring a relief to common citizen in the society.

Keywords: Christian, Politics, Moral, Decadence and Panacea.

1. Introduction

The first Christians lived in the expectation that this world would soon end and that God’s kingdom would remain God’s creation, in which Christians are to live out the meaning of their faith in deeds as well as prayer, through their conduct as well as through their confession. The bearers of political power exercised the functions of their office not on the basis of its having been founded and agreed upon by human beings, but by God’s will- whether they are aware of it or not. God has made arrangements for the projection

of human life and for the regulation of functioning of society according to law and justice. The early Christian missionaries teachings about the separation of church and state, has made many people to viewed “politics as a dirty game” which as a result affected Christian active involvement in politics. This have pave way for many unscrupulous people to dominate the political circle of the country for many years. The above in view motivate the writer’s to venture into the writing of this paper that, Christians, like every other person must involve in political activities of their

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country in order to correct or minimize the high level of immoral act by the political leaders if not totally eradicated.¹ As established in this paper, there is a reverse in the expected standard in today's political circle with respect to the issue of morality. Christian politicians as the light are expected to be a shining light to the darkest part of the political terrain and as the salt, they are to preserve the truth just as the salt preserved useful household materials.

Truly Christians are called to pray for leaders, counsel and give them words directly from the Lord (I Tim. 2:1-6), these roles will much easier if we have Christian leaders. In accordance to the origin of the world, God created man to have dominion in Genesis 1:26-28. Since politics is leadership and followership. Over time, Christian has been challenge for not sufficiently impacting society towards the attainment of a more virile and serene community. People have often pointed to the paradox of the proliferation of churches and the increase in crime and criminal tendencies in society. One area of society that has been about the least impacted by the church is the political arena. The reason for this is not farfetched. Christian leadership appears not to take more than a passing interest on how society is governed and this is reflected, even in the curricular of our theological institutions².

The irony is that rather than participating in political process and activities, Christians rather led to spend time praying that God should change things in the political terrain without actively involving themselves in various political activities as the agent of change³. More so, those who speak only of evangelism are missing the point that the gospel is to be preached in word and deed. Though Christ's ultimate concern is for people's spiritual needs, his actions during his life on earth show that he was also concerned about people's social and physical needs. Thus Christian involvement in politics to improve people's circumstances does not contradict the command to preach the gospel⁴.

Morality is concerned with or relating to human behavior especially the distinction between good and bad or right and wrong behavior. Moral as used in this paper is considered to be the principle of right and wrong behavior that has to do with character, conduct and habit, which could be good or bad.⁵ Christian is referred to as someone who believes in, and follows the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. That is someone who has the qualities relating to Jesus Christ in virtues of kindness, tolerance, patience, love and generosity⁶.

Decadence as explained by Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is behaviour that shows that someone has low moral standard⁷. In this paper, it is referred to as a state of declining in moral standard. Moral decadence in this paper is about diminishing situation in the area of morality, especially among the politicians. This means that the high standing of morals in those days, if compared with today, shows a very low grade. In the height of what has been said, we are considering the low grade in morals as opposed to the former higher grade among the politicians.

The term "Politician" pointed to someone whose work is politics, especially an elected member of the government. It is someone who is skilled at dealing with people or using the situation within an organization to gain an advantage.⁸ In the context of this paper, is a member of a branch of government who actively or professionally engages in politics. Panacea as considered in this paper is something that people think will make everything better and solves their problems. With the above in view, this work will also delves into biblical perspective of moral decadence, causes, expected roles of Christian in politics, Christian ethical responses to curbing moral decadence conclusion and recommendations.

2. Biblical Perspective of Moral Decadence

Morality from the biblical concept must be considered here since the church of God is universal and the Holy Bible is one to all Christians across the globe. To answer the question on morality without serious reference to the Holy Bible would be likened to a suicide attempt. This implies that in order to have a standardized approved and acceptable standard for moral instruction, the Holy Bible must be explored. God is the creator and the sustainer of the universe Gen. 1:1 states that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". The earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1). One can deduce from the biblical point of view that God as the creator; universe is the first initiator and teacher of morality. Light from the Garden of Eden, He began to inculcate moral values in man:

Genesis 2:15-17 states,

And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

This issue of morality from the biblical point of view is not limited to the Old Testament. It is also reflected in the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. In consideration of Jesus as the source of Christian moral teaching, it is clear that there are two main lines of thought. The first is that, the teaching of Jesus gives God's moral standard and to be a Christian is to live a moral life.⁹ It could be noted here that the issue of morality is not human made, it has its root in the Holy Bible and one can conveniently say that to be biblically inclined is the same as to be morally inclined.

Paul's call to live in accordance with the spirit that sinful nature becomes relevant here (Rom. 8:5). This brought the same challenge to deny self and give priority to the things of God. Paul was convinced that good behaviour depends on sound belief. Like the Lord Jesus, Paul condemns immoral attitudes which generate outward acts like adultery, theft and murder. He regards those who have such attitudes as arrogant and boastful.¹⁰ Paul used those laws of the Old Testament that were endorsed and reaffirmed by Christ. His insistence on abstinence from adultery and obey parents (Ep. 5:3; 6:1-3) arises from the fifth commandment and from our Lord's examples. In addition, Paul urged Christians to imitate the ways of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ep. 5:1. Phil. 2:5). Christian politicians' behaviour should be the same as that of Christ. They are to emulate behaviour patterns that are of the Lord Jesus Christ while he was on earth, that of the Father the sovereign Lord in heaven.¹¹

God intends His people to live holy lives. They must be a reflection of His perfect character. The guiding principle in every Christian's life should be, whatever you do, do as to the glory of God" (II Cor. 10:3, 5). The cause of moral degeneration continues to be a subject of study. In the Bible, moral decline is always a result of spiritual declension. The Bible counting expository historical narratives provides many personal and corporate examples of spiritual and moral development declension. The grace given to men such as Kings Saul, David, Solomon and their subsequent failures provide examples of souls who walked in disobedience to God. The biblical wisdom is also aware of the profound alienation and brokenness of human beings as it is of our potentials for increasing wholeness.¹²

3. Causes of Moral Decadence

1. Cultural Factor: Culture also plays a big role in moral training of children. Culturally, as a child is growing, every adult plays significant role in

his/her character building. Even in mastering language, children learn the ways of their culture and place in it. The moral legacies of the past and the creation of the present lives on.¹³ At times, the fault of moral decadence comes from parents due to lack of proper care and training, at times over pampering because of the nature or position of the child in the family circle i.e. the only male or female child. Some parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of financial hardship. More so, as submitted by McDowell, a young person who is receiving insufficient encouragement and guidance or spell from his parent is likely to engage in immoral acts.¹⁴

2. Craving for Material Wealth: The focus of some youths is how to acquire a particular item in life. As a result of lack of biblical instruction, they do not have the fear of God in their hearts, hence they do not mind the way they acquire such needs. This has led many to shed innocent blood, engage youths in thugery while some others engaged in dirty acts which are nothing to write good testimonies about among contemporary politicians. Even this has caused many of these youths to lose their lives.¹⁵
3. Separation from God: This arises as a result of inadequate biblical instruments and teachings, many youths have separated themselves from God. This has brought wickedness and violence, anger and murder. Many of these youths have been deceived into carrying gun, machetes, cutlasses and other dangerous weapons in order to steal with their victims during political violence. This has made them to be a cheap tool used and dumped by the politicians which as a result brings permanent shame upon them.¹⁶
4. Lack of Personal Discipline: Indiscipline has caused many people to involve in immoral acts. This writer believed that a number of factors have contributed to the decline of the practice of personal discipline in this contemporary age. When there is no personal discipline among the political office holders they would not be able to follow the norms or moral standard set by the community or society that they belong to, this is capable of making them to act differently against the moral standard that their political office calls for. Without personal discipline from the side of the political office holder, moral decadence will continue to spread from one era to another¹⁷.
5. Personal Interest/Greediness: This is one of the causes of moral decadence among the contemporary

politicians, Apostle Paul condemns attitudes which generate outward acts like theft and greediness. He sees men's heart as filled with greed and deceit I Cor. 1:26. Apostle Paul regards those who have such attitude as arrogant and boastful. They are people who devise ways of doing evil as inwardly heartless and ruthless.¹⁸ A common meaning of the New Testament word for this is sinful attitude which is missing the moral mark". A sinful attitude is when one does a wrong thing that affect others badly which if done well would have been a valuable way of meeting their needs.¹⁹

4. Expected Roles of Christians in Politics

Jesus recognized the government and its legitimate functions in terms of maintaining order, collecting taxes, and adopting a monetary system. The state has a duty to provide the essential conditions for the church including all religious bodies, to fulfill its functions to the fullest extent. The Christian's ultimate authority is God. Their duty is to witness for God, preach his word, congress the faith, teach their members to observe the divine commandment and to serve the nation and the state by proclaim the will of god as the supreme standard of life. Below are some of the roles expected from Christian in their involvement in politics²⁰. The following are some of the roles expected of Christian politicians.

- 1). Concern for social life and well-being – Paul like us today, lived in a world seriously divided by racial and tribal differences. He sings that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3:27). This means that in the community of God's people differences race have become irrelevant and all people are one in Christ. This will obligates Christian politicians to accept people of all races without discrimination and show a very good concern for their well-being on equal terms with those of their own race.²¹
- 2). Standing for justice: This simply means giving to every people what is due to him/her. It is what we must endeavor to defend innocence and promote justice and truth among mankind. It connotes equality of all persons irrespective of race color, sex, language, religion opinion party social origin or status²². "The effect of justice will be Peace" only when justice in all of its unique biblical meaning is established will people live in a tranquil country with all their cities peaceful and their houses full of ease Christian politicians are expected to stand for justice in their involvement in political functions or their country.²³ The people of God are commanded in the scripture to execute justice. Justice is one of the chief attributes of God. The justice which Christian politicians are to exercise is not theirs but God, who is the lover of justice and as well execute justice for the oppressed (Ps. 99:4)²⁴
- 3). Standing for truth: Christians in politics are to stand for truth in all their endeavour. Truthfulness must replace falsehood, honest and useful work must replace stealing and helpful talk must replace unwholesome conversation²⁵. It is the duty of Christians in politics to be intelligent understand that nature and process of government. They are to participate in the formation of public policy, work for the extension of justice, freedom, and equally to all citizens, regardless of race, color or creed as a citizen of the temporal world, they must act in the light of Christian truth in every area of their political activities. Their role in standing for the truth is to challenge and criticize any force in society which tends to deny basic human rights or to run counter to the purpose of God.²⁶
- 4). Living a holy life: Christians are holy people because they have been called by God, chosen and designated to be part of a holy community the body of which Christ is the head. (I Cor. 1:2, I Pet. 2:9). They are set apart from the world (but not by being socially separated or uninvolved), Christian politicians should stand out like lights on a hill top as they involved in the political activities of their nation.²⁷
- 5). Being loyal: Loyalty can be regarded as a virtue, the trust worthiness of the loyal person stems from an attitude of attachment to the object of his or her loyalty. Christian politicians are to remain loyal to their words based on the promise made in their manifesto to the electorate during the electioneering campaigns²⁸
- 6). Being honest: This means act of sincerity, that is, being sincere to oneself and to others in the course of one form or interaction or the other at every given time. In daily social interaction people regards as honest anything that is substantially categorically true; that is a fact that is true to the letter and true to life. Honesty therefore goes with truthfulness, uprightness, sincerity and straight forwardness in deed and words. Christian politicians are to be honest to both their country and their various constituencies.²⁹
- 7). Being a peace maker: Christians are to serve as peace maker. It is the maintenance of an orderly

and just society. Orderly in the sense that the poor masses are being protected against violence or extortion of aggressors, and just in being defended against plantation and abuse by the powerful and wicked politicians³⁰

- 8). Being salt and light of the world: Some of the so called Christian politicians have failed to obey Christ's call to be salt and light in their political life sphere, and have instead contributed to the exploitation of the poor masses³¹. John Stoff's in one of his famous book submitted that "Christians are to be fundamentally different from non-Christians; we must permeate non-Christian society, influence non-Christian society, and retain our distinctiveness". Christian politicians cannot bring good news to the poor unless they themselves are good. Christian politician are enjoin to be salt and light of the world and nation instead of putting hand in furthering the rottenness and degradation of others by non-Christian politicians.³²
- 9). Leading an exemplary life: Christian as the body of Christ should strike to live an exemplary life in their respective political offices. Charity must begin from home i.e change must begin from them. It is of good note for Christian to maintain moral standards of the Bible in their offices. Christian politicians should exemplify sharing and caring for other people especially the poverty stricken people, the victims of natural disaster and community/ constituency development than siphoning the public money or resources for their own personal use³³
- 10). Providing good governance: This involves acting in accordance with deigned guidelines and procedures in an open manner. Christians in public offices should accept the role of good leadership as a commitment to serve for the good of common people in the society as an expression of the Christian commandment of love of neighbour³⁴

5. How Christians Involvement in Politics Serve as a Panacea for Moral Decadence

In our Lord's teaching love for neighbours was one of the vital ingredients of a life that pleases God. Paul in his teaching was also convinced that good behaviour depends on sound belief. His strong insistence on giving care to enemies reflects what our Lord taught in Matthew 5:46 and Luke 6:27. He urged his readers to imitate the ways of God and of the Lord Jesus. In view of the above, Christian involvement in politics ethical

response should be a solution to moral decadence as discussed below.

1. Response through active involvement: Christians should be active in their involvement in politics. Christian body cannot remain aloof from political life³⁵. It requires their active participation and responsibility to assist those in authority in performing their appointed tasks by giving them support, by keeping their actions under continues criticism, and by preparing to replace the governing authorities themselves with this seems necessary in the interest of better government³⁶.
2. Christian response as transformation agent: Christians must seek to transform the values and morality of the world or the nation's political system. This response would not reject the work not identify the Christian ethic with the ethic of the world but would transform the world and the political method into the likeness of God's ideal method by encouraging the political office holders to have a revered mind, a mind focused on eternal matters which is God's will for society as a whole³⁷.
3. Christian can also respond through sensitization: This can be done by educating people to shun ethnic and tribal politics which seems to make people condone corruption and let erring public officials go unpunished because they come from their ethnic group or tribe. People should be sensitize through Community Based Organisations (CBOs) on their responsibility to hold public officials accountable and demand transparency in their operation³⁸.
4. Teaches people to grow morally: This is an act of getting across to all categories of people irrespective of their ages position and gender with adequate knowledge of the Bible in order to let them know what God expects of them. If this is rightly done can become means of transforming the politicians, society and the nation at large³⁹
5. Emphasis on Biblical Spirituality: Christians response as a panacea to immoral act by the political office holder involve waking up from slumbering and return to an in-depth emphasis on biblical spirituality; an emphasis on true and practical Christianity which can be achieved through modeling mentoring, counseling or employing biblical teaching method to make the needed impart and influence. It is also the role

of Christian politicians to orientate others in the political sphere with the aim of saving as light in the world⁴⁰.

6. Response through prayer of intercession: To intercede means to plead or mediate on behalf of another person just as Esther and Modecai pleaded on behalf of the Jews from the biblical record the fact is undisputable that anger moves the hand of God to liberate the people of God from captivity and restore them to prosperity. For the contemporary Christian politicians to achieve their vision of unity, prosperity and development for their country, they are to earnestly pray for leaders who will govern the nation or hold any political office in righteousness and in the fear of God⁴¹.
7. Expression of love: Political ideology would not be spared by ethnic interests or ethnic prejudices but by Christian principles. The love of God is demonstrated in our love of others, especially those who are different from us. In this regard, Christian politicians should be fair to all ethnic groups irrespective of their political and religious ideologies.

There should be no place in Christian politician's agenda for ethnic loyalty and religious fanaticism that would encourage hatred of other human beings rather than expressions of God's love to them⁴².

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined Christian involvement in politics: A panacea for moral decadence among contemporary politicians. Godly people are indispensable in politics in order to curb moral decadence. It has been established that, many factors are responsible for immoral act among the public office holders especially in the nation's political system. In short the study revealed that Christian as the body of Christ and God's representative on earth has roles to play in the governance in order to curb moral decadence among the office holders in the nation political system. For Christians to fulfill God's purpose of finding solution to this moral menace there is need for Christian moral and spiritual response, which includes active involvement and emphasis on Biblical spirituality. The challenges of moral decadence among the public office holders should not be seen as the problem to some people; rather it should be seen as the collective responsibility of every body of Christ. Therefore, every Christian, should respond positively and ensure that their involvement in politics would bring a relief to common citizen in the society.

That is, they should always stand for truth. Holiness is an identity of the people of God. God expects a high moral standard from his followers; the Christian politicians are to honour God and discharge their duties faithfully. Finally, as a light in the teaming darkness of the world, Christian politicians are to take the shining light to the entire nation. This requires living above reproach through their active involvement and demonstrating high level of transparency and moral standard.

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