



## Church And The State: A Study Of 2023 Presidential Election In Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

There are two powers God has bequeathed to human communities namely the Ecclesiastical and Civil powers. The relationship between the Church and the State can be dated back to the year 313 when Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which tolerated all forms of cults including cults in the Church and allowed the Church to own property and granted the Church all forms of freedom. Hence, both institutions have co-existed with their clear defined functions and missions. Both functions and missions of the two institutions when implemented can birth a leadership that can drive Nigeria to good governance. But the manipulation of any of the institutions poses a threat to peace and stability within the society. The study is to investigate the activities of the Church and the State as it affects the conduct of 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The study adopted structural functional approach in its theoretical analysis. The study discovers that the church and her leaders have shown their full commitment in enthroning of good leadership in Nigeria. Though, some Church leaders are still trapped by the banana pearls of politicians whom saw the Church as tool for winning elections in Nigeria. This study recommends strongly the need for political revolution from the Church. A political revolution is needed in Nigeria and it need to start from the sanctuary where priests performs triple functions as prophets (teachers of truth), Priest (ministers of the sacrament) and Kings (leaders of the people of God).

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## Introduction

The Church was born into a world ruled by Rome, but greatly influenced by Greek (Hellenistic) culture. The first world of the Church was the Greco-Roman world. A world in which the State through her leaderships the emperors tried to decimate the Church with several persecutions especially those that took place in 63 AD when Peter and Paul were put to death, 111-11AD that led to the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch, 116-117 during the reign of Marcus Aurelius when bishop Polycarp was burned to death till the fourth century when there were rival emperors with intense instability and breaking down of government structures. The State under the leadership of these emperors understood the institutionality of the church and knows that to decimate the Church is to decimate her leadership, the Popes, bishops and priests.

However, the Church is an institution. It is an institution because it is hierarchically structured and ordered. In the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* 1 (LG 1:331) the Council Fathers noted that by her relationship with Christ, the Church being a sacrament has evolved over the years and a sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. In other words, the church is symbol of unity irrespective of tribe, race or geography.

Judiciary speaking, every philosophy of the State agrees the State is not a free invention of human will, but a necessity founded in human nature, since no society can hold together unless someone is in command to give effective direction and unity of purpose. There are various theories regarding the origin of the State spanning from theory of divine origin, force theory, patriarchal and matriarchal theories, and contract theories down to evolutionary theory of the modern State. The State is the product of slow and steady process of evolution over a long period of time embracing a number of factors. But the process of evolution of the State has not been uniform, regular and continuous. Different factors produced different types of States in different societies. However, speaking in terms of history, the tribal States, the oriental empire, the Greek-City-State, the Roman Empire, the Feudal State, the modern nation State have been generally regarded as the stages of evolution of the State.



Further, the State is also an institution. This is because what defines a State is its location within a geographically defined space populated and powered with authority. Both the State and the Church are instituted for certain purposes. Peschke (2001) notes that the state is the society instituted for the universal establishment of the secular common weal while the church is instituted by Christ himself for the universal promotion of the spiritual and religious weal of mankind.

## Conceptualizations

### The Church

The relational reality of the Church is evident from the etymology. The term “Church” (English), “Kirche” (German), and “Kerk” (Dutch) probably have their origin from the equivalent Greek term “Kyriake” which means “what belongs to the Lord”. Thus, Kyriake oikia would be Lord’s House. The neo-Latin languages use the terms like “Eglise” (French), “Chiesa” (Italian), “Igreja” (Portuguese), “Iglesia” (Spanish), that are connected with the Latin word, *ekklisia* (*ekkalem*=to “call out of”). It derives its meaning from Old Testament term *qahal*, which is translated as “assembly of the people” gathered for the cultic purpose. Thus, the Latin term *ecclesia* is the modification and the transformation of the Old Testament notion of the people of God. Among the Greeks, only those who are called for a special purpose belonged to the *ekklisia*, the gathering of the city, which had political significance and only the males determined by their decisions what is to be done.

Beyond all semantics problems, the thing which is designated by the word ‘Church’ represents a mystery of self communication of God through Christ to the human community and thereby to individual human beings, as well as the mystery of this society itself fashioned by God’s self-communication. The Church is an element of the mystery of Jesus Christ, indeed of the Trinitarian God himself. As a result of its character as mystery, the Church eludes definition in a rigorous sense. Besides, such a definition, to be complete, would have to include all elements prominent in the progress of the Church’s historical life, including its future form, which we cannot yet know. The theological reflection upon the nature of the Church begins after some preliminary attempts at the end of twelfth century. At that time the overriding concern was the relationship between



papal power and the power of the king. However, it is only in our own time that the Church has offered a definitive interpretation of herself. This late development may perhaps be accounted for, if not justified, by the fact that like most human societies the Church begins to take stock of her only to the extent that its operation is not impeded to.

Again the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that the word “Church” “designate the assemblies of the people, usually for a religious purpose. *Ekklesia* is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament for the assembly of the chosen people before God, above all for their assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel received the law and was established by God as his holy people. By calling itself Church, the first community of Christian believers recognized itself as heir to that assembly. In the Church, God is calling together his people from all the ends of the earth

The Church can be defined as the faithful of the whole world. This broad definition can be understood in various senses all derived from the scripture, notably as the community of believers, the kingdom of God, the Mystical Body of Christ. As the community of believers, the Church is the assembly (*ekklesia*) of all who believe in Jesus Christ; or the fellowship (*koinonia*) of all who are bound together by their common love for the Saviour. As the kingdom (*basileia*), it is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies about the reign of the messiah. And as the mystical body, it is the communion of all those made holy by the Grace of Christ.

Again, since the Council of Trent, the Church has been defined as a union of human beings who are united by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the participation of and in the same sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the Bishop of Rome. Each element in this definition is meant to exclude all others from actual and vital membership in the Catholic Church, namely apostates and heretics who do not profess the same Christian faith, non-Christians who do not receive the same sacraments and schismatics who are not submissive to the Church’s lawful pastors under the Bishop of Rome. In the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* 1 (LG 1:331) the Council Fathers noted “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is kind of sacrament or a sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity”. In other words, the church is symbol of unity irrespective of tribe, race or geography.



Again, at the Second Vatican Council this concept of the Church was recognized as the objective reality that identifies the fullness of the Roman Catholic Church. But it was qualified subjectively so as to somehow include all who are baptized and profess their faith in Jesus Christ. They are the people of God, whom he has chosen to be his own and on whom he bestows the special graces of his providence. Thus, the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII in which the Church is described as the body of Christ. The image of the body of Christ expresses the specific difference between the Old and New Testament people of God, while the concept of the church as the people of God accents the continuity between the old and new covenant.

Further, in the scriptures according to Schmaus (1971:3) the word Church means a coming together not only of men but also of women and children, not for the purpose of decision-making, but for the obedient acceptance of a decision already made, a judgment handed down from God-for receiving the holy word of God. Bellarmine (2000) defined the Church as union of men who are bound together through the confession of the same faith and through participation in the same sacraments under the guidance of legitimate pastors, above all of the one Vicar of Christ on earth.

### **The State**

Notably, the concept of the State is comparatively modern and owes its origin to Machiavelli who expressed this idea as the power which has authority over men. Thus, there is no accepted universal definition on the concept of the State since it has been variously defined by various scholars from time to time. Even the Marxian perspective of the state did not go down well with some scholars when he defined the state as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. This Marxian approach seems plausible among African scholars who believe that the State is simply being manipulated by the upper class in achieving what they want to the detriment of the lower class. The father of political science, Aristotle defines State as the union of families and villages having for its perfect end and self-sufficient life. According to Bodin as cited in Mahajan (2001) a state is an association of families and their common possession governed by the supreme power and reason. Bluntchli as cited in Nwankwo (2013:33) says “the state is the politically organized national person of definite territory”. He went further to explain that the state is a combination or association of persons in the form of government and governed, on a definite territory, united together into a moral



organized masculine personality. Holland (2000) observes that the state is a numerous assemblage of human beings, generally occupying a certain territory amongst whom the will of the majority, of an ascertainable class or persons, is by the strength of such majority or class, made to prevail against any of the number who opposes it.

Peschke (2001) described the state as the independent (or sovereign) political community. According to him, as an independent community, it is distinguished from the many smaller communities which depend on the protection and assistance of the state. He went further to state as a political community; it is distinguished from independent religious community, which is the Church. The State can also be defined as a geographically delimited society endowed with supreme authority for the establishment of the universal common good.

However, about the State Easton as cited in Mahajan (2008:132) writes “one person sees the state as the embodiment of the moral spirit, its concrete expression; another as the instrument of exploitation used by one class against others. One author defines it simply as an aspect of the society, distinguishable from it only analytically; another as simply a synonym for government; and still another as a separate and unique association among a large number of other associations such as the church, trade unions and similar voluntary groups”. Further, according to Sidwick as cited in Mahajan (2008:133), the State is a political community, a body of human beings deriving its corporate unity from the fact that its members acknowledge permanent obedience to the same government which represent the society in any transactions that it may carry on as a body with other political societies. Philimore (1995) defines the state as a people permanently occupying a fixed territory, bound together by common laws, habits and customs into one body politic, exercising through the medium of organized government, independent sovereignty and control over all persons and things within its boundaries, capable of making war and peace and entering into all international relations with the communities of the globe.

More, Robert (1999) sees the state as a territorial area in which a population is governed by a set of political authorities and which successfully claims the compliance of the citizenry for its laws and is able to secure such compliance by its monopolistic control of legitimate force. Cole says that the state is the whole community of its members regarded as the organized social unit. Garner



(2000) explained that the state as a concept of political science and public law, is a community of persons more or less numerous, permanently occupying a definite portion of territory, independent or nearly so, of external control and possessing an organized government to which the great body of inhabitants render habitual obedience.

Gilchrist (1997:88) wrote as follows, “The state is a concept of political science and a moral reality which exists where a number of people living in a definite territory, are unified under a government which in internal matters is the organ for expressing their sovereignty and in external matters is independent of other governments. The Marxist view is that the state arose as a result of division of society into antagonistic classes for the purpose of curbing the exploited majority in the interest of the exploiting the minority. The state is the political organization of the ruling class which uses it for the purpose of suppressing the resistance of its class enemies. It is an organization for the maintenance of the rule of one class over the other classes. To achieve this, the state possesses such instrument of power as an army, the courts, a police force etc.

Almond as cited in Mahajan (2008:133) uses the term political system instead of the state. According to him, the political system is the system of interactions to be found in all independent societies which perform the functions of integration and adaptation by means of employment or threat of employment of more or less legitimate political physical compulsion. The political system is the legitimate order-maintaining or transforming system in the society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Structural-Functional approach. Structural-functionalism originated in the work of anthropologists, especially social anthropology, in the works of Radcliffe Brown and B. Malinowski in the early twelfth century.

Gabriel Almond is one of the chief proponents of this approach. Almond and his group argued that all political systems, regardless of their type must perform a specific set of task if they are to remain in existence as systems in working order or in equilibrium. He argues that every political system performs certain functions. Structure refers to human organization that can perform certain activities with effect on human beings and other organizations (such as church, family, legislature





etc). The function part relates to the activity of the agency and its external aspects, which are divided into latent and manifest, where the former is incidental and the latter intentional. With this approach, emphasis has been shifted from a physical, legal and historical description of institutions and agencies to an identification of function, that is, services. Thus, the Church and the State have specific functions they perform in the society. Their duties and functions are not ambiguous. Both are human organizations. In other words, both are populated by persons with specific goals. In some cases, citizens of the state also are citizens of the church. Both are guided by laws with a well defined goals and functions.

### **Relations between the Church and the State**

There are two powers God has bequeathed to human communities namely the Ecclesiastical and Civil powers. These two institutions exercise these powers with the aim of bettering the affairs of people it governs, though each supreme, each has limits as defined by the nature and special objects of each community. According to the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium Spes:76*) the Council Fathers noted that the political community (State) and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet both communities are also related to each other as public institutions which to a large extent have the same subjects who belong to both spheres. Peschke (2008:624) posits that the Church does not possess any political power over the temporal order. This means that she has no jurisdiction over the political realm, even though she possesses the authority to teach in matters concerning respect for human rights and moral order in public life. Outside the sphere of religion and morals, the Church possesses no competence. Refraining from direct involvement in politics, the Church will be able to proclaim the royal dominion of God over the entire world. Further, he maintained that the State does not possess any authority over the spiritual, religious orders. The State is not entitled to subject the work of the Church to a control founded on the State interests. The State has right and duty to protect religious freedom and to promote the conditions favourable to religious life.

Hence, since Church and State serve the same human being, it is unavoidable that their interest intersect in certain areas like education, marriage etc. Both the Church and the State are institutions with relevant structures. Hence, one of the major components of the state is the population, that is,





the peoples located or living within. Again, in Second Vatican Council, the dominant concept in the self-understanding of the Church is the people of God.

Further, for ages the relationship between the State and religion, more particularly between State and Church has been witnessed, studied and critiqued. The State and the Church often include the same people but represent different organizational forms with different aims and style of work. The Church and the State represent neither abuse of power nor reign of heaven but pragmatic ways of controlling power to the benefit of the people, nation, state and church. The degree of controlling power varies but they are basically two ways of relation between State and Church: the Free Church with church financially and administratively independent of the state and the State Church with the church financed and regulated by the state. Between these two poles, a number of different systems organizing the two entities have developed. However, both the church and the state play very critical roles in human formations and leadership recruitment. Hence, 2023 presidential election was not an exception.

### **Church-State and 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria.**

Church and Religion have become a major factor in Nigerian electoral process as part of identity politics that our politicians play to garner votes and gain advantage over their opponents. This is not just the politicians, the average Nigerians view political activities and processes through the lens of religion.

Hence, the 2023 presidential election has brought to the fore the place, function and actions of various institutions. During the selection of the candidates by the various political parties, the All Progressive Congress (APC) produced a same faith ticket. The APC presidential primary that birthed the Tinubu/Shettima ticket of both Muslims witnessed clearly a very reactions and condemnations by the Christian community in Nigeria especially in Churches. The ministers and leaders of Christian communities in their various Churches brazenly, ferociously and vehemently condemned the ticket. In fact some Church leaders saw the same faith ticket as a religious war against Christians. As in every divided community, APC's choice of candidates had received a labyrinth of opprobrium for downplaying the religious sensitivities in Nigeria. The Christian



Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body of Christians in Nigeria voraciously stated that the situation in Nigeria as present does not require same faith ticket. Kukah (2022) noted that APC same faith ticket is totally reprehensible and not acceptable. The stand of Kukah was in tandem with Some Christians in APC who has to abandon the party as a result of same faith ticket noting that flying such a ticket was an affront to the Christian community in the party. Ekpo (2023) clearly stated the Northern Christians protested seriously in Abuja to register their displeasure to same faith ticket by the APC. It is important to note that for the APC to assuage the feelings of Nigerian especially the Christian communities and their leaders, began deemphasizing religion of its candidate's choice and it desperately sought religious balancing in its campaign. A vivid example was the hiring of bishops to attend the unveiling of Shettima as vice presidential candidate of APC, a move which further exacerbated the tension created by same faith ticket because there were clear indications that the bishops hired were fake and non existing. Such action of the APC was perceived as an insult to Christian communities.

But the fundamental question is; why would such fear grip the Christian communities? The reasons are quite obvious. The state has in the past allowed and paid deaf ear to the various atrocities committed against the Church in Nigeria. The killings of Christians and burning of churches has been visited with little or no condemnation by the authorities in the state especially when such authorities were from Muslim community. When such atrocities had been committed in the past, the State authorities most often or sometimes pretend as if nothing happened and when they react, the perpetrators were allowed to evade justice. A case in point was the murder of Deborah Samuel in Sokoto by the Muslims fundamentalists. As of now, nothing has been heard or known about the perpetrators of such heinous crime. To underscore the influence of religion on our democratic process, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate for the 2023 presidential election, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar who condemned such an atrocity through his twitter page deleted it immediately when he was threatened by some Moslems not to vote for him during the election. The action of the PDP candidate was strongly condemned by many Christian and Church leaders who believed that he was playing a religious card to win elections.

### **Why the Church Leaders kept their eye on the ball during Presidential Election**



The primary mission of the Church is the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*). The Church also believes that the properties that constitute a man are body and soul. Hence the state of the body matters equally. Not only does the Church take care of the spiritual needs of her faithful but also the temporal needs. This is so because what affects the body many a times also affects the soul. Part of the things that affect the body is the state of governance within the society.

Thus, as the presidential election of 2023 was garnering momentum, the Church through her leaders held various seminars towards enthroning good governance in the country. The Church through her leaders encouraged the faithful to participate actively both through registrations of voters and during voting. Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) was an organ used by the Church especially in the Catholic Church to disseminate information to the faithful. However, on why the Church became so much interested in 2023 presidential election was that the Church believed that when good governance is enthroned, an enabling structure would unfold to cater for better condition of everybody. Under a good structure that cares, Nigeria will do so well in all the indices of good governance like job creation, economic growth and development. The Church always cares for the welfare of her members through some provisions of basic needs of life to the society like education, health, human capital and other social amenities. In order to achieve the above, priests became polling unit observers in their various polling units. Priests were able to secure the photocopies of monitoring templates like election observer's check list, incident report form, result report form and even snapping of the polling unit results across the federation through JDPC. Priests believe that their status will naturally go beyond mere observer to a monitor. Many things will naturally fall in place because people know that a priest is sacramentally present and will write or transmit report to any renowned organization like the JDPC or other election monitoring group especially when the availability of vital electoral materials such as voting cubicle, voting box, ballot papers, result sheets, BIVAS machines configured at 000 are a challenge. The Church through her leaders also ensures that the electoral processes are transparently followed like accreditation, free voting without clear lobbying/vote buying at the polling units, clear sorting, collation and counting of votes, clear recording of results, signing of results by the stakeholders and even transmission of results by the presiding officer. In some



situations where the leaders of the church through a priest are not around, the youths are deployed to monitor the processes using cameras as case may be.

Moreover, it is important to note that there are some spiritual /Church leaders who by their conduct should be vanguards of good governance but unfortunately become bed fellows of the oppressive politicians who service the Church projects with their ill gotten wealth and are given titles in the Church. Many a times the Church supports candidate based on membership and not based on competence. Such maneuvers of our Church leaders lead the State to remain in perpetual economic doom. Mbaka (2023) noted that clergy of all denominations in Nigeria offended God in different positions they took in the process to the 2023 presidential elections. For him, the Church leaders left their primary duties and functions and delved into politics and using the power of the pulpit to campaign for certain candidates which in his opinion is antithetical with their callings and duties. But the fundamental question is, why would the Church leaders across denominations either directly or subtly campaigned or demanding for a particular candidate? Church leader who sees his faithful being slaughtered and butchered like animals either as a result of their faith or because of bad governance, will he keep quiet when another opportunity comes to enthrone someone who can protect and stop the atrocities across all sections? An extreme actions demand an extreme measures. This may be part of the reason why Rev. Fr. Alia Hyacinth defied the prohibitory provision of the canon law and other Ecclesiastical principles and directives went and contested for Benue gubernatorial election and won. It is even more heartbroken when the perpetrators of these heinous crimes are allowed to evade justice and the government whose primary duty is protection of lives and properties pretends and turns blind eyes and treat such actions with deodorants. In this circumstance, will you blame such Church leaders if they move towards a particular candidate that has the capacity to stop such crimes and enthrone good governance? The answer is quite obvious. In various parts of the country, priests have been kidnapped and murdered in blood as a result of their faith. No one who has passed through such a tortuous experience would keep quiet during elections because their lives depend on it.

Hence, the Nigerian Catholic Diocesan Priests Association in its annual general meeting held in Calabar prior to 2023 presidential election said that it would mobilize effectively the Church's



faithful to go out and vote in the 2023 elections. With the theme as “The Imperative of effective Evangelization through Inclusiveness”, hosting about 170 priests from 56 dioceses noted that the theme is apt because it was about the Church and society or State. Duke (2023) pointed out clearly the outcome of the meeting which he said was that the Church especially the Catholic Church would want to change the political narrative in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria by encouraging the faithful to exercise their franchise. Ezehi (2023:4) quoting the outcome of the meeting said “We wrote to the INEC for registration units and had every person of voting age registered, we have also mobilized them to collect their permanent voters cards (PVC). It is the same measure that we would adopt during elections, we have told them to vote the candidates they believe that are sincere, committed and dedicated in enthroning good governance” priests were encouraged to remain undaunted despite the present challenges and pray so that God will lead them into electing good and responsive leaders in 2023.

## **Conclusion**

The Church and the State are two institutions that when working together will definitely enthrone good governance in Nigeria. None of the two institutions should see each other as an enemy but collaborators in the same entity called Nigeria. The study discovers that the Church and her leaders have totally shown their full commitment in enthroning good governance in Nigeria in the 2023 presidential election. Though some Church leaders are still trapped by the banana pearls of politicians whom saw the Church as a tool for winning elections in Nigeria but the effort of the Church in creating a State that work for all is not in doubt.

In line with the above, this study recommends strongly the need for political revolution from the church. A political revolution is needed in Nigeria and it need to start from the sanctuary where priests performs triple functions as prophets (teachers of truth), Priest (ministers of the sacrament and Kings (leaders of the people of God). The Church leaders should participate in politics, not in a partisan manner as prohibited by the cannon law but should be able to scrutinize the candidates and lead the people of God in forming and taking political decisions in choosing the right



candidates in an elections. Poverty, insecurity, poor healthcare systems and other social problems the nation is confronted with do not know which religion or tribe you are coming from. Again, no religion or tribe buys anything cheaper than the others in a nation that is bedeviled by any of these challenges mention earlier. Based on that, this study is offering the following recommendations;

In as much as Christians are now getting interested in politics and governance, this study notes that it is important that the Church through her leaders should focus more on the critical issues of nation-building, good governance and development that can resolve the plethora of challenges confronting the country.

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