

## **THEOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN BIBLICAL ISRAEL AND THE CHRISTIAN IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN POLITICS**

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### **Abstract**

*The Israelites initially had a theocracy (ruled directly by God) beginning with God establishing His covenant with Abraham through the days of Moses and Joshua. For example, God led the people out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land using a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Theocratic governance, the Biblical representation of God's relation to, and rule in and over Israel, provides a framework that is instructive for how present-day Nigerian Christians can be structured for political participation in politics. The Nigerian nation has multiple problems and challenges, ranging from bad and unchristian leadership and corruption. Different solutions have been proffered to solving the problem of governance concerning corruption in Nigerian politics but with little attention paid to a Biblically constructed solution as referenced in the theocratic governance of ancient Israel. Can the principles of theocratic governance, as seen in the Biblical account of God's relationship with the ancient Israelites, be applied to non-Biblically normed entities like Nigeria? Therefore, the paper descriptively interrogates theocratic governance in Biblical Ancient Israel to provide templates for contemporary politics in Nigeria. This is done by examining Nehemiah and Esther as political leaders. The findings show that Christian theology is capable of considering the political implication of its belief framework and serves as an example of theologically-based good governance. The paper concluded that in theocratic governance in Biblical ancient Israel, Nehemiah as a model perceptively masterminds directions and Christians' participation for good governance in Nigerian contemporary politics.*

**Keywords:** Theocratic Governance, Theocracy, Biblical Ancient Israel, Christian Participation, Contemporary Nigerian Politics

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a Nation bedevilled with recurring regional and sub-regional conflicts, tension and crisis, which has become the definition of the continent among the comity of nations. Though, this situation is not peculiar to Nigeria, yet, ours seems more pronounced because usually, these identified characteristics escalate into full-scale conflicts and socio-economic cum political crises with seemingly unending attendant consequences. These crises threaten the capacity for the corporate existence and socio-economic sustainability of Nigerian states despite their enormous social, economic, human and resource potentials. But, God's polity, as evidenced in Biblical ancient Israel, serves as a profitable reference for present-day Nigeria that is retrogressing in social development, and it provides a veritable framework that is instructive for how present-day Nigeria can be structured for social and political developments.

The Israelites initially had a theocracy (ruled directly by God) beginning with God establishing His covenant with Abraham through the days of Moses and Joshua. For example, God led the people out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land using a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Theocratic governance, the Biblical representation of God's relation to, and rule in and over Israel, provides a framework that is instructive for how present-day Nigerian Christians can be structured for political participation in politics. The Nigerian nation has multiple problems and challenges, ranging from bad and unchristian leadership and corruption. Different solutions have been proffered to solving the problem of governance concerning corruption in Nigerian politics but with little attention paid to a Biblically constructed solution as referenced in the theocratic governance of ancient Israel. Can the principles of theocratic governance, as seen in the Biblical account of God's relationship with the ancient Israelites, be applied to non-Biblically normed entities like Nigeria? Therefore, the paper descriptively interrogates theocratic governance in Biblical ancient Israel to provide templates for contemporary politics in Nigeria. This is done by examining Nehemiah's leadership styles. Can Biblical cum Christian identities and involvement in politics become a proper response to the state of affairs in Nigeria? How can we take directions from the Bible in our efforts to achieve political and social development in Nigeria? Another posing question is whether theocracy, a form of government in a society directly ruled by God, is a desirable system in a society ruled by human beings. (Mitchell 2011).

Nigeria, before and immediately after independence featured many prominent Christians who contributed significantly to the principles of righteousness that exalts a Nation. This was to be expected given the role that ethics, morality, the principles of the Bible and Missionaries played in the development of the country before independence. In Northern Nigeria in particular, Western education, agriculture and medical services were initiated by Missionaries long before the Northern Government did. Across the Middle Belt Area, from present Kwara State in the South West up to Niger State and sweeping through Kogi, FCT,

Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, and Adamawa State together with the Southern fringes of Brono, Gombe, Bauchi, Kaduna and Kebbi States, Missionary established schools produced graduates that played active roles in education, politics and in the civil service and a whole range of services that sustained Northern Nigeria and indeed Nigeria as a whole (Dafwang 35).

Therefore, the paper descriptively interrogates theocratic governance in Biblical ancient Israel before the monarchical period to provide templates for contemporary politics and social development in Nigeria. This is done within the ambit of Bob Mitchell's theoretical proposition of Christian theology of change. Mitchell posits that it is God himself who brings about a change in the world, with humans aligning themselves as active participants in his redemptive purposes. The change that God seeks is the fullness of human life. This requires the promotion of goodness, wholeness and knowledge. It operates on the premise that God is continuously at work in the world to make it good as he created it and to restore a relationship founded on a loving communion between himself, humans, and the created order. The focus of this paper is on the history of God's relationship with Israel from the patriarchal period to before the establishment of the monarchy (Mitchell 2011).

### **Clarification Of Concepts:**

#### **Theocracy**

The word "theocracy" originates from the Greek Θεοκρατία (*theokratia*), meaning "the rule of God". This in turn derives from Θεός (*theos*), meaning "god" and κρατέω (*krateo*), "to rule". Thus, the meaning of the word in Greek was "rule by god(s)" or "human incarnation(s) of god(s)" (Harper, 2017). A theocracy is a form of government whereby God sovereignly rules over the affairs of humans through divinely chosen human agents. This is explicable in the biblical account of ancient Israel. God's polity is seen through the construction of the covenantal community in ancient Israel. Thus, there is evidence of a society that prioritizes the well-being of the people and an effective response to their innate needs, whereas, in Africa, there is a situation of social imbalance resulting largely from bad governance. Under the theocracy, the work of human leaders is simply to enforce the laws and directions that God has given. It is not acceptable for them to direct the people in any way contrary to the directions of God (Spear, 2001). Theocracy restricts the power of human leaders to have control over the people.

A theocracy is different from an ecclesiocracy or hierocracy, whereby religious priests or churchmen assume a leading role in the governance of the state but do not claim that they are instruments of divine revelation. In sum, in a theocracy, the legislative, executive and judiciary power was rested in God and partially delegated to others to be exercised under a restricted form (Bookman, 2002).

## **Governance**

Canadian International Development Agency 2013 (CIDA) uses the term good governance in its policy on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance, and defines the concept as follows: by good governance, we mean how power is exercised by government in the management of a country's social and economic resources. "Good" governance is the exercise of power by various levels of government that is effective, honest, equitable, transparent and accountable.

The World Bank uses the following definition: "By governance, we mean how power is exercised... in the management of a country's social and economic resources". Pokol (2016) defined governance as "governing or directing the affairs of a group of people which could be a family, a village, a city, a country, or groups of countries. It is the activity of rendering stewardship of human and material resources within a given place and time". Governing is an exercise of constructive power by exercising leadership through persuading & influencing people towards realizing their goals (Ruwa, 2001:27) as in Pokol 194. Power in this case means diffused power which is found everywhere instead of the analogue idea of concentrated power in an individual leader. People who engage in governing are people who are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of those under them. The governing mandate is a divine one as recorded in Genesis 1:26-27 (Pokol: 194). To govern is to direct the public affairs of a country. Governance is the activity or manner of governing by a structure of governance which is the government. A Government is a group of people governing a state or country. In all constituted communities, public affairs have to be directed, controlled, influenced and managed. Thus governing is the right or power to govern. Governing implies authority. Authority refers to the right by virtue of office and position to command obedience. Authority is necessary for the unity of the state. Its role is to ensure as far as possible the common good of society (Ruwa, 2001:26).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its 1997 policy paper, defined governance as "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences ". This definition was endorsed by the Secretary General's inter-agency sub-task force to promote integrated responses to United Nations conferences and summits.

The 1991 World Bank report defined governance as "how power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (Al-jurf, 2017). Specifically, Nguyen states that governance is made up of aggregated elements including political leadership, bureaucratic capacity, representation and accountability, transparency and non-corrupt judiciary enforcing the rule of law, and participation. Also, the keys to good governance are leadership's political will and political capacity (Nguyen, 2016).

## **Politics and the Political Era**

While the idea of politics has received a negative perception, and has, at the same time, come under sharp abhorrence and resistance by the Evangelical community, it is happily embraced by some other religious bodies such as the Muslims, much more, the politicians, whether they are professionally trained in the discipline of political science or are *intruding jumpers* who merely occupy political seats. Embedded within what is a beneficial political enclave is the concept of democracy, a concept that historically, according to Rev. Professor Joel K. Biwul quoted Professor Attahiru Jega, a renowned professor of political science of global repute, emerged as the attempt to reform, organise and manage a political community for good governance to attain a progressive and cohesive society for the common good (Biwul, 2022).

## **The Concept of Politics**

After God created the world, we read in Genesis 1:26-28 that he commanded mankind to govern or rule over it in the sense of maintaining and taking care of it as we read in Genesis 2:15. And Exodus 18, we read of Jethro's comment concerning the leadership activity of Moses: *What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only water yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone... If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied* (vv. 17b, 18, 23, RSV). From this, we can say that in the Holy Bible, politics is the art of governing, leading people in such a way that the person who governs and the governed is not burdened or worn out in the process. It is the ability to provide people with the basic needs of life (Yamsat, 2011).

The concept of politics above is not far-fetched from what we read from the great ancient politician, Aristotle concerning politics. According to Yamsat quoting Aristotle, politics is the "science of man's welfare or happiness should be secured for the good of a given people through whatever form of government and social institutions deemed appropriate (Yamsat, 2011, pp 7-8). In other words, the ability to manage or for public or government affairs for the common good or the enhancement of the lives of all in a given state or nation, and not the ability to amass the wealth and power to oneself to the detriment of the majority of the people, as Nigerian politicians are known to do. As seen from the texts quoted, political leadership is not a human creation but is something rooted and initiated by God to bring order and progress in the world he created and recognized to be good, even though it was later marred by sin (Yamsat, 2011:8).

Without politics, there is nothing like government because it is the activities involved in getting and using power in public life and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a state (Dajwan, 2020). Therefore, the concept of "politics" denotes honest and sacrificial leadership in the political space that is concerned with guiding and positively

influencing governmental policies. In terms of political aspiration and electioneering, politics is said to be the art or science that concerns itself with winning and holding control over a government like what obtains between the Democrats and Republicans in the US, or what the All Progressives Congress (APC) party, Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and other political parties are practising in the case of Nigeria. Politics is conceptualised in its broad sense, as the communal life of the people in the society; but in its narrow sense, as an art of governance by appropriating specific national policies for national change (Biwul, 2022).

### **Contemporary or Political Era**

An era concerns time fixation, referring to a fixed point in time; one that begins a new period in history. It is determined by historical data sequencing from one starting point to its closing parameter. The phrase, "political era", depicts a certain defined political period or dispensation. Contemporary is by implication current, present politics and a Christian was a name given to the follower of Jesus Christ. The name was first given as a nickname in Acts 11:26 because the disciples were "*like Christ*". The term Christian denotes two Greek perspectives which are: first is a perspective that a Christian is a possession of Christ and the second a servant of Christ. In the case of the Nigerian narrative, the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914 still placed the newly rearranged country under colonial rule until its independence on October 1, 1960. The political era which began from independence was soon disrupted by a military coup d'etat, plunging the new country into a long military regime era. The democratic experience for Nigeria only began in 1999 to date with two political eras - from 1999 to 2015, led by the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and from 2015 to date, led by the All Progressives Congress (APC) party (Biwul, 2022:5).

### **Theocratic Governance in Biblical Ancient Israel**

The term "theocracy" does not occur in the Old Testament. However, we can deduce the governance of Israel by God through careful examination and analysis of the biblical texts that recorded the history of ancient Israel. The history of Israel is the history of theocracy (Kim, 1972). It is the account of the Old Testament representation of God's relation to and rule over Israel. This was possible within the sphere of divine revelation of God's will through divinely-chosen organs to divinely appointed persons (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Judges 8:23; I Samuel 8; 12:12). Under the theocracy, the work of the human leaders was simply to enforce the laws and directions that God has given (Spear, 2001).

Some have traced the beginning of theocracy to the Garden of Eden where civilization was first established and governance was carried out by God himself with no human intermediary. While some others opined that theocratic governance began with Moses, whose claim to leadership is based on his connection with God. So, theocracy is understood as formally beginning with the ratification ceremony of Exodus 24:1-8, which is consequent

upon Israel's acceptance of the covenant relationship previously offered to them in Exodus 19:3-6 (Kim, 1972).

Essentially, God's theocratic governance of biblical ancient Israel has been identified in the constitutional framework of the different epochs of their history. Three different constitutional epochs have been identified in their history before the establishment of the monarchy. The first epoch was the period of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Before the Egyptian sojourn, the Israelites had a pre- or proto-national existence. The patriarch was the sole repository of governmental powers. He was governor and military leader; he conducted foreign relations; received instructions from God; and made the covenants with God, which constituted the constitutional framework for the emerging Israelite nation (Kim, 1972).

The second epoch was when the families of the 12 sons of Jacob were in Egypt living under foreign rule as slaves. There were no more patriarchs but *zekenim* (elders) and *shofetim* (maintainers of peace). These officials administered the customary law of the tribes, perhaps subtly applying the patriarchal covenants (Mendenhall, 1954). And the third epoch began with the Exodus from Egypt up till the establishment of the monarch. The founding of the tribal confederacy immediately after the Exodus follows concurrently with the founding of the Israelite nation, while Moses became the recognized founder of the nation and its constitution-maker (Wildasky, 1984).

During this period, Israel was a loose union of 12 tribes bound together by a common constitution (the Mosaic/Sinaitic covenant). The constitution specified that God himself was the direct governor of the nation. He is assisted by the *Eved Adonai* (Servant or Prime Minister), who would be his representative and who, in turn, would maintain a core of judges and civil servants to handle the transmission of God's instructions to the tribal and family authorities. The Prime Minister, oftentimes and depending on the issue at hand, interacted with the Israelites at different levels: the assembly of the Israelites congregated as a whole (men, women and children); the assembly of all men of military age; a national council representing the tribes; or an *ad hoc* assembly of tribal elders (*zekenim*) or magistrates (*nesim*) for policy making (Elazar, 1989).

Moses was the first *Eved Adonai* and he was succeeded by Joshua. Moses and Joshua exercised authority over the 12 tribes of Israel on behalf of God. They served as God's messengers in governing the Jewish polity. Their principal task was to bring God's word to the Israelites. As the *Eved Adonai*, they likewise shared power with the priests, most especially Aaron and his sons, who were communication links between God and the Israelites. On the other hand, too, the *nesim* (magistrates) and *zekenim* (elders) were responsible for the day-to-day governance of the Israelites. They had a dual function in that they headed the individual tribes and also participated in governance as a whole (Speiser, 1965).

Consequent to the death of Moses and Joshua, regional *shofetim* (judges), who were also charismatic leaders, appeared from time to time, at least one in each generation, to act as proto-national leaders. According to the biblical account, they acted under God's sovereignty, primarily, though, not exclusively, in the military realm (Lindars, 1965). There were judges such as Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson and many others. Their duties may include the settling of disputes and the execution of God's law. This situation existed until the beginning of the monarchy.

It can therefore be deduced that the divinely chosen human representatives, the covenants, and the laws formed the basis for God's theocratic governance of biblical ancient Israel. There were three fundamental covenants and three kinds of laws through which God administered governance in ancient Israel. The covenants were the Noahic (Genesis 8:22 – 9:4, 8-17), Abrahamic (Genesis 12:1-3), and Mosaic covenants (Exodus 19:3-6) (Elazar, 1973). While the laws were also moral laws, which informed them of their duty towards God and other people; the ceremonial laws, which regulated their religious practices; and the civil laws, which were the state laws of the Israelites (Horton, 2006).

These laws became the standard for decision-making. They were rooted like God, the lawgiver and not in the unpredictable nature of humans or in the "natural order" of things as proposed by evolutionists, nor in the people's "collective conscience" as proposed by social contract theorists (DeMar, 1987). Through these laws, God prescribed rules for an ordered society and established a system that respects the life and dignity of fellow humans, as evidenced in the *Ten Commandments* (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). For instance, the institution of the Sabbath is an instrument for the levelling of social difference, allowing servants and strangers to rest together with employees and citizens (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Elazar points out two immediate consequences of this theocratic governance. Firstly, governance was not an end in itself in the Israelite scheme of things, but rather a useful way of serving divine purposes. Secondly, no leadership structure existed independently of its inhabitants. Even the entire body polity of Biblical ancient Israel was conceived as a kind of partnership of Israelites and not as an entity that existed independently of its people. Political institutions served this partnership and united the people with each other through their common linkage with God (Elazar, 1995).

Due to the theocratic governance of biblical ancient Israel, the community was unified, organized and well-structured. Also, governance was organized and efficient because there were no separate government branches unlike democracies, which often have legislative, judicial, and executive branches. Thus, directives and laws were easily passed from leaders to the general population. And the resources of the nation were easily distributed among the populace and properly appropriated.



Certain reasons have been deduced as resulting in the failure of the theocratic governance in biblical ancient Israel, whereby it gave way to a monarchy: the attempt to cope with the external pressure of Philistine military power, which called for an ongoing organized administration with a human administration that was readily available; the difficulty of communicating with God the king; the abandonment of God's direct rule over the people; the influence of the environment as seen in other nations having human government; a breakdown in the religious process and relationship with God that is necessary for a theocracy; and the inability of the people to trust in an unseen God (Elazar, 1995).

### **The Christian in Contemporary Nigerian Politics**

Nigeria before and immediately after independence featured many prominent Christians who contributed significantly to the principles of righteousness that exalts a nation. This was to be expected given the role that ethics, morality, the principles of the Bible and Missionaries played in the development of the country before independence. In Northern Nigeria in particular, Western education, agriculture and medical services were initiated by Missionaries long before the Northern Nigerian Government did. Across the Middle Belt Area, from present Kwara State in the South West up to Niger State and sweeping through Kogi, FCT, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, and Adamawa State together with the Southern fringes of Borno, Gombe, Bauchi, Kaduna and Kebbi States, Missionary established schools produced graduates that played active roles in education, politics and in the civil service and a whole range of services that sustained Northern Nigeria and indeed Nigeria as a whole (Dafwang, 2016: 35).

The first person to set up a political party in Northern Nigeria (the Northern People's Congress – NPC) was Walter Miller (an Anglican Missionary) trained and mentored Dr R. A. B. Dikko of blessed memory. It was after the colonial Government banned civil servants from associational activism (not Missionaries), that other people like the late Sardauna of Sokoto would benefit from the pioneering works of Dikko (Dafwang, 2016). Yamsat (2009) and Musa (2011) that Missionaries discouraging Christians from active participation in Politics is not general. Apart from Dr Dikko, the names of Pastor David Lot, Solomon Lar, Professor Ishaya Audu and Senator J.S. Tarka amongst others are written in gold in the annals of the history of Politics in Northern Nigeria. In the civil service, it is on record that the Sardauna (late Premier of Northern Nigeria) trusted Christians so much that he placed them in areas that required confidentiality, dedication and integrity. The role played by late Chief Sunday Awoniyi from the former Kabba Province in the administration of the office of the late Sardauna was remarkable. I listened to a lecture by Chief Sunday Awoniyi in the late 90s at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) which greatly inspired me. In his words, "*The Sardauna trusted me and respected my Christian faith to the extent that he bought me a copy of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible when he was first launched in London*". The Sardauna had gone to London on an official visit and heard that a new

version of the Bible had been launched, so he bought one as a gift for his devoted Christian Secretary. What a Testimony (Dafwang, 2016: 36).

This study is addressed from the perspective of Christian tradition. Accordingly, the focus is on the Christian and his or her participation in Nigerian contemporary politics. It should be clear that all human beings are religiously conscious beings because they were created with such intrinsically embedded consciousness of divinity. Therefore, when any human person contemplates his or her origin concerning the divine, seeking a better understanding of the subject, such contemplation could be constructed as Biblically inclined. Consequently, theology is human's insatiable quest to know the divine and how human persons can relate to him either personally or corporately. Put within a Christian context, a Biblical Christian is intensely reflective by its nature and orientation. It is the deep reflective quest about the Being, Personhood, activities, and relationship of the creation of God to the human persons; and conversely, their search for a better understanding of how they could individually and corporately relate to him. Biwul quoted in A-listers. McGrath also follows this stream of thought by conceptualising theology as a reflection upon the God whom Christians worship and adore; and Christian theology as the systematic study of the fundamental ideas of the Christian faith (Biwul, 2022). Agreeably, Timothy Palmer also understood theology as our human reflection on the nature of God and his activities in the world and politics is one (Palmer, 2015).

### **Textual Historical Participation of Christians in Nigerian Politics**

Nehemiah's leadership style is a remarkable one in that it provides a biblical example of a genuine leader who believes in participatory order of leadership, the book of Nehemiah generally talks about someone who determines to impact the society where he finds himself positively not minding the enjoyment he receives in a strange land, Nehemiah plan, strategize and execute positively for the betterment of the land of Jerusalem. The meaning of Nehemiah means (the Lord Comfort), this name shape the future of Jerusalem to the extent that the temple was rededicated for worship and the wall was rebuilt to safeguard the land from the enemy (Joseph, 2018).

The question such as should the Christians participate in politics or not. Should Christians be involved in politics? Are they under a moral obligation to do so? Are there any Biblical foundations guiding Christian sociopolitical engagement? What does the Bible have to say about political matters? Why do different groups interpret the Bible's teaching on the subject differently? These pertinent questions serve as our propellant to have recourse to the Biblical texts which serve as the primary source for Christian theologisation of politics. This is to identify some political characters in it and to also decipher their contributions to the political terrain of their time. The Biblical texts are replete with the participation of certain ancient forebears in the political reality of their day. This lays some beneficial background

framework for the contemporary Nigerian Christian to brace up for the reality of existing in the Nigerian political topography (Biwul, 2022).

True politics uses political power to expedite good governance promote the welfare of the citizenry and advance the course and progress of a state. This is what we see play out in the political participation of the sampled textual data. Two textual examples will suffice. First, Nehemiah the son of Hakaliah was an exiled Jew. He was a civil servant, serving as the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes I (464-424 BCE) in Susa, the capital of the Persian empire (Nehemiah 1:1-11). He was a godly person who revered the God of the Jews. Nehemiah was also a patriotic citizen of his ancestral nation and land (Nehemiah 2:1-9). His active political participation as governor of the Persian province of Yehud (Judah) for twelve years (445-433) brought significant religious and socio-economic reforms to the land (Biwul, 2022).

Nehemiah, being an excellent and self-sacrificing political administrator, was able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that were broken by the Babylonian invasion of 587/6 BCE amidst fierce enemy opposition (Nehemiah 2:17-20; 3:1-32; 4:1-3, 7-8, 11-21; 6:1-15). According to Katherine Southwood, he was confronted with the decision of humiliation by his opponents who used antagonistic tactics including anger, ridicule, conspiracy, sarcasm, coercion and pressurisation, and the threats of attack as well to obstruct the restoration of Jerusalem's walls (Southwood, 2016). Yet Nehemiah was focused, firm and resolute to achieve the goal of his refortification of Jerusalem. He was also able to correct certain acts of irreligiosity as well as acts of socio-political oppression and injustices by advocating for the disadvantaged and oppressed of the land (Nehemiah 5:1-13; 13:1-11; 13:15-28).

Biwul (2022) as in Tamara Cohn Eskenazi explains that tax payment to the Persian administration was aggravated and exploited by the wealthier Jews for their benefit. Defaulting citizens who were unable to repay their loans were at the risk of losing their property and pledging their children as slaves to their lending Jewish compatriots. Such greed-prone socio-political and socio-economic opportunistic exploitative attitude seems timeless in national politics.

Governor Nehemiah, in the face of such an ugly situation, became a compassionate philanthropist to the needy to redress the fractured economic situation (Nehemiah 5:14-19). He combated the situation by rebuking and challenging the wealthier upper class to right actions in favour of the needy. Nehemiah demonstrated his economic reform by practically contributing his funds to help the needy. Additionally, he gave hope to the downtrodden and guaranteed security for the land so the citizens could enjoy shalom (Nehemiah 6:16; 7:1-4; 13:13). The security of the city was guaranteed on the ground that rebuilding Jerusalem's walls would also reinforce the religious, political, and commercial power of the city (Biwul, 2022:16).

Second, Mordecai and Hadassah/Esther also stand as an amiable mirror for Christian participation in Nigerian contemporary politics or positive political participation for the Christians. While Hadassah/Esther, a cousin to Mordecai, was Queen in Susa, her uncle Mordecai was among the palace guards serving at the royal gate, possibly himself as a minor court official (Esther 2:5-7; 17, 21-23; 3:2-3). Mordecai was later elevated to the status of an honoured royalty as the second in command, Esther 6:1-11; 8:1-2, 15; 9:4; 10:3 (Leith, 2001).

Both Mordecai and Hadassah/Esther averted what Mary Joan Winn Leith describes as a genocidal scheme when they acted swiftly to obviate the annihilation plot, a self-centred act of injustice that was carefully orchestrated against the Jews by arrogant and power-drunk Haman (Esther 3:5-4:16). These two patriotic Jewish Diaspora heroes worked within the political system to secure salvation for their people (Williams, 2016). It was such political participation that saved the whole Jewish race from extermination when the enemy's plot was ironically reversed (Esther 7:1-6; 8:3-13, 17; 9:1-3, 5-19).

Gleanings from the above indicate that when godly, honest and selfless people who are firm on their stance on national issues speak out on behalf of the people as they engage in national politics and policies, the people as beneficiaries will rejoice. The nation of Nigeria needs active and positive Christian advocates (both from the clergy and lay persons) like Hadassah/Esther and Mordecai. This is what the examples of Nehemiah, Mordecai and Hadassah/Esther reveal. Conversely, when political power is either mistakenly or erroneously relinquished into the hands of sentimental, selfish, arrogant, corrupt, and people with indurate conscience, it is tantamount to killing a system and dwarfing the citizens. Biwul citing Nimmyel rhetorically ponders as affirmed by Biwul, "Is it not dangerous and risky to allow the wrong people take power, influence government policies that affect our collective wellbeing... [merely crying] foul about obnoxious policies [made by] the people ruling over us?" Upon such rhetorical intrigue, he contends that Nigeria is in a state of a political and economic mess "because good people or genuine Christians have refused to get involved to change the status quo. Unarguably, the majority of Nigerians are crying and calling for a change in the political system. Yet, changing the bastardised political landscape in Nigeria demands honest, radical, dogged, and forthright active participation with a people-centred agenda and not merely a bleating of the situation or taking the position of a barking dog (Biwul, 2022:17).

Therefore, if Nehemiah, Mordecai, and Hadassah/Esther we're not proactive in responding to the need of their contemporary nation and hour through active participation? Consider what might have happened to the Jewish race and Jerusalem's walls. There is an urgent need for Christian participation in Nigerian contemporary politics.

## **Brief Political Participatory Facts from History**

History demonstrates the fact that Christian participation in national politics has great benefits not only for the Christian community but much more for the benefit of humanity. It is a realistic truism that "Our everyday relationships with other people are deeply shaped by how we see them—who we think they are, and who we think we are?" We must possess the African mentality and philosophy "I am because we are and we are because I am". This undergirding ideology was foundational as the causation of African Transatlantic slavery. Some whites considered black skin as subhuman people lower than them: hence, enslaved them to work on their plantations and elsewhere.

The agony of their brutalization, dehumanization, and wasting them both on sea and land ignited the spirit of agitation for its abolition by abolitionists, those initial white people who felt slavery to be a social wrong and resisted its power and perpetuity (Biwul, 2022:17). They regarded slavery as antithetical dehumanization of the human person, as an abuse of human dignity, and as an evil committed against humanity, who concertedly and vehemently fought against it through abolitionist societies and movements. Unarguably, religion had a remarkable effect on these abolitionists and Anti-slavery agitators because a number of the American abolitionists and their evangelical activities were leaders from Protestant denominations (McPherson, 1992).

## **Lessons from Experiences of Some Christians by Professor Istifanus Dafwang**

### **1. Lessons from Reverend (Professor) Ishaya Audu**

Among the Sardauna boys, I had the privilege to interact very closely with Professor Ishaya Audu, the first indigenous Vice Chancellor (VC) of ABU, Zaria. He was a VC from 1972-1975 and being a leading Christian in the North, believers had very high regard for him. General Murtala Mohammed took over the Government in mid-1975 and his appointment was terminated. It was in 1986/1987 that the HEKAN Church leadership in Samaru Zaria requested that Professor Dafwang should go and interview him, in connection with his desire to be ordained as a Reverend Minister by the Church. Dafwang was then a young academic and was greatly humbled by this assignment.

*His Humility:* Baba Ishaya Audu was humble and down to earth. He never applied for the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Vice-Chancellor (VC) job. He was doing his Ward rounds in the pediatric ward when he got a letter appointing him the Vice Chancellor of ABU. The Sardauna identified men of character and learning across the North, for appointments without discrimination of either religious or ethnic backgrounds. Today in ABU, and indeed in all Federal Tertiary Institutions, the story is different. The most outstanding Scientist in the North so far, a Nigerian National Merit Award Winner, an LNG Science Award Winner, a Scientist that was ranked among the top 20, in Africa and an indigene of Kaduna State,

applied for the position of VC of ABU, Zaria in 2009. At the interview, he scored 81% to beat his nearest rival who scored 63%. Despite his outstanding qualities, the candidate was rejected, obviously, because of his Christian identity. Sadly, though, that type of discrimination has become the order of the day in Nigeria (Dafwang, 2016:37).

*His Standing up for Christ in All Situations:* As a VC his Christian identity was known wherever he went. In recruitments, appointments and promotions, he insisted on merit and equity. He was well known for judicious management of resources. In order not to tarnish his name, his wife opted to resign from the University's employment to become a businesswoman, because one of her peers, who was less qualified than her petitioned against her promotion. Even then, he was accused of misusing university resources to support his wife's business.

Fortunately for him, he insisted on getting copies of all the documents about her business transactions. Twice, the Police CID visited him for investigation and the receipts of all her business transactions were given to them for inspection and she was cleared. The Church and Nigerian contemporary politics need many more Ishaya Audus, in all public and private offices and in the Churches of Nigeria if Nigeria is to be salvaged from its current self-inflicted degeneration (Dafwang, 2016:40).

## **2. Choosing to be an Active Partisan Politician**

First of all, you must be born again, because that is the gateway. With Christ in you, you are the light of the world. Whatever may be your situation, you have been given the mandate to be the light of the world and salt of the earth. Secondly, it is important to identify God's purpose for your life and key into it. Prospective career Politicians and even those already in it will find these books very useful, "*The Purpose Driven Life*" by Rick Warren 2002, "*Christians in Politics*" by Danladi Musa, 2009 and "*The Christian Becoming a Political Leader*" by Pandang Yamsat, 2011. All the books emphasize the need to develop the Spirit of Servant Leadership as demonstrated by Jesus Christ as a critical precondition. The need for the Church to be involved in the decision-making, as well as initiating some kind of monitoring and evaluating the performance of such politicians is featured in the last two books (Dafwang, 2016:41).

With contemporary Nigerian politics, it is recommended that if possible, Church and Community leaders should be involved in recommending those assessed to be the most competent in their communities to the Political parties for nomination and election contests. The researcher learned that Chief Solomon D. Lar was nominated by the Church in Plateau State and contested the election and won. Again, his leadership witnessed infrastructural developments and always listened to the church. Mentioned has been made of how Professor Ishaya Audu emerged as the Vice Presidential running mate on the NPP ticket in

1979, based on the recommendation of four young men in ABU who had no biological or ethnic relationship with the Rev. Professor.

### **3. Love Not the World**

Wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is a sin. It is also characterized by the spraying of Naira or dollar notes at parties for people to dance on top. It is very pathetic that, even though there is a law against the spraying of Naira notes on people during parties, even those who enacted the law in the first National Assembly under President Obasanjo have no respect for it. Maybe the "Change Begins with Me" campaign should revisit that law. The massive accumulation of wealth is a clear indication of corruption, bad governance, oppression and so many of the like. Christian politicians should learn from Nehemiah who used his resources for the needy and poor in his day (Dafwang, 2016:43).

### **4. Formulation of Cooperative Societies and Non-Governmental Organizations for Community Service**

Cooperative movements worldwide have been used by Governments to mobilize citizens through self-help initiatives to complement the development efforts of the state. If politics is the practice of the distribution of power and resources within a Cooperative creates an enabling environment for community-based mobilization of resources from within and without the community and for the equitable distribution of same to all members. Unlike in a Government Agency with a hierarchy of administrative officers, Cooperative Societies operate a democratic process in which all members have equal opportunities in taking decisions in managing the Cooperative. Christians can impact positively the lives of many by investing in the formation and management of Cooperatives (Dafwang, 2016:45).

### **Conclusion**

God's rule over biblical ancient Israel from the patriarchal period to before the establishment of the monarchy was through human leaders (patriarchs, *Eved Adonai* like Moses and Joshua, elders and magistrates or judges) and the various covenants or laws. The theocratic governance in biblical ancient Israel reveals the following: human leaders were submissive to God's authority and not their self-will, which consequently resulted in accountable leadership; decentralization of power and authority that allowed for every substructure to actively participate in governance; leaders existed for the governed and not the other way round; and the laws (constitutional framework) were strictly adhered to with due punishment meted out to offenders without variance to status or gender.

All of the aforementioned improved the well-being of the Israelites and the quality of life was enhanced. God's rule over biblical ancient Israel through the various laws or covenants enacted through the human representatives made living better, created a cohesive society,

raised an accountable human leadership, prioritized human needs, enhanced interpersonal and communal safety, and accentuated social character concerned with achieving the good life. These are indices of a socially developed community and are instructive for an African continent that is riddled with factors militating against social development.

Therefore, the corporate existence of a self-governed people under the rule of God's law and sovereignty through divinely appointed human leaders can sustain social development in Africa. African countries can apply these aspects of theocratic governance in principle. Leaders should lead with a great sense of accountability because they occupy leadership positions for the benefit of the people; political power should be decentralized with every substrata of society participating in governance; and the rule of law should be maintained and enforced.

This article has shown that Christian theology is capable of considering the social implications of its belief framework and serves as an example of a theologically-based social investigation of human concern. Hence, as Bob Mitchell asserted in his proposition of Christian theology of change, Africa will achieve wholeness and be delivered from impoverishment when those who govern and the governed align with God's redemptive purposes in the world.

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