

The Socio-Political Relevance of 1 Peter 2: 13-17 in Nigeria

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Abstract

Governance, an integral part of society, cannot be overlooked, every citizen treasure good leadership. Experience, however, reveals that not all leaders provide good governance hence they are referred to as bad leaders. Previous researchers on 1 Peter 2:13-17 have focused on its literary connection with Romans 13: 1-7 and on the relationship between the Church and State without giving much attention to the socio-political context of I Peter 2:13-17. On the other hand, 1 Peter 2:13-17 has been interpreted variously. Firstly, that Christians be subordinate to their rulers, as long as that subordination does not place them in violation of God's will. Secondly, that they respect the superior order, and not implying loyalty. Yet, some Christians are being taught to disregard every order from political leaderships who doesn't meet Christ's standard in their leadership style. Hence, to be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake becomes a dilemma, not only within the political space, but even within the church. This paper, therefore, carried out an exegetical analysis of 1 Peter 2:13-17 using the socio-historical method. This is to garner social, historical, and cultural information necessary to better understand the text. Opinions on being subject to good/bad leadership were gathered using the social media handles, Twitter and WhatsApp. Collected data were exegetically and

content analysed. It is expected that the results of this would direct the contemporary Nigerian Christians toward right attitude to political and church leaders as well as civic responsibilities.

Keywords: Citizenship, Political leadership, Civic responsibilities, Socio-Historical Analysis

Introduction

The power and authority exercised by those in leadership positions cannot be overemphasised. Political leaders are charged with the responsibility to govern and manage the human and material resources which belong to the generality of the society¹. However, good governance is lacking in some nations of the world, Nigeria inclusive. Politicians see leadership positions as avenues for personal growth.² The situation is so appalling that some scholars³ note that as long as the Nigerian Constitution is dysfunctional, Constitutional provisions are suspended, and military culture of 'command and control' prevails, there cannot be effective leadership provision to build the nation and enshrine peace. Some Christians who know what governance should provide them are in dilemma of what their civic responsibility to a government who does not meet their expectations should be especially when considering some biblical injunctions as specified in I Peter 2:13-17. Therefore, this paper exegetically analyses 1 Peter 2: 13-17 using the socio-historical method in the context of governance in Nigeria. The aim is to garner social, historical, and cultural information necessary to better understand the text with the expectation that the contemporary Nigerian Christians would develop right attitude to politics and governance, as well as performing their civic responsibilities diligently.

Opinions on being subject to good/bad leadership were gathered using the social media the Twitter, WhatsApp and the Facebook. This is premised on McCombs and Shaw' Agenda-setting theory which suggests that citizen use mass media in making broadcasting their opinions on political activities with the aim of guiding political office holders in shaping and determining the issues of importance in

governance.⁴ This theory focuses on the individuals' agenda in relation to the agenda of their communities thereby serving as checks and balances for the activities of the political elites.⁵ Collected data were and content analysed analysis.

A Panoramic Overview of Governance in Nigeria

Five main categorisations of regimes/governance can be identified in Nigeria. These are, First Republic (1960-1966), First Coming of the Military (1966- 1979), Second Republic (1979-1983), Second coming of the Military (1984-1999), and Fourth Republic (1999-till date). The Third Republic combined the features of a military autocracy and a democratic dispensation (1992 and 1993). Yet there has always been a wide gap between the expectations of the citizens and what the government provides.⁶ The draconian Decrees and Edicts have not helped to expose corrupt practices in the Nigerian society. One such example is the Public Officers Decree which would not allow objective criticism against any public officer.⁷ Politics of regionalism, godfatherism, vote buying, nepotism, gender disparity, rotational presidency, electoral illegitimacy, inefficient and ineffective service delivery, administrative incompetence, lack of respect for Civil Liberties and over-ambition are banes to good governance in Nigeria.⁸ Osaghae notes that Nigeria's politics is dominated by corrupt political elites.⁹ They are selfish, high-handed, tribalistic and opportunistic small money-mined people.¹⁰ The Nigerian leaders use the mass media propaganda to meet their personal goals.¹¹ The leaders care less about the perceptions of domination, marginalization, alienation and discrimination of one ethnic group against the other.¹² Fatokun describes them as 'political parrots' who have used their 'sugar-coated peaks' to deceive Nigerians.¹³ Political corruption which has resulted in income inequality, low human development and poverty would not allow for security of life and property and good practice of the Rule of Law¹⁴ and in some of the politicians' media houses that present them as good, transparent leaders.¹⁵ There is reduced economic growth and inequality.¹⁶ Inappropriately, ethnicity has become a tool in the hands of politicians to exploit and suppress opposition.¹⁷ The militant ethnic

associations that on the onset, set up to protect ethnic interests “act like political thugs rarely supportive of democratic principles.”¹⁸ Apart from the fact that corruption impact the economic, social, political and environmental strata of the Nigeria¹⁹, the ‘bandwagon effect’ of corruption and its seemingly institutionalization, with the attendant slogans as ‘give and take’²⁰, ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’, national artificial debts, low ranks in the world and Mo Ibrahim index of African Governance, poor investment opportunities, high poverty level, poor infrastructural development, underdevelopment, and insecurity.²¹

Reforms and programmes that were put in place to ensure good governance by the democratic government would not work. The agencies established to curb corruption in Nigeria include the Criminal Code Act, Penal Code, Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, 2011, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act, ICPC Act, Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act, Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act, Public Complaints Commission Act, and the Central Bank of Nigerian Act²². These agencies have not been very effective as expected. Inegbedion observes that attempts at curbing corruption failed because of the social-political impediments that were not removed.²³ Usman Mohammed observes that one factor militating against effective eradication of corruption in Nigeria is leadership characterized by top – down approach, impunity of the senior officers and interference from the government.²⁴ They infringe on relevant human right principles such as the right to protest.²⁵ There is the argument that the EFCC is now an instrument in the hands of the ruling party to punish members of the opposition party, while closing their eyes to the corrupt people in the ruling party.²⁶

The resultant effect of bad leadership is that Nigerian citizens sometimes decide that as long as the government is not meeting their socioeconomic needs, there will be no need to turn out for voting during elections, neglecting their civic responsibilities.²⁷ More so, political reforms, when unjust may lead citizens to resort to civil obedience that is not harmful or nonviolent.²⁸ Gani Fawehinmi, the famous Nigerian Human Right Lawyer once said, “In a state of lawlessness, it is illegal to

be law abiding”²⁹ Corruption has been institutionalized that if not eradicated, all efforts at ensuring growth, development, security and good governance in Nigeria would be in futility.³⁰

Socio-historical Context of 1 Peter 2:13-17

Traditionally, I Peter, is ascribed to Peter the apostle of Jesus Christ because of the opening greetings and the use of the first person singular, which is taken to reflect Simon Peter of Galilee as the author. However, the excellence of the Greek, which compares favorably with that of Paul and stylistically with the best prose of the New Testament, the use of the Greek version of the Old Testament, the love of metaphors and the similarity with the writing of Thucydides makes it unpersuasive to ascribe 1 Peter to Simon Peter.³¹ There is also the apparent lack of reference to the life of Jesus, and the use of early Christian traditions in addition to the references to the persecution and the internal structure of ecclesiastical organization.³² Barlett³³, Vinson, Wilson and Mills³⁴ believe that the letter was written after Peter's death, by another Christian writing in Peter's name because they feel that Peter was an Aramaic-speaking fisherman, Peter must have been martyred at the time composition of the letter, the author's contact with epistle to the Romans, and the reference to Silvanus in I Peter 5:12 is an indication of Silas' composition of the letter. Yet, Achtemeier avers that Peter, aware of the imperative of mission must have improved his ability in the lingua franca of his Hellenistic world, the reason for the polished Greek language used.³⁵ The traditions contained in the sacred writings of Israel informed the thought of the author of this epistle, they did not furnish the fundamental basis for his convictions, the idea that the Christians had been given new life, and the similarity between the speeches of Peter in the Acts and I Peter is an evidence of Petrine authorship of I Peter.³⁶

I Peter has similar passages in Romans 13: 1-7, I Timothy 2:1-7, Titus 3:1-8. Nevertheless, the attitude to civil authority in I Peter is different from Romans 13:1-7. Both use a form of *υποτασσω* (“superior authorities”), and *εξουσια* borne by *αρχοντες* (governing authorities), and *ηγεμονοι* (governors) are used in the context of divine

establishment in the context of Romans 13, they are used in terms of 'human creatures' and subordination to the emperor in I Peter. *υπερεχω* ("be superior") in Romans 13: 1 is to superior authority of divine establishment, while its use in 1 Peter 2:13 refers to the king. In like manners, the phrases in Roman 13:5-4 and 1 Peter 2:14 are similar, but they are used in a divine context (Roman 13:5-4) and purely human emperor and his governors (1 Peter 2:14). The use of *φοβος* (fear) and *τιμαω* ("to honour") are in the same order in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. However, 1 Peter 2 refers to God, while Romans 13 refers to human powers. In Roman 13:3 *θιλημα* refers to human will, while it is to God's will in 1 Peter 2:15. Lastly, the primary motive for subordination in both passages is God's will, but 'because of the Lord' in 1 Peter, and 'because of [your] conscience' in Romans 13:5. The secondary reason in 1 Peter is to put an end to ignorant accusations against the Christians while it is to escape fear and gaining praise in Romans 13:3.³⁷ Vinson *et al* opine that 1 Peter 2: 13-17 was intended to make Christians look harmless and normal, have support during harsh treatment and find proper balance for their new way of life.³⁸

Summer opines that in all of these verses, the state government or civil authority stands uprightness, good conducts and morals that the Christians stood for, while the state in Revelation was assuming the place of God and the Christians were urged to resist it, even unto death.³⁹ The phrase "be subject" is a military or civil term meaning to "be in subordination", to the emperor, the Supreme leader, and the governor who enforces law by praising or punishing those who abide by, or disobey the Law respectively. It is an imperative and an obligation which requires total obedience.⁴⁰ There are however, differing views towards the interpretation of this passage. Guthrie would not comprehend why the audience should be subject to an authority as evil as under the Neronian persecution.⁴¹ There was bitter resentment towards Nero. In order to shift the blame from himself, Nero insisted it was the Christians who has set Rome on fire. He had his way because the Christians were already victims of certain slanders. More so, these Christians had some affiliation to the Jews who, most times show resentment to the Roman antisemitism. The Christians, in other words

became scapegoats. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells the story (Annals 15.44).⁴² They face unofficial local persecutions and they were not willing to participate in the general religio-cultural activities that normally held throughout the Roman Empire.⁴³ Nevertheless, Summer insists that the audience must be subject to the State authority as long as they are expecting to benefit from the State.⁴⁴ In cases where the dictates of the rulers were violating God's commands, the Christians would disobey and suffer the consequence because submission is not always obedience.⁴⁵

Socially the Christians were thought to have come from the lower strata of the society. These group of people are also economically distressed. They were referred to as "exiles and aliens" (v.11)." They were believers living in hostile surroundings and this captures the two dialectical elements, judgement and restoration, in the Old Testament.⁴⁶ They were seen as rural people who were politically and culturally dispossessed without any legal rights. It is assumed to be a Diaspora letter to suffering Christians of largely Gentile provenance.⁴⁷ In order to be acceptable within the society, they needed not only be good in quality (*αγθος*), but be good in quality and also be lovely, fine, attractive and winsome (*καλος*).⁴⁸ The theme of subordination which permeates its whole social teaching, is based upon the fundamental subordination of the believer to God and to His will. The author wanted the Church to be ordered according to the will of God, and that the church should be a peaceful and respected, good citizen of the larger community who should be admired for their exemplary behavior.⁴⁹

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Peter 2:13-17

¹³υποταγντε ουν παση αωθρωπινη κτισει δια τον κυριον ειτε βασιλει ως υπερεχοντι,¹⁴ειτε νγεμοσιν ως δι'αυτου πεμπομενοις εις εκδικησιν μεν κακοποιων επαινον δε αγαθοποιων, ¹⁵οτι ουτως εστιν το θελημα του θεου αγαθοποιουντας φιμουν την των αφπονων ανθρωπων αγνωσιαν, ¹⁶ως ελευθεροι, και μη ως επικαλυμμα εχοντες της κακιας την ελευθεριαν αλλ ως θεου

δουλοι.¹⁷ παντας τιμησατε, την αδελφοτητα αγαπατε, τον θεον φοβειστε, τον βασιλεα τιματε (1 Peter 2:13-17)

v.13a.υποταγντε (submit yourselves) from the verb υποτασσω. It is a military term meaning 'to rank under' (υπο, 'under', τασσω 'to arrange'). Be in subjection to, submit yourselves to (Vine Subject, Subjection 87). It is in the passive form, meaning 'set yourself under' or 'be subject to'. Vilson et al note, not 'obey unquestioningly' but 'act appropriately for your station'⁵⁰ The phrase παση ανθρωπινη κτισει in verse 13b is variously as interpreted as 'every human authority' (NIV), 'every human institution' (ESV, RSV, NASB), 'every ordinance of man' (KJV, NKJV). κτισει has the idea of humanity as creational goal, living being, new creation, the new heaven and earth in which death is abolished (I Cor.15:45, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal.6:15, Eph 2:15). There are no parallels for interpreting *ktisis* as 'institution'. It probably would mean 'subject for the Lord's sake to all kinds of people.'⁵¹ Κτίσις means that which is created.⁵² Human institution in this verse is seen as magistrates who have been created by divine right. So whether they are good or bad, Christian must submit to them.⁵³

The και μη ως επικαλυμμα εχοντες της κακιας την ελευθεριαν ('not as having your liberty for a veil of badness') of verse 16a connotes to submission to the civil authority and, not doing evil or disrespecting the law in the name of religion. The αλλ ως δουλοι θεου (but live as servants of God) of verse 16b is an adjective, indicating subjection without the idea of bondage. It is used metaphorically of spiritual, moral and ethical conditions.⁵⁴ To God alone must Christians be servants, but they must honour men. The τον θεον φοβειστε (fear God) of verse 17 emphasises verse 16b the more. The king is to be honoured, men/brethren are to be loved, Christians should however, fear God.

1 Peter 2:13-17 and Governance in the Nigerian Context.

The Nigerian context can be put side by side with the Petrine context. Christians have the word of God. They therefore profess purity, righteousness and perfection against those who are in politics. Nevertheless, some factors are discouraging them from being subject to

the social, political and economic dictates of the political leaders. Firstly, the sycophantic attitude, immoral rectitude, bad reputation and diminishing public confidence⁵⁵ in the Nigerian pastors is a bane to being subject to the political leaders. Christians know their pastors. They see many of their pastors becoming slaves to these politicians because of money, material possessions and positions. Many church leaders are guilty of supportive corruption⁵⁶ because they sing in praise of the bad politicians because of personal, selfish gains. Church members also see their leaders being at the mercy of the political leaders to rescue them when they err against the laws of the land. Yet, no nation would survive moral and ethical equilibrium of her citizens.⁵⁷ Secondly, most churches denominations teach that politics is a 'dirty game'. They teach that those who are involved in politics are 'sinners. Some Christians therefore insist that they would never be subject to the sinners for any reason. Some would not even sing the national anthem, nor say the national pledge. More so, the Christian have attained new life. They are above the 'sinners', though religiously and probably spiritually, and they are legally and socially exiles in space and time for they can't do as the 'world' is doing. Lastly, the 'bandwagon effect' is so much reflecting in Nigerian governance. Christians who join politics, most times, come out worse than their non-Christian counterparts. The slogan has most time been, 'if you can beat them, join them'. Many politicians who started well end becoming even worse than those they met doing evil because according to them those doing evil are making it!

Opinions on being subject to good/bad leadership will be gathered using the social media the Twitter and WhatsApp. There were 240 respondents. The respondents were many because of wide distribution of the questions on the WhatsApp. More so, the questions were left on the Twitter for about two weeks. 209 (87.08%) respondents averred that the government of the day has not done so much for the citizens, while 31 (12.91%) opine that they were enjoying good governance. 113 (47.08%) claimed that they would continue to obey the government irrespective of the hardship suffered from the government. 127 (52.91%). Majority of Christians are not ready to submit to the

governing authorities because these authorities have not been kind. This reveals that some Christians are not aligning with Peter's teaching on submitting to authorities.

Recommendations

Governance is an important component of human societies, since Christians must perform their civic rights and duties to the nation, this study recommends the following:

1. Christians should submit to those in positions of authority. They are citizens of this world and of God's rule. This will make them as role models for anyone who may want to disobey earthly ordinances.
2. Christians should not compromise their faith with the dictates of the governance. In cases where the earthly ordinances are against the will of God, they should not rebel against those in authority. However, they should be ready to correct the wrong doings, and be willing to suffer whatever consequences and penalty if need be.
3. Christians have the opportunity, and sometimes the mandate to govern the citizens. In such situations, they should rule with the fear of God, not as in being a boss or a dictator.
4. Christians should participate in electoral processes in order to select political leaders and directors who will rule with the fear of God.
5. Those in positions of should positively reward those who submit to constituted authorities. This will encourage other citizens to be willing to submit not as in forcing them to do so.
6. Also, Nigerian government should embrace e-governance. They should allow occasionally evaluation of their activities through the use of new media such as the Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and emerging technologies such as google form.

Conclusion

Governance in Nigeria is not done perfectly. The citizen have reasons to disrespect those in position of authority, disregard ungodly regulations and protest against bad policies. However, the injunction in 1 Peter 2:13-17 is that they should submit to all authority even when it is difficult to do so, as long as it doesn't affect their relationship with God. Billows states,

...stable politics is based upon compromise, upon toleration of political differences, and upon acceptance of defeat in the peaceful political process, or at any rate working to overturn such defeat through peaceful dialogues.⁵⁸

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