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Article

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GENOCIDE IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN MEN IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN POLITICS

Wokocha David Amadike¹ & Okengwu Kelechi²

Peace and Conflict Resolution Unit, School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria^{1&2}

Corresponding Email: da.wokocha@mouau.ed.ng¹

Abstract

Ever since relations between the citizen and the State were first defined, it has been understood that the preservation of political institutions best carters for the interests of the majority of citizens. Over the years this understanding between the citizen and the State has evolved to include various types and forms of political institutional frameworks. Governments whether, democracies, despotism, dictatorships or monarchies, manifest as the various regimes under which the children of God live and pursue their diverse sources of livelihoods. Nigeria's contemporary socio-political landscape cannot be said to be in line with the universal human desire for peace. The periods 1999-2024 have seen violent socio-political upheavals where armed insurgencies erupting from different parts of the country have caused death of innocent Nigerians particularly Christians. Accordingly, this paper argues that it is important for Christian men to show formidable representation via the roles they play in contemporary Nigerian politics. This is so because structural violence which affects Christians and non-Christians alike has been built into our various societies in the form of endemic poverty, economic crisis, disease and war. At all levels of government, the greed for material resources attached to political power has blinded our leaders to the needs and aspirations of our people. This paper is qualitative in nature and relies on secondary methods of data collection. This comprises of published and unpublished articles, periodicals, and government documents. In conclusion, this paper posits for Christian men particularly those in government to carry out a sustainable re-course to Christian principles and values that ensure accountability in governance in order to stamp out the perverted culture of violence to stamp out acts of genocide.

Keywords: Genocide, Security, Politics, Christian Men, Nigeria.

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Introduction

For the Nigerian State the need for purposeful political leadership at the centre is long overdue (Wokocha, 2018). This is evident in the mindless waste of the country's vast potentials. The tragic abuse of human life and dignity and the primitive accumulation of wealth by those in power. The tyranny of inept leadership is reflected in entrenched corruption in government at all levels. Presently, no government institution delivers up to maximum capacity to the citizens. Nigerians have lost faith in the administration of the State and its institutions due to weak or failed state status. According to Burton (1979), ever since relations between the citizen and the State were first defined, it has been understood that the preservation of social institutions and structures best carters for the interests of the majority of citizens. In Nigeria, the failure of government institutions, particularly security institutions are so glaring and does not need statistical data to prove so. Providing empirical evidence will only embarrass the government further. Several scholars (Wokocha, 2018; Rotberg, 2009; Burton, 1979) maintained that the State remains the fundamental purveyor of security. The State has an obligation through governance performance which is the delivery of high-quality political goods to citizens. Such goods are those intangible and hard to assess claims that citizens daily make on national and local governments. These political goods encapsulate citizen expectations, bundles of obligation, inform the local political culture and together give content to the social contract between ruler and ruled that is at the core of state and citizenry interactions (Rotberg, 2009 as cited in Wokocha, 2018). Significantly, the most important of these public goods is security.

Conceptual Analysis

This section will give a definition of key concepts used, to enable us understand the contexts under which they were used.

Genocide

Genocide is a crime defined under international law. Genocide means the deliberate and systematic destruction of national, ethnic, racial or religious group in whole or in part. The term was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 in his seminal work titled *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, to give a name to the slaughter called the Jewish Holocaust. An act of extermination of groups, particularly the Jews in Europe, by Nazi Germany during WWII 1939-194. Therefore, a new term, genocide, was needed to be minted to capture the meaning of the Jewish Holocaust as humanity emerged from an atrocity without historical antecedents (Conversi, 2006). The term genocide was later adopted into international law. Conversi (2006) posited that the exaltation of a dominant nation or people as superior to all others, particularly subaltern groups, inevitably leads to a series of discriminatory acts against competing nations, ranging from assimilation and marginalization to genocide. Importantly, the role of central governments and the military appear to be crucial in most instances of genocide, together with media censorship and popular misinformation. Therefore, with regards to Lemkin's work that coined the concept genocide, Jones (2006) stated that the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted the concept 'genocide' and further defined it as a crime against the law of nations. Importantly, this robust or enhanced definition by the United Nations conceptualised genocide as a crime that can be committed in times of peace, not only during wars.

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide definition is as follows:

Article I. The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II. In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- i. Killing members of the group
- ii. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- iii. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
- iv. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- v. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article III. The following acts shall be punishable:

- i. Genocide
- ii. Conspiracy to commit genocide
- iii. Direct and public incitement to commit genocide
- iv. Attempt to commit genocide
- v. Complicity in genocide

Significantly, Lemkin's conviction that genocide needed to be confronted, whatever the context, was broadly endorsed with the United Nations Convention's declaration that genocide is a crime whether committed in time of peace or in time of war (Jones, 2006:12-13).

Role

Role refers to clearly defining responsibilities, tasks, and expectations associated with a particular position or individual within an organization (Encyclopaedia Britannica, (2020). It involves specific duties, authorities, and accountabilities that individuals are responsible for in their respective stations. Role provides clarity and structure within a system of action by establishing clear boundaries and expectations for each position. It helps individuals in a society to understand their position requirements, responsibilities, and how their roles contribute to the overall objectives and success of their environment (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Role explanation is essential for effective organizational management, coordination, and performance evaluation. Best (2006) argues that in any given conflict situation there are two main characters or stakeholders and they have different roles in any given conflict. The first are the primary stakeholders. These are the most visible parties in a conflict; those who are commonly known. For instance, in the 2023 General Elections the primary stakeholders were, Peter Obi, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu. Each primary stakeholder had a role to play in the success of his political party in the last elections. The second category of stakeholders are referred to as the shadow party. They are the most dangerous party in any conflict because their involvement is by proxy rather than direct. Shadow parties complicate conflict situations because it is difficult to identify them and their roles in any given conflict. In politics there are shadow parties and it is important to identify the roles they play on time so that political plans can succeed. According to the Britannica dictionary (2020) role is defined as the character played by an actor or a part that someone or something has in a particular activity or situation. The definition of role could be extended

to mean the part someone has to play in a family, society or in a much larger group (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). This paper argues that there is a role for Christian men to play in Nigerian politics which Jesus Christ Himself defined when He said you are the Salt and the Light to the World.

Christian Man

In Scripture, we have the example of Jesus Christ, the Ultimate man. The Bible says Jesus worked with His hands and went on some dangerous fishing trips, but His example of being a man was much more than that. Jesus' life on earth was lived in full submission to the will of His Father. Philippians 2:8 says "And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death on a cross." For this paper a Christian man is defined as a man who follows Christ and whose action and behaviour reflects the following:

Key Characteristics & Actions

- i. **Humble & Servant-Hearted:** Emulates Jesus Christ by serving others, not demanding to be served, and showing gentleness.
- ii. **Loving & Compassionate:** Extends grace, offers encouragement, forgives, and loves his wife and family as Christ loved the church.
- iii. **Honourable & Pure:** Practices integrity, purity in heart and mind, guards his eyes and ears, and avoids deceit, gossip, and immorality.
- iv. **Leader & Provider:** Takes responsibility to provide for and spiritually guide his family, teaching them God's Word.
- v. **Courageous & Truthful:** Speaks truth in love, defends the rights of the needy, and is brave in standing for what's right, even when unpopular.
- vi. **Disciplined:** Manages his life, work, and finances responsibly, avoiding drunkenness and greed, and maintains a good reputation.

Politics

Scholars agree that there is no universal definition of politics (McAuley, 2003; Modebadze, 2010). Politics has been defined in many different ways. The different views of politics examined in this paper include: Politics as the art of government, politics as public affairs, politics as the study of conflict resolution, politics as the study of power. According to Modebadze (2010), people are social beings. They are members of society, only as such, in order to survive they have to co-operate and work together. Modebadze argued further that when human beings work together there is a need to make decisions about how difficulties that arise by working together are solved, or how the available resources to the group are to be shared out. Therefore, politics is the study of how such decisions are made. As such this paper would rely on two definitions of politics which are, politics as an art of government and the study of power. The political role of the Christian man is crucial to the arguments made in this paper. Thus, this paper would also describe politics as activities that relate to influencing the actions and policies of a government or getting and keeping power in a government. For the Christian man, political role could be seen as the active participation in the political processes of a State with the aim of influencing government decision-making (Andrain and Apter, 1995). This includes activities such as holding public or political office, being a candidate for an election, taking part in political campaigns, attending political rallies, contributing money towards party activities, taking part in political discussions, wearing party badges, and displaying party stickers. This study emphasizes that the political role of the Christian man goes beyond indirect forms such as voting and being aware of current

issues, but rather involves direct engagement in political activities and seeking to influence leaders at various levels of government and self-defence.

Weaknesses of contemporary Nigerian politics

- i. **Lack of Meritocracy:** Godfatherism often leads to the emergence of political candidates and officeholders who are not necessarily the most qualified or capable individuals. Instead, positions are often filled based on loyalty to the godfather rather than merit. This undermines the principles of inclusive governance, where individuals from diverse backgrounds and with different perspectives should have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.
- ii. **Nepotism, Ethnicity and Cronyism:** Godfathers tend to promote their own interests and those of their close associates, leading to the appointment of cronies' people from the same ethnic / religious group and family members to key positions. This practice excludes competent individuals who may be better suited for the roles, thereby limiting the diversity of voices and perspectives in governance and the armed forces.
- iii. **Lack of Accountability:** Godfathers exert significant influence over their proteges, often controlling their actions and decisions. This can result in a lack of accountability, as the godfather's interests may take precedence over the public's welfare. The proteges may feel obligated to prioritize the godfather's interests, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability in governance and security agencies.
- iv. **Stifling of Opposition:** Godfathers often exert control over the political landscape, making it difficult for opposition parties or independent candidates to thrive. This limits the choices available to voters and hampers the democratic process. Inclusive governance requires a level playing field where all individuals and parties have equal opportunities to participate and compete.
- v. **Corruption and Rent-Seeking:** Godfatherism is often associated with corruption and rent-seeking behaviour. The godfather may demand financial contributions or other favours from their proteges in exchange for political support. This perpetuates a culture of corruption and undermines transparency in governance.

Literature Review: Democracy and Christian Genocide

Since 1999, there have been stumbling blocks to having a strong democracy in Nigeria at all levels of government. Conflict erupts in different sectors, triggered by political competition, communal, ethnic and religious or resource allocation rivalries. All these pose major threats to democracy. Hence, politics in Nigeria is largely seen as a very dirty game. One which involves all levels of physical and spiritual corruption. Such abominations are what a normal Christian man would instantly avoid for the purity of his soul and sanity of mind. These are the prevailing conditions in contemporary Nigerian politics which discourage the average Christian man from engaging in the process. The chaotic political landscape in Nigeria reflects ideas and concepts which could be derived from reading books such as; *The Prince* written by Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Art of War* written by Sun Zu and *48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene; rather than the Holy Bible. These books with regards to democracy, propagate zero sum philosophies of winner takes all in politics hence, we experience the daredevil like approach to politics in Nigeria. These and other dark, radicalised literatures take it for granted that immoral acts are justified if they can help achieve political glory.

Importantly, in Nigeria, in 2022 and 2023 the National Broadcasting Commission NBC issued a total of 3,312 warnings to radio and TV stations to stop broadcasting cases of genocide and ethnic cleansing occurring in the country (Premiumtime news, 2022). Penalties

were issued to 125 stations in 2022 and 62 stations in 2023 respectively. Thereby highlighting a grand plan to suffocate information on the killings of Nigerians in general and Christians in particular. On the 16th of July, 2021 the NBC issued a directive to broadcast stations not to give details in their reports on the activities of insurgents, bandits, terrorists and kidnappers especially on the victims and number of casualties (The Cable, 2021). Scholars have argued that in instances of genocide, media censorship and popular misinformation by the central government played key roles (Conversi, 2006; Jones, 2006). This looked suspicious and an attempt to drastically reduce the impact of these atrocities on the larger society. Unfortunately, these violent conflicts such as insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder disputes, gang wars and separatist agitations have continued to afflict the country. These conflicts manifest as mass killings, property destruction, worsening poverty, and displacement. Consequently, Campell and Rotberg (2021) argued that, if a State's first obligation is to provide security and maintain a monopoly on the use of violence, then Nigeria has failed, even if some other aspects of the State still function. For these scholars (Campell and Rotberg) the unchecked violence perpetrated by several criminal groups increasingly threatens the government's grip on power.

According to the 2022 annual report published by Reliefweb international, in the last ten years over 60,000 lives were lost to Nigeria's security challenges. These figures are not adequate. The International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety) compiled a more comprehensive report published in February, 2024 titled *Jihadist Genocide of Christians in Nigeria Bloodiest in 2023*. This report argued that out of 14 ongoing Genocides in the World today Nigeria ranked the second largest deadliest genocide country with 150,000 deaths since 2009 (Intersociety,2024). According to this report Nigeria is second to Syria with over 306,000 deaths since 2011. This organisation gave a more reasonable presentation of the crisis on the ground. These include; 1,450 Christian deaths in 2023 in Benue state, 1,400 in Plateau, 822 in Kaduna, 730 in Niger. Also 8,400 Christians were abducted in 2023 and 840 never returned alive from captivity just to mention a few hot spots (Intersociety, 2024). During the Unknown Gunmen crisis, Intersociety (2024) stated that the Military and Police abducted 800 citizens in 2023 in the predominantly Christian South-East region, majority of whom are yet to return alive till date.

Intersociety (2024) further stated in its report that Jihadist herdsmen abducted 1000 South Easterners in 2023 in the South East and slaughtered 600 in captivity. Islamist terror Jihadists abducted 1,300 in 2023 in Niger state, 1100 in Kaduna state and 400 in FCT. It also argued in its report that 500 Churches were attacked in 2023 and 18,500 Churches since 2009 with 70 Christian Clerics kidnapped in 2023 and at least 25 killed (Intersociety, 2024). According to Intersociety (2024) over 300 Christian communities were sacked in 2023 and more than 1,100 communities have been sacked since 2009. On a large scale 50 million Christians have been religiously threatened by religious terrorists mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria since 2009. The various armed conflicts in Northern Nigeria have substantial negative consequences as millions of civilians particularly Christians are forced to flee and become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or cross international borders and become refugees. In Benue alone, there are over 3 million IDPs with millions of others emanating from theatres of war in Borno, Adamawa, Taraba and Yobe states (Nextier. database, 2023). Fresh numbers of IDPs have risen in Niger state, FCT, Nasarawa, Kogi, Ondo, Enugu states where extremist elements are operational (Nextier database, 2023).

Furthermore, Nigeria has gone through an avalanche of violent socio-political upheavals and armed insurgencies from 1999-2024, resulting in the death of innocent

Nigerians as stated above (Osaghae *et al* 2002). Importantly, the political class in the country needs to understand that when political power shifts amongst the major ethnic groups' it breeds legitimacy, peace, and development (Albert, 2002). Unfortunately, this is not so as structural violence has been built into Nigerian societies in the form of poverty, disease, and war. In Nigeria, conflicts arise over the control and distribution of political, economic, military, and legislative power, leading to marginalization and persecution of certain ethnic groups and the emergence of armed insurgencies. Western countries believe that democracy is the right system of government to foster good governance in Nigeria (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013). Yet a plethora of political complications stare Nigerians in the face. Despite the position of the Western countries on democracy, it has been proven that democracy alone does not guarantee economic growth, peace and development but rather a disciplined leadership. Consequently, with the absence of a disciplined ruling elite, national development, in-depth sociopolitical reforms, peace and stability are far from reality. Nigeria, therefore witnessed an increasing gap of inequality, corruption, ethnic conflicts, unhealthy ethnic competition and political intrigues, political marginalization, rising religious tension and religious insurgency, militancy and other related issues that bedevil the State.

Christian men in contemporary Nigerian politics

The involvement of Christian men in contemporary Nigerian politics has been a source of debate for quite some time. This argument must be dropped as Nigeria is constantly sliding into political chaos and economic instability. This is evident in the quality of life her citizens have experienced under the different democratic regimes from 1999 till date. The United Nations uses key indicators to establish the quality of life of citizens in any given country. These indicators called Human Development Index HDI (UNDP, 2024) are:

- i. A long and healthy life
- ii. Education – number of school years completed
- iii. A decent standard of living – per capita income

The human development index is one statistical model the United Nations uses to rank countries based on their score. In most cases these indicators are high based on the political leadership of the country under scrutiny (UNDP, 2024). As such, this paper states that, political leadership is key to the improvement of a people's standard of living. Therefore, if we agree that politics is the art of governance which involves how the available resources of a country are to be shared out amongst the component groups, which in turn increases the standard of living of citizens, then Christian men must be involved in this all-important process called politics. It is no coincidence that the Bible says "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked man rules, the people groan" (Proverbs 29: 2 NKJV).

Whether politics is a dirty game or not, Christian men must answer the clarion call to be involved in the political process of their various communities. Since our yardstick is Jesus Christ who was obedient to His Father, Our Lord God even until death, then we too as sons of God must obey to be involved in political affairs as desired by Him in Proverbs 29: 2. This is so because, the Lord knows that wicked men are more than willing to take up whatever position is available in government. Looking at Mordecai's case, he was able to change the system because he was an insider. Haman harassed and intimidated God's people until he wanted them all eliminated (Esther 4: 14 NKJV). Mordecai as the stepfather to Queen Esther could have hidden in the shadows, but as a Christian man who had compassion for others

and for the survival of his people, he ventured into politics. Mordecai was able to defend and bring his people to safety because he was involved in the political process of that time.

In the Bible, politicians like King Solomon were not given an option whether or not to join politics in Israel. Governance was thrust into Solomon's hands and he asked for godly wisdom from God to carry out his political responsibilities and roles. The important thing we should note here is that it greatly pleased God that Solomon didn't ask for anything else but wisdom to excel in politics. This excited our Lord God so much because Solomon's request was in line with Christ Jesus's instruction to be the salt and light of the world. In Matthew 5:13-16, the Bible calls on us Christian men to be the salt and the light of the world. As you know, Christ spoke in parables hence the value of salt is evident only when it is added either to food for improved taste, to meat as a preservative or to sores as a disinfectant. This means that one of the usefulness of the Christian man includes adding value to politics. Also, as light, showing the right way things should be done in a political sector that is full of darkness. Particularly, in reducing financial corruption and recklessness by increasing accountability in the use of public funds, just like Stephen did, the Apostle who was stoned to death. Light is useless if it does not give light. Salt is a preservative which means as Christian men we have been raised by God to preserve the societal value and norms of our day. Light brings illumination thereby expelling darkness. There is so much decay in contemporary Nigerian politics and society today because very few politicians have the interest of the masses at heart while many are so selfish and corrupt. So, as Christian men, we must make a difference when we get elected, appointed, or promoted into high offices. This is because you can effectively change a system from within the system, not outside the system. Daniel, Joseph, Shedrack, Mishack and Abednigo all served in the most idolatrous governments on earth.

Recommendation: Being the Salt and the Light of Nigerian Politics

Since we have agreed that the role of a Christian man has to do with the behaviour expected of him when he occupies a given social position or status. Thus, the role of a Christian man in politics is a comprehensive pattern of behaviour that is socially recognized, providing a means of identifying and placing this individual in a society. Therefore, for the Christian men, their role in politics also serves as a strategy for coping with recurrent situations and dealing with the roles and actions of others. Hence, Christian men should arise and get involved directly or indirectly in politics. Directly when they run for political offices and indirectly when they encourage godly people to join politics and also when they go out and fulfil their civic responsibilities.

i. Key Roles of Christian men in politics

- Integrity: Conduct themselves with honesty, transparency, and accountability
- Justice: Advocate for fairness, equality, and the protection of human rights
- Compassion: Show empathy and kindness to the vulnerable and marginalized
- Stewardship: Manage resources wisely and prioritize the common good

ii. Practical Applications of roles

- Engage in respectful dialogue and listen to diverse perspectives
- Stand up for the oppressed and advocate for justice
- Support policies that promote human flourishing and dignity
- Lead with humility and servant-leadership

iii. **Challenges and Opportunities**

- Navigate complex issues with biblical wisdom and grace
- Resist the temptation to conflate politics with idolatry
- Collaborate with others to build bridges and find common ground.

iv. **Self Defence:** This paper will finally recommend active participation of Christian men in Nigerian politics to create community security outfits. Communal security will act as first responders to any act of aggression against vulnerable Christian communities before the police or army arrives. The dangers facing Christianity in Nigeria today are of huge proportions and do not require docile participation. Importantly, the times in Nigeria reflect the recommendation made in the Scriptures in Luke 22:36, which directly calls for political action including self-defence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Christian men, we are called to be salt and light in the world, and this includes the realm of politics. The key point is to realise that we are involved anyway, we have no choice about being political because if we choose not to engage then our actions become a vote for the status quo – an evil world. Our faith should inform our approach to governance, leadership, and citizenship. This is because you can effectively change a system from within the system, not outside the system. In politics there are three types of stakeholders or parties to a conflict the Christian man should be aware of, firstly, the primary stakeholders. They are the ones you see arguing and fighting over an issue. Secondly, the secondary stakeholders, this group have primary ties with the primary stakeholders. Thirdly the shadow parties, these are the most dangerous parties or persons in politics, they will fund a conflict but don't want to be seen in any way connected to the conflict. Every Christian man in politics must at every given situation identify the shadow parties involved in each activity. As Christian men in politics, we have a unique calling to shape the world around us. May we embrace this responsibility with courage, faith, and a commitment to serving our communities. Finally, as King Solomon did, always ask God for wisdom to excel in politics. Let us pray for wisdom, discernment, and grace to fulfil our roles with integrity and excellence.

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**Note all Bible reference are of the New King James Version