Spirituality and Politics in the Davidic Reign in Ancient Israel and Politics in Africa

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Introduction

Humanity is created as both physical and spiritual. The physical aspects consist of dust, while the spiritual entity is the breath of God they received. The breath of God offers humanity the ability to commune with God and through which they can figure out what His purpose for their lives and attempt to fulfill the purpose. This indicates that without the breath of God in humanity the road to communication is closed, and humanity remains an empty carcass.

The word spirituality is derived from the word spirit *ruach,* which means wind or breath.[1] The spirit is invisible, just as the giver is invisible. Spirituality is better experienced than described. This makes it difficult to have a one word definition for it especially since its usage has gone out of religion to other spheres of life. Spirituality is not mentioned in either of the two Canons. Nevertheless its definition is still confined to the realm of religion because its practice still remains within the ambits of religion. Spirituality refers to a person's life and activity in relationship to God, and others in the community.[2] Kevin asserts that spirituality is the study and practice of a perfect life before God, a phenomenon that has to do with a small number of people in the strict sense of the word.[3]

Members of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) opine that spirituality is the influence of God's spirit in the life of humanity that enables them to discern God's will for their lives and the people around them.[4] It is also considered to be the subjection of human personal feeling or purpose, which is of a lower value, to allow the higher value, which is of God, to take precedence in all human actions. On the other hand, it is defined as an attempt to grow in sensitivity to self, to others, to non-human creation and to God. In this sense it finds expression in activities like reading, especially poetry, visiting museums, art galleries, walking, meditating and appreciating the work of nature. It is further defined as an exploration into what is involved in becoming human, a quest for full humanity.[5] These definitions indicate that spirituality is about having deep concern for the welfare of others and not for seeking personal comfort.

Every endeavour of humanity has its driving force which motivates humanity to achieve its aim. The driving force in governance today is politics. Politics is an institution created by humanity for the orderliness of the society through maintenance of laws by law enforcement agents. Politics in ancient Israel was carried out by the kings because its mode of politics was monarchical. The power resides in the king, but it is generally applied in fighting war against their Palestinian enemies. By this the politics played by David, even though monarchical had a theocratic flavour because he saw Yahweh the as the President and the de-facto of the afiars of the nation.

Spirituality in the Old Testament Texts and Context

Discussing or writing on the theory and practice of spirituality, one will be tempted at first to refer to the New Testament with focus on the four Gospels and the Pauline epistles as the only material for the subject and ignore the relevance of the Old Testament with a (total extermination of a group of people in favour of another for the purpose of possessing their landed property) wave of the hand. The claim of equal inspiration and value of the two canons is contested in the practice and study of spirituality. The popular notion is that Old Testament texts is difficult to read and understand, lacks hermeneutical principles, are full of unnecessary repetitions and contradictions, and the content is opposed to the current happenings in human endeavours. It is a book that is seen as promoting war, violence, murder, rivalry and such other vices. Some consider it as a book that goes against basic fundamental human rights especially when one considers the aspect of ethnic cleansing.

Coupled with the above, is the long history of its development, which historical-critical scholarship has indicated, yet on which there seems to be no consensus, thus making the Hebrew literature a book that is often ignored for

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[1] A. E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, 2. Eugene H. Peterson, "Spirituality" in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, (ed.), *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005, 766.

[2] Henry Rack, *20th Spirituality*, Epworth: Epworth Press, 1969, 2.

[3] Ibid 767.

[4] EATWOT Members "Spiritualities" in Virginia Fabella & R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Dictionary of the Third World Theologies,* New York: Maryknoll, 2000, 189.

[5] John R. Hinnells, (ed.), *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions,* second Edition, London: Peguin, 1995, 495.

the purposes of spiritual enrichment. There is also a wide cultural gap between the world of the Old Testament and the contemporary world. Christo Lombaard avers that the Old Testament is infrequently drawn from for spiritual exercises, and continues to play a much less substantial role in the church than its proportions in the Bible would suggest. Even when it is referred to it is more or less done in a metaphorical sense rather than the exegetical or theological.[6] But it is important to note that virtually all that humanity takes pride in today in religion, economy, social life, and politics have their foundation firmly rooted in the Old Testament.

The methods and practice of human endeavours for instance in agriculture, engineering, medicine, education, judiciary, family life, legislature including principles of fundamental human rights that social critics apply today all these are what the Old Testament characters had practiced and the post modern humanity still replicates them. The historical scholarship of the Old Testament, on the other hand, does not in any way stand at odds with spirituality scholarship. The complexity of the Old Testament text and context is to reemphasize issues that promote positive ideals and ideas.

Politics in Ancient Israel

The Old Testament canon does not offer a concise systematic political ideology of the Hebrews,[7] but from one era to another, scholars have derived inductively the political history of the people as they move from one community to another, distinguishing their life styles among the people they co-habited with. The record of ancient Israel's political system that is available to scholars is the account on the subject as enunciated in the Hebrew literature which is supplemented by limited archaeological evidences and documents from other West Asian polities of the biblical era. Just like other cultures the political culture of the Israelites evolved from a primitive level to the advanced level.

In the history and religion of Israel, as explained in the Old Testament, we can deduce three political organizations: local, tribal and national. These three were hinged strongly on religious observances of sacrifice, entering into covenant relationship, and making of vows thereby making Israel's political system theocratic. This development made Roland de Vaux to assert that the traditional political system of ancient Israel was essentially a theo-political phenomenon, a means by which humanity sought salvation from natural and supernatural life threatening events.[8] The local political institution had its origin in the family and it was the first constitutional epoch. During this period the Patriarch was the repository of governmental powers in its legislative, judiciary and executive system. He was the military leader and decided terms of the foreign relations. It is noted that he received instructions from Yahweh and made covenants with Him.

In this context he built altars, offered sacrifice and blessed his subjects. Abraham laid the foundation of local political system where he led his servants in war against Chedorlaomer when the latter fought against Sodom and took Lot, Abraham's nephew, captive. In local political system the leader combines both the political and religious office together taking decisions. We did not know much about the practice of local political system of Isaac and Jacob other than that the duo were heads of their families, playing the role of training their children in the arts of shepherding, particularly of Jacob and his family. The absence of this record might be that there were no inter tribal war at their era. Local political system is hereditary in that the eldest son (or the one circumstances have ordained), is expected to take over the headship from the father.

The increase in population of the Israelite led to the second type of political system which is tribal. The tribal polity emanated from the twelve sons of Jacob who settled in Egypt as a result of intense famine in Palestine. The victory of the Egyptians against the Hyksos reduced the Israelites to slavery who served their masters under heavy burden. Under this rule there were no more Patriarchs and consequently no leadership, yet they multiplied in number and families developed in each tribe. In Egypt, Israel maintained local political system because their servitude in Egypt could not give them the opportunity to organize themselves as a nation. This is evident in the instruction of Yahweh to Moses as to the observance of Passover feast, "every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses" which indicates that local political system was still in vogue.

The practice of tribal political system was introduced in Israel through the advice of Jethro to Moses. As the Israelites left Egypt, Moses was the religious and political figure in the land. It was Jethro who we can technically say brought tribal political system to Israel. This might be that this system of government had been in existence in Ancient Near East, especially in Midian, where Jethro was a priest. The advice of Jethro made Moses to appoint *zekenim (*elders) and *shotrim* (maintainers of peace). The main duty of the elders and maintainers of peace was to administer customary law of the tribes, perhaps recalling in a veiled way the Patriarchal covenants. Israel was formed as a nation at the foot of Mount Sinai when they entered into covenant relationship with Yahweh. This event also brought about the constitution of the nation of which everyone was

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[6] www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article accessed on 19th March, 2014.

[7] John Bimson, *The World of the Old Testament,* London: Scripture Union, 1988, 138.

[8] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, John McHugh (Translator), London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961, 93. John Bright, *A History of Israel,* Revised Edition, London: SCM, 1972, 99.

supposed to obey, because contravening it, brought about Yahweh's wrath which was visited on the person and at times the whole nation.

The first constitutional epoch after the Exodus was the founding of tribal confederacy with Moses as the Prime Minister while Yahweh was the President. Bernhard avers that the Mosaic constitution formally laid the foundation of Israelite polity.[9] In tribal confederacy the *Ebed Adonai* is the visible head of government who should constantly be spiritually alert so as to discern and declare the purpose of Yahweh for the nation. Under his governance are various officers such as priests and elders who were to work together with him. The *Eved Adonai* also shared the responsibilities of the priest whom he invested into office.[10] At this time Aaron and his sons had their covenant with Yahweh who established them as hereditary priesthood with certain constitutional functions as well as cultic. The *zekenim* were responsible for the day-to -day governance of the people and also function as the head of their individual tribes. These *zekenim* were the people that encouraged all male who had reached the age of twenty to enroll in the army to fight the enemies of the nation since there was no standing army. In the leadership of the nation by Moses, he groomed Joshua as the leader of the nation who later actually took over from him though with Yahweh's instruction.

The first constitutional epoch continued after the death of Moses, with Joshua as the leader who led the nation to the Promised Land after much armed struggle with the Canaanites. The nation's polity under Joshua seemed to be stable because there was a national leaders who coordinated the military activities but with low spiritual undertone. Towards the later age of Joshua he gathered the twelve tribes at Shechem and they had a pact which sealed their religious unity and established a certain form of national unity among the tribes. Most Old Testament scholars compared this to amphictyony, in which Greek cities where grouped around one sanctuary.[11] Unfortunately, Joshua did not train a leader who would take over from him as Moses did for him, and this left the nation without a leader for some centuries and the Canaanites had the opportunity to wage war against the nation plundering their farm at each year's harvest season. In this era regional *shofetim* (judges) appeared from time to time, at least one in each generation. The *shofetim* acted as proto-national leader under God's direct sovereignty, primarily in the militia realm. None of the *shofetim* enjoyed cooperation from all the tribes throughout the period in which they governed the nation. Each judge was supported by his /her clan, mainly with few from other tribes only for the purpose of waging war against their enemies.

David as King in Israel and Use of Spirituality

The first constitutional epoch came to an end with the advent of monarchy, which was instituted by Samuel reluctantly. Thus, the institution of monarchy opened a new constitutional epoch in Israel's political life. Samuel who was the last of the judges tried to revive national unity in the traditional manner through a single nationwide leader. Under his rule, he attempted to create a conventional monarchy planning for his two sons to take over from him by dividing the nation into two parts. But this plan was foiled by the *zekenim* who demanded for a king for the purpose of having a leader who would lead them to war against their enemies especially the Philistines. Samuel had the notion that the visible head in governance should have limited authority which should not be extended to spiritual matter. It was this limited authority that beclouded his mind that made him to declare Saul as a *nagid* (prince) and not as a king because to be a king in Samuel's view is to usurp the very office and position of Yahweh which would spell doom for the nation. He emphasized the idea of sharing of power between the prince and the prophet. The struggle between him and Saul did not give a strong foundation for monarchy as Saul was endowed with monarchic power, Samuel transformed his own role from that of a judge to that of a prophet who kept the monarch within the limit of the constitution. Saul did not exercise much authority apart from his military office. The tribes retained their administrative autonomy. Saul and Samuel fell apart till death parted them.

David's public appearance in Israel's history was recorded in two different versions. The first is his presence in the house of Saul as a skilful player on the ly,re so that by means of music the mental disorder from which Saul was suffering may be allayed. The second is his appearance at the battlefield between Israel and the Philistines where he offered to fight for Israel and consequently conquered Goliath, the war lord of the Philistines. The two accounts revealed the spirituality of David in the political life in Israel. From time immemorial music has been a veritable tool of spirituality and for him to be a musician who could play the lyre to ease the torment of evil spirit in Saul shows that David was highly spiritually endowed. In occupational therapy it is said that music aids the work of the clinician by heightening the spirituality of the patient.[12] For David to play music to offer healing

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[9] Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament,* London: Longman,*1961, 57.*

[10] Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,vol 1,* translated by J. A, Baker, London: SCM, 1961,290.

[11] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions,* Translated by John Mc Hugh, London: Dartonn, Longman & Todd, 1961, 93; *ibid. 88;* John Bright, *A History of Israel,* Revised Edition, London: SCM, 1974, 171-172; T. N. O. Quarcoopome, *History and Religion of Israel,* Ibadan: African University, 1986, 93.

[12] http:occupational-therapy.advanceweb.com accessed on 19th March, 2014.

indicates that he is spiritually inclined. At the battle field between him and Goliath, the latter boasted in his weapons and experience in fighting war from his youth and cursed the young lad by his gods, but the young David replied Goliath that he had come to him in the name of the Lord of hosts. David conquered Goliath through the instrumentality of his spirituality. These narratives express the deep religious sense attached to power and human endeavours in Israel.

David became king after the demise of Saul and he could be said to be the first to formally assume the mantle of kingship in Israel. He was made king through a combination of divine designation with the anointing by a prophet and by popular consent of the people represented by the *zekenim* of both Judah and Israel. David, upon assumption of office as king, realized that politics and spirituality are twin brothers that would make him to have the favour of God and loyalty of the people. It is obvious that Israel was monolithic since the formation of the nation at Sinai, but nonetheless their contact with the Canaanites had exposed them to the worship of fertility gods: Baal and Asherah,[13] more importantly that they had changed occupation from nomads to agrarian. This acculturation had contaminated their monolithic spirituality. This made the king to emphasize spirituality in his reign not only to reenact the old covenant but also to unite the people who had been divided physically and psychologically through the civil war between the house of Saul and people of Judah.

The spirituality of the king was demonstrated as he was pronounced king' He sought for the Ark of the Covenant which represents the visible presence of Yahweh in the nation with the intention to have a permanent place of residence for it in Jerusalem. He offered burnt and peace offerings to the Lord with various musical instruments in praise of Yahweh, after which he blessed the people. This action indicates that he is an enthusiast of Yahweh.[14] The king was dissatisfied by the fact that he lived in the house of cedar and the Ark of the Covenant lived in the tent. He allowed Nathan and Gad the prophets of Yahweh and the Zadokites as the priestly guardians of the Ark to reside in the palace for the purpose of strengthening his spirituality constantly. He consulted Nathan the prophet when he had the notion to build a house of the Lord where the Ark of the Covenant will be placed so that all the people of Israel could have direct access to the Lord. As he thought of his spiritual life likewise he desired to develop the spiritual life of the citizens.

The spirituality of David moved Yahweh to make an everlasting covenant with him, by which, till date, his descendant still rule Israel. The spirituality of David was devoid of all forms of pride as he humbly accepted the rebuke of Nathan when he committed adultery and killed Uriah. The rebuke of the prophet led to the writing of Psalm 51.[15] David conducted a census for the purpose of general levy and to show how large his army was, and this caused Yahweh's anger. Yahweh sent Gad the prophet to him, he accepted his folly and he pleaded for Yahweh's mercy to relent in his anger. It takes a king whose spirituality is high to do this.

Spirituality and Politics in Africa

Politics as a means of governance is as old as creation. This made Plato to affirm that human beings are political animals because it being practiced in all facts of life from nuclear family to the larger society. Politics according to Danladi Musa is all about acquiring and using power to influence decisions that affect a nation.[16] Politics is considered as a dirty game by some religious adherents and as a result they distance themselves from it and at times castigate against the politicians as not being godly. Politics is part of culture, thereby it is difficult to cut people away from it. Politics is always associated with religion, the latter being an easy tool for electioneering campaigns.

Christian participation in politics in Africa differs from one country to another, and the same applies to geo-political zones in Nigeria. The two popular religions: Islam and Christianity had their stronghold in different parts of Africa. The predominant religion in the North of Africa is Islam, as a result of which the majority of politicians are Muslims. The popular religion in the South of Sahara is Christianity hence the politicians there are Christians. The fact still remains that the Euro-American missionaries did not have politics as part of their vision and mission in Africa and it is obvious that they did not introduce politics to Africa. Samuel Kunhiyop posits that owing to the strong links between the missionaries and the colonial masters, the missionaries, especially in Northern part of Nigeria, discouraged Christians from participating in active politics.[17] But the Western education which was one of the tools of evangelization of Africa opened the African eyes to the evils of colonialism and made them to be involved in political activities. Their involvement in politics had created the urge to fight for the independence from colonial rulers applying the tool of their religious affiliation. This confirms the postulation of Bolaji Idowu of Yoruba extraction which is true of all ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa in general, that they are incurably religious, and religion forms the foundation and the all-governing

[13] Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, 137.

[14] *Op. cit*. Quarcoopome, 152.

[15] Michael Wilcock, *The Message of the Psalms 1 – 72,* Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001, 185.

[16] Danladi Musa, *Christians in Politics: How can they be effective*?, Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2009, 62.

[17] Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics,* Grand Rapids: Hippo Books, 2008, 84.

principle of life for them.[18] This indicates that they apply spirituality in all life's endeavours.

The problem that confronts the society today in the application of spirituality in politics as opposed to the past is that there are no verifiable significant evidences that promote and enhance human dignity. Rather inhumanity to humanity is the evidence which the society experience in the political arena of which there is no end in sight. The application of spirituality is now subjective and strictly personal, which is expressed only within the four walls of the place of worship and probably when campaigning for votes only to show a caricature of it to cajole people. The purpose of God creating spirituality in humanity is to make the intangible tangible and invisible visible to the populace.[19] Most politicians when voted into office seem to have forgotten or compromised their faith in the discharge of their political responsibilities to the electorates. Though the fact remains that the Church does not have politics as a doctrine, yet she expects a Christian when elected into office to apply the principles of Biblical characters like David, Joseph, Josiah and Hezekiah in governance since he/she has been exposed to the lives of these people in the study of the Bible and their roles in the political life of the Israelites.

It is difficult to determine whether the politicians discover their natural talents and God given spiritual gifts before vying for political offices. It may be this defect that contributes to the problem of inapplicability of spirituality in leadership. This is the difference between them and David, who saw that his fighting against wild animals in the field to rescue his flocks and killing them indicate his prowess in leadership. The appointment of David was directly from Yahweh, a situation which does not happen in political life of today. Many that are in politics either appoint themselves or are persuaded by their community, probably as a result of their level of education, wealth or connection, neglecting to consider if they lead godly lives. In this kind of situation the application of spirituality in political office will be at the low ebb self and personal ego will reign supreme.

An examination of little development that politics has wrought in Nigeria, reveals that in the first political era, chapels was built in some government houses with priests conducting worship and declaring the will of God. This made the first era politicians apply spirituality for the betterment of the populace. In that era there was free education, free health care services and building of infrastructure that made the economy boom. But the reverse is the case today. Some politicians have no time to meet with God; the day of worship is when they hold political meetings. Even when prophets declare the voice of God which will definitely oppose their way of life and governance, some can be angry, vent their anger on the prophet, slap him and ignore his warnings. The politicians who do this, think that it is possible to separate religion from politics owing to post modernity. But no matter the level of civilization Africa may attain, it will be impossible to divorce religion and politics. Even in traditional monarchical government politics and religion are intertwined in the person of the king, let alone this age when the instrument that made politics popular was originated by the missionaries and sacred book is used to back the practice of politics.

Spirituality cannot be undermined in the political life of a nation. It has the power of suppressing the ego, and evolves the emotion of sympathy that graduates to empathy. It creates the urge to apply the golden rule "so whatever you wish men would do to you, do so to them" (Matt. &: 12 RSV), and the supreme law "love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22 39 RSV). In all its ramifications spirituality makes humanity to put others in one's shoes, which will restrict inflicting the tendency of enslaving ones neighbour in his/her father, banish all forms of suppression, oppression and inflicting unnecessary hardship on others. Spirituality is the communitarian dimension of having a fulfilled life which is both vertical and horizontal.

Conclusion

The undeniable fact of life is that humanity is both physical and spiritual as both cannot be divorced; likewise spirituality which stems from pure form of religion and politics cannot be separated. Spirituality that enhance human dignity as expressed in Davidic dynasty has a tripod stand which Mic 6: 8 states "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God? O' Donnell analyzed the tripod stand in this way "to do justice" means working to build a just society politically, where all forms of discrimination such as gender, ethnic, and social strata will be eliminated. "Loving tenderly" depicts building inter personal relationship by treating everyone with mutual respect and having open mind in all issues that tend to promote peace and unity. "Walking humbly with God" means obeying the voice of God even if it goes against ones personal will.[20]

The absence of spirituality in any political life results in unreliability, disloyalty, deception, and self centeredness. Presently there is display of high level of insensitivity to the plight of the masses by some political leaders. There

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[18] Bolaji Idowu,, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Ibadan: Longman, 1996, 5.*

[19] Juliana Sanavoe "Spirituality and Theological Education in Africa" in Emmanuel Martery Protus Kemdrim & Deji Ayegboyin, eds. *West African Association of Theological Institutions, Spirituality and Theological Education in Africa, 2002, 1.*

[20] O' Donnell Dorr, "Evangelization: The Challenge of Modernity" in *Trends in Mission,* Mary Knoll, Orbis book, 1991, 131.

is pursuant of personal ambition at the expense of the life of the poor masses. How can one explain a situation when many citizens were killed and several other lied in pain in hospitals with various degrees of injury as a result of a bomb blast and less than twenty four hours after the unfortunate incident, a sitting President who is seeking for a second term in office went for a campaign trail. This is a demonstration of lack of spirituality and empathy. The absence of spirituality close the ears of the political leaders to laudable ideas from local and international bodies that can alleviate the suffering of the electorates.

Therefore, this paper recommends that African political leaders should endeavour to apply their religious spiritual inclination as espoused in the tenets of their religious affiliation to ease the unnecessary burden that make life unbearable for the electorates. In as much as there are religious functionaries which they attach themselves to from time to time, there is need to heed the warnings of the prophets so that the citizens can enjoy the natural resources endowed the nation by the Divine. If this done politics will no longer be termed as a dirty game.

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