



## PLAYING GOD IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE: TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY<sup>1</sup>

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*Received 21 November 2012; accepted 8 January 2013*

The Nigerian universe is a religious one; all phenomena and experiences are apparently explained in the supernatural. It is in this sense that religion and politics are inseparable, though ambidextrous. In this sense, the theoretical or constitutional separation thesis differs from the apodictic demonstrative reality. The latter form of this relationship attributes all events to acts of God, whether good or evil, but more evil than good. The act, will or grace of God (Insha'Allah) in the Nigerian political experience, in the assessment of Christian principles, calls for an evaluation of the political and politicians' recourse to God in the face of anti-God and anti-people display of political power. It is the argument of this paper that God is an alibi in Nigerian political development, thus making the political system to play God. Through the gristmill of critical analysis, it is argued that Christian eligible voters in a democracy bear crucial responsibility of not only correctly and critically, in a contextual manner, interpreting the scriptures, but also going beyond prayer for leadership, which source and ascendancy to power is questionable and illegitimate. The Christian responsibility must therefore be comprehensive, authentic and pragmatic.

Keywords: Democracy, Christian, politics, power, religion, God, theologian.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Igboin, B. O. 2013. Playing God in Nigerian political experience: towards a Christian responsibility, *Limes: Borderland Studies* 6(2): 159–174.

### Introduction

The notoriety and incurability of African religiosity has been taken to a very high level that all aspects of life – cosmic and super-sensible – are explained in religious terms. This constitutes the religious epistemologies that we are poised to examine in

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<sup>1</sup> The earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference organised by the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan between 20th and 23rd February, 2011.

this paper. The reality of this has indeed questioned the universality of the claim of the Enlightenment, especially the doctrine of the God of the Gaps. In other words, one is poised to agree that with the theory and practice of religion as understood in contemporary Africa, the claim that the Enlightenment has obliterated religious fervour cannot be further substantiated. Religion has continuously provided model for the explanation of life or existential phenomena. It is no longer true that where scientific discoveries have not reached that provide the basis for religion, but rather all aspects of human reality come under the purview and interpretation of religion. And in fact, the post-9/11 discourse has brought back to the limelight the critical and pivotal role of religion in global politics. For an African, therefore, the separation thesis – the argument that religion and politics do not mix – cannot be sustained practically because of the inter-penetration of the two worlds – here and hereafter.

However, the main thrust of this enterprise is to interrogate that relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria. The argument here is that while it is widely accepted that religion and politics mix strongly, it is also the case that theocracy has no place in the democratisation process of Nigeria. We tend to argue that political and politicians' recourse to religion and God is self-serving. It is our argument that even though political leaders claim to trust in God for the political development of the country, God actually is an alibi, or at worst, they are simply playing God. This position is ossified by the fact that every political leader claims to be a staunch member of a particular religious affiliation. The assumption and public declaration that they are being sent or backed by God to become leaders in spite of the widespread electoral malpractices call for critical attention. But insofar as there are obvious discrepancies between their claim to God and the practice of democracy, it becomes incumbent upon us to awaken the Christians to the crucial responsibility laid upon them by the dictate of their faith in a democratising country like Nigeria.

### Understanding the act of playing God

The word, play carries several literal meanings. In one sense, it has to do with imitation or taking a role of someone else in a scene or pretend to be someone or something else, an impostor; trick and deceive somebody. Francis Collins argues that the two words "playing God" are indeed "powerful". These two words had been understood in relation to the activities of medical personnel engaged in "end-of-life decisions". However, this primordial understanding has given way to a wider scope that involves genetics, which has largely, in scientific realm denied the existence of a God. When genetics leaves the level of disease to alteration of human traits, the question of playing God naturally arises (Peters 1997: ix).

Even though playing God is not found in standard theological and political texts, Ted Peters submits that the phrase can be understood from three broad but related perspectives. One, it can mean the act of "learning God's awesome secrets" (Peters 1997: 10). By this is meant that human beings tend to acquire "Godlike powers" to do great things that have not been possibly imagined, not only in medicine but also in human and societal administration. As Thomas A. Shannon, Jr. admits, "such power is truly awe-inspiring" (Peters 1997: 10).

The second meaning of playing God has to do with the practical wielding of “power over life and death” (Peters 1997: 10). This is exercised by those whom the patients or victims see as the only hope for their survival. Whether or not the doctors believe they have omnipotence in this circumstance, the patients or victims readily ascribe it to them. This meaning works with two basic assumptions, namely: decisions concerning life and death fall within the ambit of God’s prerogative and not human beings. Second, when human beings make such decisions, they “transgress divinely imposed limits” (Peters 1997: 10). Of course, these assumptions create an air of anxiety, which is the basis of continuous controversial debates in medical ethics.

The third meaning of playing God has to do with “the use of science to alter life and influence human evolution” (Peters 1997: 11). In practice, this means that the scientists are substituting themselves for God in the determination of the nature of human beings. “It refers to placing ourselves where God and only God belongs” (Peters 1997: 11). The application of this meaning shows that human beings have gone beyond “the limits of a reasonable dominion over nature” (Peters 1997: 11) and administration of human community.

In practical political application with regard to Nigeria, playing God is demonstrated in not only spicing political speeches with God and his grace (God talk), even though it is not meant, but also the prophetic assumption of God’s imprimatur to act with immunity and impunity, and deception of the electorate in God’s name. For instance, killing of innocent citizens has been carried out without ever officially identifying the instigators and perpetrators of the crimes. Even when they are known, there have been ample cases in which nothing is done to bring them to book. Today, the killers of Bola Ige, a serving minister under Obasanjo administration, are not known. Those who were accused of Pa Alfred Rewane have been discharged and acquitted, thus meaning his killers are not known. Again, Most Rev. John Onaiyekan rightly captured the culture of immunity and impunity when he said: “there is a lot of stealing but there is no thief” (see *The News* 2010: 42) in Nigeria. Ironically, it is those who are stealing that preach against corruption.

Playing God in this sense means that the politicians cannot be challenged just as the belief that no one challenges God. The politicians wield the power over life and death as demonstrated in the examples above. The desire to stay tight in power has been given a metaphysical interpretation. In this case, it is not just that they are learning the secret of God in the act of politicking but naturally, in the second meaning of playing God, acting as God. In this scenario, god-fatherism, patronage politics and raw violence take the central stage of political activities.

On the third tranche of meaning is the do-or-die politics in which reference to God is inconsequential, but politicians actually substitute themselves as God and act, using all force and power under their command, to achieve or retain political power. For example, former President Olusegun Obasanjo played God in this sense when he claimed that he had prayed for a successor and God told him that it was Umaru Musa Yar’Adua that was chosen. However, if Yar’Adua refused to take up the job as president, it was his fault and not God’s (see *Daily Sun* 2009: 30). This was Yar’Adua who, as the governor of Katsina State, had been battling with his health, which he contin-

ued to battle until he died on 5th May 2010. Whatever the political manoeuvre, he got to the presidency and declared that the process that brought him to power was fraught with irregularities. Yar'Adua also played God by assuming that he was able to engineer a sound political evolution when he lacked the legitimacy to do so. In spite of the fact that Uwais Committee's report was lauded, which he initiated, it was the same Yar'Adua that altered the pivot of the report thus giving the National Assembly the leeway to bastardise it finally.

As will be shown later, there is a confusion of human knowledge and the wisdom to decide on how to use it. It is the lack of this wisdom that makes human beings to believe and act in such a way as though they were gods:

“<...> human beings have an ability to do Godlike things: to exercise creativity, to direct and redirect processes of nature. But the warnings also imply that these powers may be used rashly, that it may be better for people to remember that they are creatures and not gods” (Peters 1997: 12).

The unwillingness of human beings to accept their limit, either consciously or unconsciously has resulted in hubris. When pride overrides knowledge, the application of the latter usually leads to disaster. In realising this, the United Methodist Church issued the following statement:

“The image of God, in which humanity is created, confers both power and responsibility to use power as God does: neither by coercion nor tyranny, but by love. Failure to accept limits by rejecting or ignoring accountability to God and interdependency with the whole of creation is the essence of sin” (see, for instance, *United Methodist Church...* 1992: 114).

The consequence of playing God in Nigerian polity is coated in myth of political development. The true is that when man plays God, he will receive the “arrow of God”, but then “things will fall apart” for him (see *When Man Plays God* 2010: 26). Georges Sorel for instance believes the revolutionaries that ushered in the 20th century needed some catalysts to keep their hopes alive; that was the myth that would bring capitalism to its knees. Translated, it was a myth, a political myth, which by definition is “the forming of a future, in some indeterminate time” (Sorel 1961: 124). In his book *Political Myth: on the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*, Roland Boer defines myth as “a second-order semiological system built on a primary system of meaning that deforms meaning and is regressive and depoliticized” (Boer 2009: 7). However, he realises the political interpretation and function of myth by those who wield power. Power is indeed the crucible of political engagement (Boer 2009: 7). But is God's power the same as political?

### Religion, politics and power relations

It is difficult in African terms to differentiate between God and religion. In most cases, both terms are used interchangeably. However, our interest here is to ossify the argument that the core of religions in Africa is God, and that when there are discussions on religion, God cannot be possibly excused. Having said that, it is needless to

say that there is a fusion of politics and religion in Africa. This is because all aspects of African life have a strong link to the super-sensible. This is why the binary theory of the West has found it almost impossible to be instantiated in Africa. This fusion, most Western, and even some African scholars argue, is brought about by the social conditions of life of the Africans:

“The new patterns of religion and politics discernible in Africa and other places are of course affected by phenomena such as state failure, globalisation and economic crises, as many commentators have pointed out, but that is not the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter, rather, is that many people in the world <...> consider power as having its ultimate origin in the invisible world” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 390).

Stephen Ellis’ and Gerrie ter Haar’s study of African epistemologies in relation to religion and politics glaringly shows that “spiritual power constitutes real and effective power” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 390) which makes religion and politics two facets of power that are constantly interacting. While Cletus N. Chukwu sees such relation as distorting the harmony of politics in Nigeria, and therefore, religion and politics should be permanently severed (Chukwu 2008), Adam K. Arap Chepkwony argues that *traditional* Africans are constantly conscious of such inseparable relationship, which defines and provides answers to their metaphysical and existential questions and needs in human community. In particular, African politicians, no matter their religious inclination forthrightly engage African spirituality in the contest and context of power. According to him,

“African politicians pay great attention to African spirituality as a source of power to rise to leadership position. The African religious worldview contributes substantially in shaping the directions of politics in a particular community or country” (Chepkwony 2008: 17).

In spite of the fact that Western model of governance – separation of Church and State – has affected “the reality of spiritual power in Africa’s public life” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 391), this has not in significant way obscure “cultivating spiritual power” as “a vital component of a political career, as is widely attested by the popular media” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 391) This is why “politics in Africa cannot be fully understood without taking its religious dimension into account” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 393).

The authentic religious detour, as Philip Goodchild argues, can be found in renunciation. It is here that human flourishing, which is the essence of power can be properly located. Human flourishing in general, he posits, has a transcendental source that can be activated by means of renunciation. According to him:

“Indeed in religious life it is believed that flourishing does not lie within human power alone. It is achieved through the aid of some special divine grace, ancestral blessing or sacred power. This detour in the path toward wealth opens up a realm for the transcendent, conceived perhaps in terms of grace, mystery, the sacred, special insight, authority, spiritual presence, or another world” (Goodchild 2009: xi).

In politics, “a religious life that authorizes the obligations and regulations through which this distribution occurs is the guarantee of <...> life” (Goodchild 2009: xiii). In practical terms, authorisation falls within the ambit of power.

In religion as well as politics, acquiring and wielding power is pivotal. In this sense, two kinds of power are distinguished, namely: the physical, which derives from gravity, solar radiation, chemical and atomic bonds. This can be found in power stations and military hardware. The second is the purely human power of the will expressed in speech and action. In modern time, these two concepts of power are required in the administration of the society. In Cartesian conceptualisation, the “human will may act on human will through the image of threat of physical power” (Goodchild 2009: 29). This understanding reflects on Carl Schmitt’s definition of the political, which has to do with the differentiation between friend and enemy. The binary conception gives rise to war, the exercise of power, which distinguishes in concrete reality between friend and enemy (Schmitt 1996: 351). This impactful political power is raw as it can, and does, “publicly dispose of the lives of people, whether of the lives of enemy or of one’s own people” (Goodchild 2009: 29). Superogatory to these two kinds of power is the “intangible energy of the political, irreducible to physical force” (Goodchild 2009: 30). The thrust of political power derives its strength from customs, traditions, markets, etc. The intangible energy that superogates the fore-going forms the kernel of the third dimension of power: “It is the authority that guides and authorises the action of the will on will. It is this energy that is the subject matter of a political theology” (Goodchild 2009: 30).

In mediating between power in the realms of the religious and the political, the former holds “theological concept of power” that believes that sovereignty and reason are crucial to the exercise of the latter. But the political power in attempting to free itself from the nozzle of the religious has remained linked in practice to the religious notion of power. Therefore, “power rests on meta-human flows of beliefs and desires” (Goodchild 2009: 36). As Goodchild elucidates:

“At stake here is the essence of theology, for absolute sovereign power is a theological notion. Where even the tyrant depends on the credulity of his subjects, only the divine is supposed to possess absolute self-sufficiency. Short of true social models, the notion of unrestrained power is encountered, to varying degrees, in forms of monotheistic belief. The divine is the model for the essence of power and the essence of reason. Only the power of the creator can be unmediated. The sovereign subject of modern political thought – the basis for freedom and democracy – is not free from the constraints of being and desire. Instead, it contains its own theological presuppositions deriving from the history of its emergence” (Goodchild 2009: 36).

In Nigerian politics as well as African in general, the moral nature of power is determined in the manner it is exercised (Ellis, Haar 2007: 395). This theoretical reasoning is sound. But in actual dispensation of power, its moral nature which is usually believed to have been derived from God is denied. In politics, the emic and the etic positions are different. Politicians have always tried to forge a symbiosis; a synergy they believe is capable of endearing the electorate to them and vice versa, as well as the outside world. “The spiritualisation of politics can thus play into the hands of the worst dictators, who are able to use religion as a channel of political support” (Ellis, Haar 2007: 394).

The spiritualisation of politics is an act of playing God. For one, it deceives the electorate and places the politicians in a position whereby the former is able to look up to them for survival. Chepkwony strongly argues that African spirituality is the source of political power in Africa. The African religious worldview plays crucial role in shaping African politics. This dimension of African religious symbiosis with politics is constructive in the sense that those who believe and utilise it know the obvious implications. As he puts it:

“African politicians are thus aware that they do well to avoid violating traditional religious vitality. They also know too well how to resonate with the echoes of African religious view in their daily encounter with the people. In that way, alert politicians exploit African piety to gain the attention and commitment of their constituents” (Chepkwony 2008: 25–26).

The same notion of playing God is also depicted by many of those who claim to be Christians in politics. The denial of political values or democracy dividends is what constitutes playing God. This is because it is believed that God is just and fair and anyone that assumes a relationship to him must in like manner dispense his character. As Chepkwony concludes, “African people traditionally understood that God requires that proper governance be just, fair and tolerant” (Chepkwony 2008: 18). Playing God here means the confusion of knowledge with the wisdom to decide its utility. This position is suffusing in Nigerian political scene and recourse to it is a commonplace. This makes us to think of the politicians as theologians-in-chief.

### Politicians as theologians-in-chief

Boer talks about the “theological metaphorization” of politics. This evokes “a culture of geo-piety that shows up in the explicit production” of political language (Boer 2009: 3, 4). In Africa, religion is the language of interpretation of reality (Ellis, Haar 2007: 390). This medium of expression and communication is a gift from God. Since the African universe is a religio-sphere, its language of interpretation must necessarily be religious. Boer argues that this is not a peculiar feature of Africa. Even though modernity denies this realm of religious language in favour of logical or empirical one, that is, a second order fact, the reality of compelling religious resurgences across the globe has drawn critical attention to the power of religious language. This, according to him, can be seen clearly in the relationship between America and Israel (Boer 2009: 146).

According to Boer, Ronald Reagan exhibited the tradition of “theologian in chief” following the step of Thomas Jefferson, the American first theologian-in-chief, who evoked the context of Old Testament prophetic text in American picture as a basis for America-Israel relations. George W. Bush also followed suit. He enunciated the beliefs shared by both nations (Boer 2009: 146–147). Bush’s status as theologian-in-chief was incandescent when Osama bin Laden claimed responsibility for attacking the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. For bin Laden, hatred towards America is a religious duty which he committedly mobilised Muslims to embrace. According to him:

“On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies...is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it... We – with God’s help – call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it” (Mandel 2002: 103).

In response to the attacks, Bush quotes from Psalm 23 to conclude his speech:

“Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. Today, our nation saw evil <...>. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me” (Mandel 2002: 105).

Bin Laden’s political language is engrossed in religious colouration to vilify and dehumanise the Americans just as Bush’s is a recourse to the same source: God. The reprisal attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq become an antithesis of God’s injunction to leave vengeance for him. As David R. Mandel concludes:

“We now know that the greatest acts of evil during that period were caused not by those ostensible heretics but by those who believed with certainty that they were acting in accordance with the word of God and were, therefore, on the side of righteousness and against the side of evil” (Mandel 2002: 105).

The concept of theologian-in-chief goes with geo-piety. According to Burke O. Long, “geopiety is the curious mix of romantic imagination, historical rectitude, and attachment to a physical place” (Long 2003: 1). Thus for Americans, America is the “Blessed Land”, the “Holy Land” in the order of the biblical Israel. The Akurinu Churches of Kenya see Mount Kenya as Mount Sinai where the Law was given to Moses just as the Ethiopians address themselves as the heirs of Judah (Kim, S. Kim, K. 2008: 93). These expressions have strong emotional evocation and reverence to a physical place such that its defence is inoculated into the psyche of the citizens. In Nigeria, many pastors have inserted Nigeria into the Bible in the course of their preaching, and have instructed their congregations to do so always with the belief of invoking God’s blessings on the country. While the politicians talk about blessed Nigeria, it has been shown that many of them willingly desecrate the land with blood of “political enemies”. Bin Laden, calling Americans God’s enemy, summoned Muslims to attack America for occupying “the Land of the Two Holy Mosques” (Mandel 2002: 104).

In Nigeria, every national event is understood to be an act of God. The political leaders assume the position of theologian-in-chief when they actively interpret national events in religious language as a way of evoking sympathy and assuaging the citizens. Nosakhare Isekhure in his “Our God and Allah as Alibi” espouses with picturesque reality the several “acts of God or Allah” in Nigeria. According to him, Nigerian politicians turned theologians-in-chief have continuously shifted blame from themselves to the doorsteps of God. As he puts it:

“We have refused to own up to realities of development by pretending that if we shift blames from one sector to another and no one is ready to admit failure, then such blames should be shifted to a more comfortable terrain which is the celestial realm.



The Almighty Creator becomes the handy alibi. This is the genesis of the obsession in the past several years to explain our human shortcomings by deliberately holding God responsible for actions and activities we have planned, researched, and wilfully executed” (Isekhure 1996: A14).

The unwillingness to accept blame is the reason for the underdevelopment of the country.

Isekhure argues that it is only the potentiated person that is the one on whom the responsibility of acting the role of the creator lies (Isekhure 1996: A14). Unfortunately, most Nigerian political leaders are largely potentiated in their resolve to give spiritual seal to human narcissism. It is in this sense that colonialism, independence in 1960, military interventions, the Nigerian Civil War, political killings and the inability of the state to find the instigators and perpetrators, stolen electoral mandate, rigging of election, selection and imposition of candidates, parallel political primaries or lack of internal democracy, thuggery, armed robbery, kidnapping, abuse of power or corruption and the few who have been caught, Jos conflicts, *Boko Haram* and other ethnic, religio-political conflicts, bomb blasts, etc. are all acts of God. However, no one apparently accepts personal political failure as an act of God. As Isekhure heckles, if these evils are the acts of God, “then what is now the business of the so-called Satan or Devil?” (Isekhure 1996: A14).

In specific terms, Nigerian presidents and governors as well as their supporters and opponents assume the status of theologian-in-chief. Ibrahim Babangida has been known widely as one who usually has recourse to Insha’Allah (by the grace of God) even when he does not mean what he is saying. The annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election was an act of God, because by so doing, the Judiciary would be cleansed. According to Gani Fawehinmi, “Babangida has insulted God by defying the wishes of the electorate because the will of the people is the voice of God” (*African Concord* 1993: 15). Prince C. A. Hastrup, former deputy governor of Osun State reacted to the annulment by saying that the act is a “call for the wrath of God” (*African Concord* 1993: 15). In his reaction, Lamidi Adedibu maintained that “by the grace of God, it will materialise” (Omobowale, Olutayo 2007: 349). Shortly after many of the supporters of June 12 later joined forces against it, which is also “an act of God.” And June 12 was not realised eventually, and never to be realised. Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola was also a theologian-in-chief. According to him,

“I am by the infinite grace of God, and the wishes of the people of this country, the President-elect.... I am the custodian of a sacred mandate, freely given, which I cannot surrender unless the people so demand” (*African Concord* 1993: 5).

Just as Bush claimed that his presidency was God-ordained (South Letter 2003: 50), Olusegun Obasanjo said his and his policies were God’s (see *Nigerian Tribune* 2004: 3). Obasanjo has consistently insisted that his second ascendancy to power is likened to the story of Joseph who was elevated from the prison to the position of prime minister in Egypt. In the case of Obasanjo, some say that his is one described in Ecclesiastes 4:14: “For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor”. The late President Yar’Adua was always referring to

the grace of God in his pursuit of the rule of law in spite of the many breaches of the rule by his government.

President Goodluck Jonathan also spices his speeches with the grace of God when faced with national challenges, especially since the bomb blasts that occurred between October 2010 and September 2011. Recently, he reiterated his belief that he was elected by the grace of God. People widely believe that he relied on God to win the presidential election in April 2011. However, even after he has been elected, he has not ceased to campaign and call for continuous prayers for the realisation of his transformation agenda. He has argued against the position of his critics that he would not do anything against his God-given nature. In other words, that he would not be a lion, Goliath or an Army General in order to bring his agenda for the nation to bear. In spite of the teething security challenges the country is facing at present for which the national legislators passed a vote of no confidence, the instigators of which he claims to know, his argument is that their time would naturally wear off. According to him, "Every Goliath has an exposed forehead; all the Goliaths that are stumbling blocks to the development and growth of this country, God will expose their heads for the stone of David" (for details of the President's position see *The Punch* (26) 2011: 10; *The Nation* 2011: 1, 4; for reactions to his speech see *The Guardian* 2011; *The Punch* (27) 2011). The philosophico-theological, as well as moral imperative here is that David, against all odds or dissuasions, identified and headed straight for the unveiled part of Goliath's head rather than continued in ceaseless prayers. In fact, faith without works is dead.

Recently, the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) claimed that the registration of voters exercise would be successful by the grace of God. The Senators, also acting as gods, wanted to be cocksure that the extension period sought by the Chairman would be enough. Senator Mahmud Kanti Bello said that "acts of God do not have figures"<sup>2</sup>, thus implying that mathematical precision should not be disguised in the glove of religious belief that has continued to deceive the people. In other words, Jega should be scientific in his administration of the Commission.

According to Goodchild, "political power is thus unthinkable without a body that supports it, whether such a body is a weapon of violence, a sovereign authority, or money itself" (Goodchild 2009: 38). This statement is true in our reflection of patronage politics that suffuses the country. Patronage politics in Nigeria means that the politicians must "deliver the goods" in order to survive the political terrain. The "goods" are not in terms of social amenities provided for the generality of the people but the "settlement" of those who act as staunch godfathers. In this case, there is a personalisation of political power which in reality hampers democratic ideals and ossifies authoritarianism (Omobowale, Olutayo 2007: 426).

In their philosophical inquiry into *Amala-Gbegiri* politics as propounded by Lamidi Adedibu in Ibadan, Oyo State, Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale and Akinpelu Olanrewaju Olutayo did not lose sight of the theologian-in-chief concept

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Attahiru Jega was invited to the Nigerian Senate to explain issues concerning the Voters' Registration on 26th January, 2011, watched via NTA.

when they report that Adedibu argued that leaders are products of God. In an interview, Adedibu stated:

“Leadership in social organisations emerges by the will of God. Before you start the organisation, you will have the command over the selection of the leaders. One will determine who will be number one, two, three and so on <...>. One does not need to canvass before knowing who the leaders should be” (Omobowale, Olutayo 2007: 426).

This is the reason nation-states cannot, in their nature, get rid of the evil in the world. This, again, is because they either generate them or are engrossed in political power, economic interests, cultural clashes, etc. The power to overcome evil is believed to lie with God and his faithful people who exercise clean and clear moral conscience. Thus, to confuse the role of God, as exercised by the theologians-in-chief, is a stark theological error, which has been interpreted correctly as blasphemy (Oyeshola 2007: 14) or playing God. What is, therefore, the responsibility of the Christians in a democratic setting in the face of serious narcissistic fantasies or political myths?

### The Christian responsibility in democracy

The act of playing God in Nigerian political experience is not only advanced by political leaders, many Christian leaders support it. This truly puts the Church in a fix, because she ought to be guided by its historical tradition of truth. Julien Marie Cosmao got this impression right when he said that:

“The decrease in the number of people who allow themselves to be guided by the ecclesiastical institution only serves to heighten the impression that the Church and Christianity are vanishing historical realities. The same impression is evident within the Church, producing either disenchantment or defensive focus on ‘eternal’ principles or traditions” (Oyeshola 2007: 7).

Cosmao’s thought could have been informed by Harold J. Berman’s, in his examination of the critical role played by the Catholic Church in Western law and democracy. According to Berman, “the Papal Revolution gave birth to the modern Western state—the first example of which, paradoxically, was the church itself” (Berman 1983: 113). He elucidates further: “the combination of ...two factors, the political and the intellectual, helped to produce modern Western legal systems, of which the first was the new system of canon law of the Roman Catholic Church” (Berman 1983: 86). The point being made here is the critical role played by the Church in shaping Western society before the separation thesis. It needs to be argued that despite the separation thesis, the two factors – political and intellectual – that aided the Western revolution are as important today particularly in Nigeria’s political system as they were then. Even though Berman claimed that there were no direct influences of Jewish and Islamic law in the formative development of Western legal system, thus painting an exclusive picture (Berman 1983: 160), David Funk (1984) believed otherwise. Funk tasked Berman to explore the Jewish system of usury, which might have influenced the canon law, and the Islamic business organisation that might have also influenced “the *lex mercatoria* via the Moors in Spain” (Funk 1984: 698).

The import of the foregoing on the Nigerian Christians is that, unlike the medieval period above, where the Church had absolute power in the determination of political and legal decisions, and where, though arguably as Berman portrayed that there were no external influences, the Nigerian case is different. Nigeria is a pluralistic society as the West has become today. Thus, diverse inclinations, leanings, ideas and beliefs contest for public space, most of the times trying to outdo the other. This is truly the picture in Nigeria between Christian south perceived to lean towards the West and Muslim north perceived to lean towards Arab civilisation. The contest for political power in Nigeria is hotly between the two sides of the divide, and with great expectation from the masses. And it is this that puts the burden on Christians to rise up in the midst of threats to their individual and corporate existence as being presently witnessed in the Boko Haram onslaught.

A great deal of positive changes is still being hopefully expected from Christianity. Christianity's contributions to democratic process in Nigeria are not only limited to prayers for those in authority, such prayers when said, require that the leaders who are not true representatives of the people, who have rigged themselves into position of "authority" must be prayed out so that there will be peace and tranquillity for both Christians and the country at large. This is one prophetic role of the Church in contemporary democratic experience. To pray for those who get to power through violence to retain their place in governance means to play God; assuming God supports violence and rigging of election.

Faithful Christians have continued to realise that human suffering results from political, cultural and structural systems that, in practice, do not respect the principles of justice and fairness. Yet these systems are being prayed for, when indeed they are not created by God, neither are they part of "the nature of things even though they appear that way" (Oyeshola 2007: 12). These systems are creations of human beings for their benefits. Given this, Christians must realise that helping suffering individuals must go beyond relief materials, though important, to working to change the systems that foist the grubby conditions on them. Encountering the world is one possible solution, whereby church proliferation is discountenanced because it seemingly adds to the complexity of the already comatose system. It should be through impacting positively on the system by active engagement (Oyeshola 2007: 12). For now, while many Christians are getting involved actively in the process of change, a few of them have lived above board.

The envisaged change has come to other nations in history through proper contextualisation of the Bible. When committed Christians stuck to the contextual application of the Bible, the evidence or outcome is that the prevailing systems changed. Martin Luther King, Jr., Desmond Tutu, among others have demonstrated this. In fact, "it is true that religions such as Christianity – especially through the Bible – have been the inspiration for revolutionary movements" (Boer 2009: 6). These are men who stood up as the prophets of justice and continued in it for the empowerment of their people, which eventually led to liberation (Kasenene 2008: 14). Peter Kasenene implies that Christians play God when they do not stand to pronounce and actively defend the principles and values of God's kingdom they profess to hold. According to him:

“Religious leaders and members of the Church have the duty to be prophetic and to clearly stand for the values of the kingdom: justice and peace, truth and unity, integrity and the preferential love and care for the afflicted and oppressed. These must be post-Pentecostal leaders, who are courageous and uncompromising on the fundamentals of faith” (Kasenene 2008: 15).

The practice of biblical interpretation by some men of God that “shows the extent to which biblical interpretation and the methods of biblical interpretation to serve the ends of the politically powerful” (Kim, S., Kim, K. 2008: 93) must be stopped.

It must be realised that Christians as heavenly citizens double as citizens of their representative countries. They are affected by the politics of their countries. This dual citizenship, to be sure, creates harmony as well as disharmony and conflict. But this can be mediated through sound theological inspiration, philosophical reflection and pragmatic actions. Christian leaders properly called, have this great responsibility. This is because they have invaluable influence on their members who are also citizens of their countries. Therefore, “their intervention in politics is not a choice but an imperative” (Kim, S., Kim, K. 2008: 93). In the midst of the retinue of leaders, the possibility of deceptive ones cannot be ruled out. That is why it is imperative for the Church to discern the true ones – who can be conscience of the society. “Church leaders are the conscience of the society, but an uninformed conscience can mislead” (Kim, S., Kim, K. 2008: 93). The business of the prophets is to bring about God’s “politics” of justice, compassion and peace in order to re-bind the people to God. It is this mission and the response of the audience that brings change, growth and challenging alternative in a decimated polity. Unfortunately, in Nigeria there is a dearth of prophets in spite of the claim of high level of religiosity and prophetism.

Finally, Christians in Nigeria must know that their active participation or non-participation in politics is not value-free; there are consequences. This must spur them to engage in active and positive Bible-inspired action to escape from the practice of playing God which has suffused the country. They must know that:

“In our democratic system, the elected leaders and the bureaucrats will bear punishment, but with a democracy all eligible voters bear responsibility. Saints will be saved but will go through hardship, as did the Godly people of the times of exile <...>. All eligible voters have a share in whether our leaders at every level of government steer us toward the holy or toward the profane” (Morford 2003: 407).

Christian participation in politics, it is strongly believed, will reduce the incidence of playing God in Nigeria.

## Conclusions

We have argued the theoretical assumption of God’s grace depicted in the act of playing God has no corresponding positive tacitly. This is demonstrated in the growing vices that are thoroughly human creations or machinations but expressed as acts of God. The pervasive culture of volleying blame, buck passing and excuses that stops at the celestial doorsteps has derelictious effects on national development, and it is “God-playing”. So unfortunate is the fact that many Christians so-called and the the-

ologians-in-chief engage in this abuse of the biblical texts to hoodwink the people. Therefore, the rise of prophetic dimension to the polity becomes the urgent responsibility of the Christians, who can truly affect, and are affected by the polity. The needed revolution is one that Christians can champion with their active, but unspotted participation in politics. They can be involved through active partisan and non-partisan participation and intervention in politics. It is only then that a new generation of positive change can emerge in which playing God will be an anathema, and the dividends of democracy delivered as a necessary result of democratic system.

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## DIEVO VAIDMUO NIGERIJOS POLITINIUOSE POTYRIUOSE: LINK KRIKŠČIONIŠKOSIOS ATSAKOMYBĖS

Benson O. Igboin

Santrauka

Nigerijos pasaulis yra religinis: visi reiškiniai ir potyriai akivaizdžiai aiškiami antgamtiškumu. Šia prasme religija ir politika yra neatskiriamos, tačiau dviveidės. Tad teorinio ar konstitucinio atsidalijimo tezė skiriasi nuo apodiktinės akivaizdžios realybės. Pastaroji šio santykio forma visus įvykius priskiria Dievo veiklai, – tiek gėrį, tiek ir blogį, tačiau labiau blogį nei gėrį. Išanalizavus krikščionybės principus, Nigerijos politiniame gyvenime Dievo (Insha’Allah) veikla, valia ar malonė antdievo bei antžmonių, demonstruojančių politinę galią, akivaizdoje kviečia įvertinti politikos ir politikų atsigrėžimą į Dievą. Šiame straipsnyje argumentuojama, kad Dievas yra Nigerijos politinės raidos alibi,

verčiantis politinę sistemą vaidinti Dievą. Pasitelkiant griežtą kritinę analizę, įrodinėjama, kad tinkami rinkėjai demokratijos sąlygomis yra atsakingi ne tik korektiškai ir kritiškai, kontekstualiū būdu interpretuodami šventuosius raštus, bet taip pat ir dėl vadovavimo, kurio šaltinis ir įtaka valdžiai yra abejotini ir neteisėti. Todėl krikščioniškoji atsakomybė turi būti visapusė, autentiška ir pragmatiška.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: demokratija, krikščioniškoji atsakomybė, politika, galia, religija, Dievas, teologas.

Nuoroda į šį straipsnį: Igboin, B. O. 2013. Dievo vaidmuo Nigerijos politiniuose potyriuose: link krikščioniškosios atsakomybės, *Limes: Borderland Studies* 6(2): 159–174.