

PREVENTION OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Stakeholders' Perceptions

PROCEEDINGS OF A 2-DAY WORKSHOP ON THE
PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN 2011
ELECTIONS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA, 9-10 MARCH, 2011

Edited by

Is-haq O. Oloyede
Olabisi Olasehinde-Williams

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The Role of Religion in Preventing Electoral Violence: The Christian Perspective

Dr. Caleb O. Ogunkunle

INTRODUCTION

There are two broad categories of evil, namely: natural and moral evils. Natural evil does not involve human will and act. It is an aspect of nature that works against the welfare of man. Examples of natural evil include hurricanes, earthquakes, flood, storms, pestilence, volcanic eruption etc each of which produces large loss of lives and properties. Moral evil has its root in lust, greed and hatred in men. It involves the will, choice and action of men, the free moral agents. Examples of moral evil are: war, crime,

cruelty, class struggle, discrimination and injustice. While natural evil is not preventable by man, moral evil is. Incidentally, electoral violence, which has been a source of concern all over the world and especially in developing nations of which Nigeria belong can be categorised under moral evil. This is because each of the causes of electoral violence is preventable by man.

Writing on the 2003 general elections, Samuel C. Ugoh concludes his paper by saying that "the 2003 election witnessed less violence and death than the previous ones, which indicated that Nigerian voters are becoming more matured".¹ The aim of this paper is to proffer solution to the problems associated with electoral violence with a view to having a hitch-free April 2011 election in Kwara State in particular and Nigeria in general. Therefore, this paper examines the role of religion in preventing electoral violence. A historical method is adopted as relevant literature on electoral violence is examined. The historical method is corroborated with exegetical method as two passages namely, Acts 1:21-26 and 6:1-7 are considered with a view to understanding the principles of election used in the Holy Bible and the need to prevent any form of violence.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Election: According to *the Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*, the verb to "elect" means to choose someone for an official position by voting. Thus, for our context, election is the process whereby people choose individuals and transfer power from one regime to another through ballot box.

Electoral Violence

Jeff Fischer defines electoral violence as "any random organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process."² Otiye Igbuzor's definition is equally

appropriate for our context. He says:

Electoral violence is any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities including pre, during and post election periods and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral process.³

Corroborating this, I. S. Popoola says:

Political violence can be described as a behavioural concept in which aggrieved or agitated individuals or groups, resort to acts of muscle-flexing, verbal and physical assault, thuggery, rioting, protesting, killing, maiming, destruction of valuable property, and arson, among others.⁴

Religion

Religion means different thing to different people. *The Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged* has seven different definitions for religion. One of them is adopted in this paper. In essence, religion is belief in a divine power who is to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator and ruler of the universe.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Ordinarily, election which is expected to be a legitimate way of choosing and transferring power from one regime to another through the ballot has been subjected to various abuses in Nigeria. This is because of electoral violence that has been associated with various elections since independence in 1960. I.S. Popoola enunciates:

Since Nigeria became an independent country on October 1, 1960 conducting a violence-free election remains a goal yet to be

attained. From the first federal election after independence in 1964 to that of 1983 and 2003, electioneering in Nigeria is usually characterised by thuggery and political violence.⁵

There have been several cases of victimisation and humiliation of political opponents, threatening and killing of individuals; burning of homes and destruction of properties etc.⁶ A recent case of political killing took place in Ibadan, the Oyo State Capital on Thursday, December 30, 2010 when the factional Chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Oyo State Chapter, Alhaji Abdul Lateef Salako, popularly known as Eleweomo was murdered. The killing was carried out during the second leg of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) congress, ordered by the National Working Committee (NWC).⁷

There are five stages of electoral process, and electoral violence can occur at any of these stages. These include:

- (a) Identity or registration violence: This occurs at the time of registration when each of the political parties is mobilising members or votes.
- (b) Campaign violence: This occurs when rival political parties seek to disrupt the opponent's campaigns through threat and intimidation of voters and candidates.
- (c) Voting or balloting violence: This occurs on the day of election when rivals oppose each other at the polling stations.
- (d) Results Violence: This occurs with disputes over election results and the inability of the judiciary to resolve the disputes.
- (e) Post election or presentation violence: This occurs when winners of the election take it all and losers are left out of participation in governance.⁸

Electoral violence is grouped into two categories namely,

psychological and physical. The psychological violence includes tearing of posters belonging to opponent political parties, intimidation, use of media, reckless driving by those in procession to campaign rallies. The physical violence includes physical attack of opponents which result in assault, grievous bodily harm, disruption of meetings or campaigns.⁹

There are certain factors that are responsible for electoral violence in developing nations especially in Nigeria. These include lack of the fear of God, selfishness, greed, hunger, poverty, unemployment, victimisation marginalisation, insecurity, winner takes it all syndrome, lucrative nature of political office, poor handling of election petition etc.¹⁰ Ademola Azeez notes:

The problem of increasing unemployment and marginalisation, injustice and inequitable distribution of natural resources especially among different levels of government, the desire of politicians to stay in power indefinitely and politics of acrimonies and hatred among several others are the common motivating factors in Nigeria.¹¹

The most disturbing aspect of electoral violence in Nigeria is the involvement of many youths who even though are educated but are unemployed, frustrated, hungry and angry. Unfortunately, these youths in their helplessness find themselves being used by unscrupulous politicians to achieve their selfish and personal ambition. In a bid of many politicians to clinch electoral post, they recruit youths as their thugs, provide them with security outfits as well as arms and ammunition in order to achieve their pre-conceived plans. These politicians see election as do or die affair as they want to be in power by all means.¹² Samuel C. Ugoh observes that "most of the political violence in Nigeria since independence had been caused by the refusal of the ruling elite to relinquish power by adopting various methods, which are contrary to normal democratic process".¹³

The result of electoral violence which is the breaking down

of electoral rule is bad and its memory is generally unpalatable. Apart from destruction of lives and properties, the democratic process itself is at risk. Ademola Azeez again notes:

Democratic roots cannot be firmed unless a mechanism is found to reduce incidence of violence because violence not only drains government resources and diverts attention from governmental efforts at consolidation, stability and development, but in the least frequently provokes undemocratic responses from the state in the form of security forces acting outside the law, and the legal process being suspended thereby destroying the democratic fabrics of the country.¹⁴

Commenting further on the result of violence and quoting O.B.C. Nwoliise, he says:

Violence has led to the loss of several hundred of lives, destruction of private and public property worth billions of Naira, discouragement of foreign and domestic investment cum retardation on national unity and integration, damage to the nation's image and psyche and slow pace of national development among others.¹⁵

ELECTION IN THE BIBLE

Theocracy is a form of government where God is recognised as the Supreme Ruler. The best of theocracy is found among the Israelites in the Old Testament of the Bible where Yahweh was their king (Deuteronomy 33:5) and the Israelites were His armies (Exodus 7:4). Technically, the various wars embarked upon by the Israelites were God's wars (Numbers 21:14).¹⁶ But as time went on and especially at the time of Samuel, the people demanded for a king of their own as they would like to be like other nations around them. Samuel was not comfortable with their request but God asked him to grant their demand (1 Samuel 8). The biblical concept of democracy is much more discussed in the New

Testament, thus two of the passages are considered with the aim of bringing out principles that would help our state and nation in the forthcoming elections.

(a) Acts of the Apostles 1:21-26

The demise of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus Christ brought about a vacant position in the apostolic assignment. Thus, a proper arrangement was made for the election of one person to fill the position. Acts 1:21-26 is therefore a clear indication that Christianity is familiar with the concept and practice of election.¹⁷ Four stages of electoral processes are spelt out in Acts 1:21-26. These are: justification for election; proposal or nomination; prayer for divine guidance and finally casting of lots.

Stage one: The need for the Apostles to choose another person to replace Judas Iscariot was established. They therefore set up qualifications for a successor. The person must have been a companion of the Lord and His disciples from the time when John the Baptist was active to the day of the Lord's ascension. Also, he must be a witness of the Lord's resurrection, as the rest of the Apostles were.¹⁸ This means that the position was not meant just for anybody; the candidate to occupy must be well qualified.

Stage two: Proposal or nomination- The audience put forward two possible candidates namely Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. In other words, they did not just cast lots haphazardly; they first selected the two qualified men.

Stage three: Prayer – F.F. Bruce says “the Apostles’ Prayer is couched in dignified language with liturgical echoes.”¹⁹ They prayed acknowledging the Sovereignty and Omniscience of God. Their aim was to allow Him who knows the hearts of all men to make the choice (Psalm 139:1-6; John 2:25; 4:29).

Stage four: Casting of lot: They cast lots and it fell on Matthias. This was in line with Proverbs 16:33 which says “the lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord. By casting lot,

they were able to allow God the right of choice as in other passages in the Bible-Exodus 28:30; Numbers 26:53; 1 Chronicles 26:13-16; Nehemiah 11:1 and John 1:7.

(b) Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7

The early church continued to experience growth (Acts 5:14) and this gave rise to inevitable problems both within (Acts 6:1-7) and from without (Acts 6:7-8; 60). Acts 6:1-7 deals with internal problems that confronted the early church and how it was solved. Acts 6:1-7 like Acts 1:21-26 has five stages of electoral process. These include: justification for election; qualification of the candidates; nomination or election of the candidates; presentation of the candidates to the apostles for prayer and result of the election.

Stage one: Justification for election- As church continued to grow two groups of Jews became apparent. One, the Grecian Jews or the Hellenists, that is, those that were born in lands other than Palestine and who spoke Greek. Secondly, there were the Hebraic Jews, that is, those who spoke the Aramaic and/or Hebrew language (s) of Palestine and who preserved Jewish culture and custom. The main problem was the complaint or murmuring of the Hellenistic Jews whose widows were neglected in the daily administration. These widows had no one to take care of them and so it became the responsibility of the church to do so (Acts 4:35; 11:28-29; 1Timothy 5:3-16). Incidentally, the twelve apostles recognised their priority in the ministry of the word of God and prayer. In other words, they recognised their limitation as they would not be able to combine the ministry of serving the tables with preaching and prayer (Acts 6:2). They, therefore, charged the congregation to choose men that would serve in the new responsibility.

Stage two: Qualification of the candidates- There are three qualifications to look for in those to be selected. They must be

full of the spirit; they must be full of wisdom; and they must be known for exercising their gifts of the spirit and wisdom.

Stage three: Nomination/election of the candidates- Seven men were chosen based on the above requirements. There was no casting of lot as in Acts 1:21-26 but the whole community was involved in the selection and thereafter they were presented to the Apostles who appointed them to their office.

Stage four: Presentation for Prayer: Even though the Christian community selected the seven, they were commissioned by the Apostles. This was done by prayer and laying on of hands. The laying on of hands was used in the Old Testament period to confer blessing (Genesis 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Numbers 27:23). In the New Testament period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (Acts 28:8 cf Mark 1:41) and blessing (Mark 10:16). The laying on of hands on individuals as in this context was a gesture signifying commissioning and granting of authority (Acts 6:6; 8:17-19; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; Hebrews 6:2). Therefore, these seven men were appointed for responsibilities as specified by the twelve Apostles. They received the apostolic hands which formally which formally associated them with the twelve.²⁰

Stage five: Result of the election- Acts 6:7 says:

So the word of God spread. The number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to faith (cf Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31). In other words, as a result of the wise decision of the Apostles and the whole community much progress was made in the propagation of the gospel.

WAYS OF PREVENTING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Our study of Acts 1:21-26 and 6:1-7 has thrown a great light in ways of preventing electoral violence, at least from the perspective

of Christian religion. Some of these points are discussed as follows:

- (1) **The fear of God:** Our politicians and electorate must have the fear of the Lord in everything they do. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of the Lord makes a person to hate evil and all forms of electoral violence (Proverbs 8: 13). The fear of the Lord makes a man to avoid evil (Proverbs 16:6).
- (2) **Godliness and contentment:** 1 Timothy 6:6-7 says: "But godliness with contentment is a great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing from it." Everyone must be conscious of this passage as we participate in politics and elections. Election must not be seen as a do or die affair. The apostles in Acts 6:1-7 demonstrated this attribute as they refused to combine the office of deacons with their own. They were not greedy.
- (3) **Sanctity of life:** The Bible attaches so much importance to the life of human beings. Leviticus 7:11 says "For the life of a creature is in the blood . . ." Exodus 20:13 says "You shall not kill". Genesis 9:6 says "Whosoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man".

This means that no man has any right to take the life of another person in the name of wanting to serve the community or nation. A situation where bomb is planted on political campaign ground is barbaric and devilish. A recent example of this wickedness took place on Thursday 3/3/2011 at Sulejah when bombs exploded at the flag-off of the PDP Zonal campaign rally which killed 10 people and 21 others were injured.²¹

- (4) Adoption of non-violence option: Even though this is not a popular position yet it is the panacea to electoral violence. It was reported of the early Christians who adopted this approach and their faith was "spoken of throughout the world" (Romans 1:8). They conquered by rewarding evil with good.²² Furthermore, the injunction of Apostle Paul in Romans 12:17-21 is for all political stakeholders:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- (5) Rightful engagement of youths: The fact that young people are strong is established in the Bible (Proverbs 20:29). Also, God's plan for youths is to see visions (Joel 2:28) and consequently become useful in life. The situation where youths are used as political thugs is bad and it should be discouraged. Therefore, efforts must be made at all levels of the government (Local, State and Federal) to take care of the teeming population of the youths in the society.
- (6) Unique role of Religious Leaders: Church leaders (Pastors, Evangelists, Prophets, and others) have a very unique role in curbing electoral violence. The church, that is, each local assembly is made up of categories of people representing all political parties. This is the more reason why church leaders must not be involved in

partisan politics. They must be seen as fathers of all. They must learn to pray and intercede on behalf of all members as demonstrated by the disciples and apostles in Acts 1 and 6 respectively. This is exactly what the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Enoch Adeboye did for President Goodluck Jonathan on 17 December, 2010 at the Holy Ghost Convention. The President knelt down on the altar as Pastor Adeboye prayed for him.²³ Religion must be used to promote love, justice and fairness among the member politicians.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that credible, free and fair election is necessary for the sake of political stability and physical development of our nation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all political stakeholders to make it work. With religion being an agent of change and transformation, it is believed that most problems associated with electoral violence could be solved by following religious morals. Hence, religious leaders should mobilise their followers to abide by the tenets of their religion.