

“Religion Should not Mix With Politics”: Reflections on the Prophetic Voice of the Clergy in Ghana on Nation-Building

Emmanuel Twumasi Ankrah¹

ABSTRACT

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is arguably the most religious region of the world, as well as the region facing the most profound difficulties in enacting an effective programme of state-building and instituting stable democratic systems.² However, one often hears people, especially politicians reproving: “Religion should not mix with politics”.³ Even those who appear to be somewhat charitable to the Church have sometimes questioned whether or not the Clergy should adopt the approach of the so-called serial callers.⁴ This has resulted in the vilification of the Clergy that share their views on the governance process of the people. The paper examined

¹ EMMANUEL TWUMASI ANKRAH holds M.Phil.in Religious Studies from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi – Ghana and a B.A in Theology with Administration from the Christian Service University College Kumasi – Ghana. He is currently a PhD. Religious Studies candidate at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. emmatwumasiankrah@gmail.com/etankrah@yahoo.co.uk

² Nicolette D. Manglos and Alexander A. Weinreb, “Religion and Interest in Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa”, Social Forces, Vol.92, No.1, (2013):214.

³ J.N.Kudadjie and R.K. Aboagye-Mensah, Christian Social Ethics, (Accra: Asempa publishers, 2004), 28.

⁴ In Ghana serial callers are party faithful who contribute by way of phone-ins to political shows on several radio stations. They are fanatic party members who would go all out to defend their party and condemn their opponents on air. Their telephone numbers and voices are well known by radio presenters of political shows. In fact, it has now become a sort of employment for some party fanatics. It is an open secret that many of such people are on the pay-role of their various political parties.

the interplay between the Church and politics-how the Clergy engaged in rhetoric, in the decision-making process of the nation.

Introduction

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the Lutheran's "TwoKingdom Theory". Martin Luther describes two realms of governance: the kingdom of the world which is for non-Christians governed by the law and the kingdom of God reserved for true believers or Christians governed by the gospel. Although Christians belong to both realms, Deifelt understood Luther at postulating that non-Christians belong only to the world, while the kingdom of God is reserved only for true believers.

To Deifelt, Luther's description can be misconstrued to enforce the notion that there are two mutually exclusive types of citizenship, one heavenly (for Christians) and the other one earthly (for unbelievers). Another challenge is the fact that Luther employs a dualistic language to describe his theory. This can create false assumption that human beings are divided into two categories: those concerned with heavenly matters, and those concerned with worldly affairs.⁵ He contends that the spiritual and earthly governments constitute two realms but both belong to God. They are not in opposition to each other, since both contend against the devil. God rules over both kingdoms and institutes two kinds of government. One is spiritual, and the other earthly. The two realms however, are interdependent. They testify that God rules over the whole world and does so in two ways.⁶

This simply implies that in the sight of God there is no difference between heavenly issues and earthly issues, both are God's concern. Good governance and well-being were instituted by God. Indeed, God

⁵ Wanda Deifelt, "Advocacy, Political Participation and Citizenship: Lutheran Contributions to Public Theology", *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol.49, No.2, (2010): 109-110.

⁶ Deifelt, "Advocacy," 110.

is the author of politics and the ruler of state and society. Christians, being God's children are first and foremost the heirs of this two but one kingdom. Therefore a good Christian is among other things a good citizen.

Indeed, some people have misapplied Lutheran's theory to mean that there should be an absolute separation of the Church from the state. A case in point in Ghana is about an incident that occurred between Johnson Asiedu Nketiah, the General Secretary of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and Emmanuel Martey, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana prior to the '2012 General Elections. It was reported that the former had in a way of response, retorted that the latter (Clergy) should take his Bible and leave the Constitution to the Politicians.⁷ As if that was not enough, the boss of the Ghana Free Zones Board, Kojo Twum Boafu, who claimed to be a member of the Presbyterian Church publicly resigned from the church accusing its leadership of dabbling in politics.⁸

Obviously, these two politicians and many others like them would feel jittery to hear a clergy speak about any issue considered political in the Ghanaian context. Emmanuel Martey and the likeminded clergy on the other hand would want to undertake their prophetic role in the nation the way they understand it. A classic example occurred when two Guantanamo Bay detainees were brought to come and live in Ghana by the government. It was reported that when some Christian leaders shared

⁷ Reports were all over the social media especially myjoyonline.com, 14th September, 2012, that Mr. AsieduNketiah, the General Secretary of the ruling NDC had accused Rt. Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Martey of being in bed with the opposition party. He questioned why the Church must get involved in such a controversial matter. However, after some few days, the President, John Mahama apologized to the Moderator of Presbyterian Church of Ghana for that unfortunate statement from his General Secretary. The Moderator had led his church leadership to call on the Electoral Commission to reconsider his intention of creating 45 new constituencies which had sparked a lot of controversies ahead of the 2012 national elections.

⁸ <http://www.myjoyonline.com>, 14th September, 2012, [Accessed on 11th January, 2013].

their dissenting views, the politicians, especially from the incumbent government rained insults on them.⁹

Would the politicians feel the same way about the Clergy if they spoke on national issues that endorsed their political stance? Will the clergy take the same posture towards a different political party when the need arises? These are questions that some political observers ask.

The Church and Politics in Ghana

The study indicates that majority of the Clergy in Ghana are unwilling to be known publicly as members of particular political parties. This assertion can clearly be seen in the results displayed by the field reports on whether or not the respondents (Clergy) belonged to any political party. 85 percent declined, while 15 percent responded affirmative. When the Clergy were asked whether or not they in anyway influenced the Laity to vote for particular political parties or candidates during elections, they unanimously (100 percent) denied. On the question that was meant to find out if the Clergy thought they ought to influence their members in voting during national elections or not, once again, the results (72.5 percent, No; and 27.5 percent, Yes) indicating reluctance on the part of the Clergy to be partisan in their political participation. In their hand-written remarks on the questionnaire, the Clergy explained that their reluctance was chiefly based on the fact that their immediate audiences (i.e. Laity) were from diverse political persuasions, so being partisan in such a setting would stir up a lot of troubles in the Church.

Kwaku Asante, intimated that if the Clergy became partisan, the Church would split.¹⁰ ¹¹He said that so long as one was a clergy, his role was like

⁹ <http://www.Ghanaweb.com>, 11th January, 2016, [Accessed on 24th January, 2016].

¹⁰ Emmanuel Kwaku Asante, interviewed by the researcher, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Department of Religious Studies, March, 7, 2014.

¹¹ Kwaku Asante.

¹² Kwaku Asante.

a chief - he was to unite the people. He was not supposed to be a cardholding and a dues-paying member of any political party.¹¹ He however added that a Clergy might be a sympathizer of a particular ideology but should not be an activist of any political party.¹² This obviously means that according to him, it may not be prudent for a clergy to stand on the ticket of a political party to contest for presidential or parliamentary seat. All of this is to say that from the viewpoint of the Clergy in Ghana, their reluctance to be partisan in their political participation is just for convenience and not necessarily lack of political interest.

On their part, (50 percent) of the Laity respondents conversely perceived the Clergy as members of political parties in the country while the other half (50 percent) differed from that opinion. This clearly shows that the Laity had inconsistent perceptions about the Clergy when it came to their political participation. In their handwritten remarks on the questionnaire the respondents (Laity) who thought that the Clergy were members of the various political parties in the country explained that some of the Clergy displayed their clear political standpoint when they mounted the pulpit. That is, their comments and criticisms were consistently in favour and or against a particular political party.

If Kwaku Asante's definition of who a member of a political party¹² is to be considered, then one would say that the assertion of the Laity who suspected the Clergy to be members of particular political parties just by inferring from what they say in their sermons was quite speculative and could not be scientifically substantiated. This is not to suggest that the speculations about the Clergy from a section of the Laity should be entirely ignored. At least few clergy such as Samuel Asante Antwi¹⁴ of the Methodist Church -Ghana and Daniel Nkansah¹³ of New Vision

¹² A party member is a card-bearing and a dues-paying person and an activist of a particular political party.

¹³ Prophet Daniel Nkansah of New Vision Pentecostal Church is the founder of the New Vision Party (NVP). He was the flag-bearer of the party in the '2008 and '2012 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. However, on those two occasions he was not able to get his name on the ballot sheet of the Electoral Commission (EC). In '2012 he was reported to have fingered one of the officials

Pentecostal Church-Accra are well-known political party members in this country.

This perception about some clergy playing partisan politics in Ghana is not only held by a section of the Laity but also a section of the Clergy. King Binambo for instance has noted that some clergy normally come out on national issues to perform a function for their political parties.¹⁴ He therefore admonished the Clergy to stop using the Church for the politicization of national issues.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bishop Samuel Asante Antwi is a past Presiding bishop of the Methodist Church –Ghana. He used to be heavily criticized by some political parties especially the National Democratic Congress to be in bed with the New Patriotic Party based on his comments and criticisms. He has now been appointed as a member of the Disciplinary Committee in the New Patriotic Party. In an interview with one of the high ranking clergy of the Methodist Church –Ghana, he confirmed it and said it was unfortunate for his colleague to be deeply rooted in a particular political party but added that he thanked God that bishop Asante Antwi was doing the public party politics at the time of his retirement. According to him, Bishop Asante Antwi also has his reasons for doing what he does, for anytime he had confronted him on that issue he had explained that it was good he was in there; if he had not been there things would have been bad for the party (NPP) and the nation at large. May be in the near future, political parties would need chaplains.

Those outspoken Clergy would obviously argue that they come out on national issues as concerned citizens of Ghana who are directly or indirectly affected by whatever goes on in the state. Absolutely, this is an uncontestable standpoint from the Clergy.

of the EC to have indulged in corruption as candidates filled their nomination forms. Of course he made this allegation to be the bases for the rejection of his forms by the EC.

¹⁴ Solomon King Binambo, the Principal of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary –Kumasi, interviewed by the researcher, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary –Kumasi, March, 10, 2014.

¹⁵ King Binambo.

The results from the Laity's assessment on whether or not the Clergy do influence the former on voting during national elections showed that the Laity were surprisingly undivided (100 percent) at saying that the Clergy did not influence them on voting. Their response was consistent with the Clergy who denied completely that they did not in any way influence the Laity on voting.

We also solicited their opinion on whether or not they expected the Clergy to influence them on voting during national elections. We expected a unanimous rejection from the Laity on this issue. It was surprising that five percent of the Laity expected the Clergy to influence them on voting during national elections whereas 95 percent of them remained consistent that the Clergy ought not to influence the Laity in any way during national elections.

From the internal (the Clergy and Laity) assessment of the political participation of the Clergy in Ghana, the study postulates that the Clergy should not in any way participate in politics in a partisan manner. That is, their sermons, comments and contributions toward national discourses should appear neutral; devoid of partisan politics. However, it is instructive to note that a significant number, over 27 percent of the Clergy indicated the desire to influence the Laity during national elections. In addition to that, is the fact that 15 percent of them wish to be affiliated publicly to one political party or the other. This implies that the perception of a section of the Clergy and Laity that some Clergy participate in politics in partisan manner may be true. It could also mean that a section of the Clergy indeed indulge in partisan politics in camera since 15 percent of them suspected some of their colleagues Clergy to be members of the various political divide in the country and over 27 percent expected the Clergy to influence the Laity during national elections respectively.

Nation-Building: A definition

Nation-building is a process whereby diverse views of the citizenry are harnessed and incorporated into the collective decision-making process for the total well-being of the people in a nation state. It involves ideas on economics, employment, transportation, trade, education, health,

energy, peace and justice, and many others. A nation is built by and with people. So, in nation-building process, the people in the nation are the most important resource. Nation-building is therefore a collective responsibility from all citizenry. It constitutes several activities and a combination of culture, religion and other economic factors. We build a nation with people. So the culture, social and religious backgrounds of the people have to be harnessed for development. We need to achieve a consensus of all these factors in order to shape the psychology of the people toward nation-building. It is an intermarriage of all the various connections and sub-groups into one unit so that the unity would propel the system toward a common objective or mission that the nation determines to achieve. So if you set all the fantastic national goals while the various factors of nation-building are disjointed, it will be difficult for the leadership of the nation to achieve the set goals.¹⁶ Indeed, nationbuilding occurs when each and every one becomes aware of the role they should play for the common good. That is, where the mental shake-up of the individuals could be geared toward national consensus. To achieve this, there is the need for intensive education on the civic rights and responsibilities of the citizenry using our patriotic songs, poems, schools, churches, mosques and durbars. Do the Clergy not have a role?

The Prophetic Voice: A definition

The Prophetic voice could be explained as a religious attempt or response to use the word of God as a measuring rod to evaluate, educate, criticize and transform the total well-being of the individual and the nation as a whole. In the light of this, we are of the view that Christians as a whole and the Clergy in particular have a biblical mandate to engage in rhetoric that is geared toward building of consensus to harness the collective thoughts for nation-building.

The prophetic voice of the Clergy is using scripture as the bases for speaking the mind or the will of God to address issues of righteous

¹⁶ Thomas Kusi-Boafo, a social commentator, interviewed by the researcher at his residence, March, 24, 2014.

living, peace and justice for the holistic well-being of the entire nation. That is, the Clergy acting as a social critic with scripture as a tool in the political environment. The Clergy in Ghana like the prophets Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and others have the responsibility to speak to the nation about what God thinks about every issue of the state. The Clergy should make the people know that their God is not a *Deus Otiosus*,¹⁷ rather, He is actively involved and equally concerned about the political affairs of the nation just as He is concerned about the spiritual life of the nation. This confirms Martin Luther's two Kingdoms theory, both of which the Christian lives and is expected to play his prophetic role for the common good of the citizenry. One could not agree more with Asante who describes the philosophy that says that the Clergy ought to concentrate only on ecclesiastical and spiritual matters as "a Gnostic perception of Christianity, where everything is reduced to the Spirit".¹⁸ Yirenkyi postulates that the Church performs her two-fold educational role in the light of political education and advocacy.¹⁹

The Prophetic Voice (Role) of the Clergy

Political Educational role

The results indicated that majority of the Clergy (70 percent) and the Laity (80 percent) responded affirmative that the Clergy ought to teach the members on national issues. Indeed the Clergy have a two-dimension educational focus. They are first of all supposed to teach their members to take up their civic rights and responsibilities and secondly they serve as the conscience of society, and the voice of the voiceless (play advocacy role).

¹⁷ *Deus Otiosus* is a god who is far-removed from his people and is not concerned about their daily activities. Worshippers of such a god would have to depend on intermediaries in maintaining their relationship with him.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Kwaku Asante, interviewed by the researcher, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Department of Religious Studies, March, 7, 2014.

¹⁹ Kwasi Yirenkyi, "The Role of Christian Churches in National Politics: Reflections from Laity and Clergy in Ghana", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol.61, No.3, (2000): 332-333.

In the survey conducted, many of the Laity respondents indicated that prior to the '2012 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, the Clergy encouraged them to exercise their franchise as good citizens of the country. Sometimes too, they created platforms for officials of National Commission on Civic Education during church meetings to educate the members about the new electoral rules and reforms especially the 'Biometric Verification System' used in the '2012 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. The question that readily comes to mind is, Does the educational role of the Clergy include educating the laity on the public policies in the state?

Advocacy role

This is one of the gray areas where the Clergy in Ghana have turned a blind eye for fear of being vilified by party vigilantes should they attack or endorse a political party's public policy. In the words of Kwaku Asante, "No political party comes out with a policy that would not be beneficial to the people, so for a Clergy to attack a political party's public policy choices would mean that that Clergyman had aligned himself to one political party or the other and that would not augur well for the Church and the nation as a whole."²⁰ A position, we slightly differ in the sense that sometimes a political party in power is bent on implementing a manifesto promise without taking recourse to assess its potency of satisfying the larger society. Some other times, we clearly see certain government programmes to be nothing more than the concept of *jobs for the boys*.²¹ He however added that he would attack a political party's public policy only if it was explicitly against the teachings of the Bible and was not in keeping with the will of God.²² Meanwhile, Kwaku Asante had hinted that the classical prophets were sometimes critical on national policies which were not in keeping with the will of God but they also at some point encouraged national policies

²⁰ Kwaku Asante.

²¹ Sometimes, governments in power intentionally create agencies and initiate certain programmes just to create jobs for their party vigilantes, serial-callers and foot-soldiers that worked so hard during the contest. This is an open secret especially on the African political landscape.

²² Kwaku Asante.

which they considered to be in keeping with the will of God for the people.²³

King Binambo disagrees with Kwaku Asante on his reluctance to criticize a political party's public policy. He opines that if the Clergy understand the nitty-gritties of a particular public policy, they have a responsibility to educate their members so that they are not misled by ignorance.²⁴ Kwaku Asante however explains his position that considering how polarized party politics is played out in Ghana, he thinks that the Clergy ought to be wise when examining political parties' public policies because all things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial.²⁷ Opuni-Frimpong, shares a similar view with King Binambo when he says that the Clergy can only be said to be relevant when they take active participation in whatever concerns the people they serve.²⁵

The survey lent support to the view that the Clergy had a responsibility to educate their members about political party's public policies. 70 percent of the Clergy themselves were ready to take that responsibility while over 62 percent of the Laity had that expectation from the Clergy.

However, the number of the Clergy (30 percent) who opposed their own involvement in educating their members on any national issue could not be ignored. Likewise the 20 percent of the Laity who expressed that they would feel uncomfortable in church should their pastors began to include in their teaching sessions national issues such as the economy, injustices, corruption, education, health, politics, unemployment and so on, was significant. These are the Christians who prescribe a total

²³ Kwaku Asante.

²⁴ King Binambo.

²⁷ Kwaku Asante.

²⁵ Opuni-Frimpong, the General Secretary of the CCG in an interview on Hello FM 101.5, King Edward, April, 2, 2014, 8: 00am hinted that the CCG in conjunction with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) had had a crunch meeting with President Mahama concerning the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) before the President left for the ECOWAS meeting in Yamoussoukro. In that meeting, it was reported that the CCG advised the President not sign the EPA because it was going to destroy local industries.

separation of Church from the State. Some of them indicated that they would prefer the Clergy to keep to prayers and spiritual concerns only even if the economy was bad, since Christians were in the world but were not of the world. As pastors they were not supposed to meddle in politics and stuff like that; they were to concentrate on ecclesiastical matters and the spiritual well-being of the people.

Kwaku Asante completely disagrees with such a view. He describes it as a Gnostic perception of Christianity where everything is reduced to the spirit.²⁶ He added that the Clergy have been asked to minister holistically; therefore they have to be very much concerned about the physical, emotional, psychological, economic, social and the spiritual well-being of the people in the state.²⁷

Kwaku Asante's view is in keeping with our understanding about the prophetic role of Jeremiah. Prophet Jeremiah carried out his prophetic ministry in a chaotic era politically, morally, and spiritually.²⁸ He became the greatest personality in Jerusalem because he took a stand openly against the ungodly reign and social wrongs of King Manasseh persisting in his time. If the prophetic role of Jeremiah is to be used as the epitome of the prophetic voice of the Clergy in Ghana, then one needs not to be labour on the fact that the Clergy in Ghana have a biblical mandate to be involved in the governance processes of the people in the nation.

The society sometimes calls on the Clergy to advocate on their behalf when there seem to be acts of brutalities, injustices and corruption. Literature and newspaper reports abound on how the religious bodies especially the Christian Council Ghana (CCG), Catholic Bishops' Council (CBC) and the National Catholic Secretariat (NCS) played their advocacy role during the severe repressions in the 1980s. They stood for freedom, justice, integrity and equity in the political arena in Ghana.

²⁶ Kwaku Asante.

²⁷ Kwaku Asante.

²⁸ Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 3.

This study examined how the Clergy played their advocacy role in the governance of the people. Osei Bonsu pointed out that it took the intervention of the CBC, CCG and the National Peace Council (NPC) to resolve the controversies that surrounded the creation of the 45 new constituencies by the Electoral Commission (EC) ahead of the '2012 General Elections.²⁹ He explained further that he, the chairman of that meeting with all the political parties' representatives, managed to make the feuding parties understand the issues in order to ensure peace before, during and after the elections.³³ In the words of the Chairman of the NPC, he says:

When the EC delayed in declaring the '2012 Presidential results, people started calling on us...we in collaboration with the religious bodies such as the CCG, CBC, NCS and other civil societies held a crunch meeting for the political parties and the EC in the EC office to ensure that justice and fair play was delivered to the people of Ghana...³⁰

A typical example of the incessant calls on the religious bodies can be cited when on *Adom FM*, on Sunday, 9th December, 2012 when the EC had still not declared the results, Clement Apak was heard on air saying, "I am calling on all the top bishops - Duncan Williams, Mensah Otabil, Emmanuel Asante and even *Otumfour*,³⁵ yes, leadership must speak before things get out of hand..."

This and many of such incessant calls made the religious bodies and the civil society groups take the move they took to ensure that political stability prevailed. This goes to say that the Clergy through the bodies (CCG, CBC, NCS, Ghana Baptist Convention, Ghana Pentecostal Council and others) have engaged and continue to engage the State for the well-being of Ghanaians. Our concern in this study is not to examine the prophetic role of the various Christian/Church bodies but to examine

²⁹ Joseph OseiBonsu, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, interviewed by the researcher, Konongo Catholic Parish, March, 20, 2014. ³³ OseiBonsu.

³⁰ In an in-depth interview with the chairman of the NPC, the Most Rev. Prof.

the prophetic voice of the Clergy as individuals and as collectivities. Even where the various church bodies are referred to, the attention is geared toward their collective voice but not their denominational or sectional voices.

The study indicated that while 70 percent of the Clergy respondents preferred to speak on specific national issues when they mount the pulpit, only 47.5 percent of the Laity supported that position. Our sample indicated that 30 percent of the Clergy and 52.5 percent of the Laity

convinced the EC to give room for the aggrieved party to provide evidence of the purported rigging, the EC conceded for 24 hours within which the purported evidence could be brought. After the given period, the EC hinted that the evidence of the purported rigging was not substantive to affect the results at hand. Even though the opposition NPP was still unimpressed, they (NPC, CCG, CBC, NCS and the civil society groups) impressed on them to proceed to court for justice rather than restrain the EC from declaring the results and to delay it beyond the 72 hours stipulated by the laws of Ghana. He believed that the action they took saved this nation from plunging into turmoil. He added that he never regret for playing that role as a Clergy and a citizen of this country.

³⁵ *Otumfour* is the title for the paramount chief of the Asante Kingdom in Ghana. Otumfour Osei Tutu II the paramount chief of the Asante Kingdom is an eminent king well-known in Ghana and abroad for his wise counsel and mediatory skills.

opposed it. Based on this result, one would say that the Ghanaian Clergy was gradually becoming more sensitized and daring toward the wellbeing of the populace.

In the words of Osei Bonsu, “The Clergy must be agents of reconciliation between God and humanity not only in religious or spiritual matters but also in political, economic and social issues”.³¹ Others may argue that the result revealed just an inherent desire among the Clergy but its actual demonstration was far-fetched in the Church.

³¹ Osei Bonsu.

For example, SarfoKantanka says, “I believe the Politicians fear the Media than the Clergy because we are not speaking...Who is really speaking for the voiceless?”³² King Binambo shares a similar opinion. He says:

The Clergy has decided to stay back. I don't know why. It's just a few individual Clergy who come out to make contributions to national discourses...May be we are afraid that we may incur the wrath of the Politicians. We are not involved that much. Even the few who get involved may be affiliated to one party or the other.³⁸

Clearly King Binambo and many like-minded Ghanaians thought that effectively the Clergy had not demonstrated the willingness to be involved in the national debates on nation-building. Some of them explained that our democracy was too young and volatile. Many Ghanaians were too passionate and fanatic about their political affiliations many of whom were also members of the Church. Therefore as pastors they had to learn to walk on a fine line when making political comments on the pulpit. Others explained that the Laity had inconsistent expectations from them.

Even though a section of the Laity expected the Clergy to share their views on issues that came to the state, suffice to say that for many of those people, the kind of involvement they were prescribing for the Clergy might not include criticizing the economic mismanagement and the bad policies of the government they supported. That was a 'No go area'. If a Clergy happened to have a congregation where majority were sympathizers of the strongest opposition party, then he was sure to be encouraged to criticize the ruling party, but if it happened to be the other way round, then he was not expected to be prophetic in his ministry lest

³² OseiSarfo-Kantanka. The Kumasi diocesan bishop of the Methodist Church made this observation on a programme dubbed “Kukurantumi” on Nhyira FM 104.5 on the Easter Saturday, the 30th of March, 2013. The bishop in an interview was asked to share his thoughts on “The significance of the Death and Resurrection of Christ to the Nation” ³⁸ King Binambo.

he would be accused of dabbling in politics. Clearly, these inconsistent expectations screwed up some of the Clergy and left others in a state of indecision.

The Clergy in Ghana could learn a great deal from the prophetic role of Jeremiah. Our study of the text in Jeremiah 1:5-10 has revealed that the prophet Jeremiah was called by God to have his eyes upon the nations, and to predict their destruction, or restoration, according as their conduct was bad or good. He was not to timidly or servilely flatter men, or to show indulgence to their lusts and passions. Consequently, he was encouraged by God to be magnanimous in spirit.

We have noted in this study that the prophetic voice implies being a social critic with the word of God as a tool. Also, it means becoming critical on national policies that are not in keeping with the will of God and encouraging those policies that are in keeping with the will of God. In this case we see no difference between the prophetic voice of the prophet Jeremiah and that of the Clergy in Ghana with the exception of the setting. The Clergy is required by God and the society to speak against the rot and encourage the good in the governance process of the people toward the total well-being of all. The field results indicated that 90 percent of the Laity expected the Clergy to criticize the government when the need be. While only 70 percent of the Clergy themselves were willing to do so. Again the Clergy were more cautious than the Laity in the political arena.

The 30 percent of the Clergy who might hesitate in criticizing the government explained that they had taken a cue from the ordeal, lashings, vilifications and castigations their fellow outspoken Clergy faced when they criticized the government. Perhaps this is the reason why Kwaku Asante, unlike Bosomtwe Ayensu would not criticize the government unless what they were doing was explicitly against the spirit of the word of God.³³

³³ Emmanuel Kwaku Asante, the Presiding bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, March, 7, 2014. We asked the Presiding bishop to share his thought on a comment Rt. Rev. Bosomtwe Ayensu, the Methodist bishop of Obuasi diocese

However, neither the Clergy nor the Laity preferred a partisan position to be encouraged in the Church. Kwaku Asante compared the position of the Clergy to that of a chief who is supposed to unite all his subjects for development.³⁴ The survey confirmed that partisan politics would not be countenanced in the Church in Ghana. As the results showed, over 72 percent of the Clergy themselves were not ready to go partisan way in the discharge of their prophetic role. Similarly the Laity would normally not encourage partisanship in the Church. With over 87 percent of the Laity ready to oppose the Clergy should they become partisan when they mount the pulpit, is a clear sign of the fact that majority of the Laity were party fanatics. In such a polarized arena, one would wonder how to effectively and fairly assess the effectiveness or otherwise of the Prophetic Voice.

The Effectiveness of the Prophetic Voice of the Clergy

The study showed that only 42.5 percent of the Clergy considered their prophetic voice to be effective while 57.5 percent of them differed. The Clergy respondents who thought that the prophetic voice of the Clergy in Ghana was ineffective, is very significant since they were not oblivious of the huge responsibility they had toward the nation and God. King Binambo minces no words by saying that the prophetic voice was largely silent.³⁵ Yinkah Sarfo agrees with Binambo, he says, “The prophetic voice is not very active; Kenya, as well as Rwanda had a blood bath because the Clergy failed to speak.”³⁶ According to Osei

was reported to have made concerning how the government was managing the economic challenges of the nation. Kwaku Asante responded that it would be very difficult for him to say that “President Mahama is asleep”, because the President was not his cup of tea. He added that it was important for one to develop a tough skin before going that way at the government else the party fanatics would wear him out. He would rather look at what everybody could do to help overcome the crisis. “That would involve educating and encouraging my members to take up their civic responsibilities, and a word to a wise would be enough”. He indicated.

³⁴ Kwaku Asante.

³⁵ King Binambo.

³⁶ Yinkah Sarfo.

SarfoKantanka, the prophetic voice is undeniably silent because many of the Clergy do not want to be tagged with one party or the other in order to avoid persecution and vilification.³⁷ Nii Armah Akomfrah shares the same sentiment that the Clergy of late had preferred platitudes even though they had the power to rebuke, discipline and correct.³⁸

An important component of the prophetic voice is the media. Some of the

Clergy explained that the prophetic voice looked largely silent because just a few of them had access to the Media. We are of the view that quality attracts quantity. That is, it does not matter where a Clergy may find himself, if he gives a quality message especially the one that is about the well-being of the nation, the Media will be attracted to take up the story. The few who had access to the Media perhaps did so because of the role they had been playing in the nation –either they encouraged the prophetic voice or discouraged it publicly.

Osei Bonsu on the other hand, asserted that the prophetic voice had been effective and proactive.³⁹ Citing the role the Christian bodies such as the CBC, CCG, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), NCS and the others had been playing, he hinted that the Church through its leadership has been engaging the government on almost every sphere of the nation, but in many occasions, on the quiet.⁴⁰

Inasmuch as we agree with those who thought that the prophetic voice of the Clergy in Ghana was essentially silent, one cannot ignore the immense role the various Christian bodies have played in the democratic

³⁷ OseiSarfo-Kantanka.

³⁸ On the official Website of the CPP <http://www.conventionpeoplesparty.org> September, 14, 2012, [Accessed on 11th January, 2013]. NiiArmahAkomfrah commented that Ghana as a country, appear to be living under the erroneous impression that Christian faith is exclusively a faith of soft-talking, humblelooking and tongues speaking. He further stated that if this is all that our faith offers then our faith is ineffective and incomplete.

³⁹ Osei Bonsu.

⁴⁰ Osei Bonsu.

processes of the country since Independence especially during the 1980s repressions. However, we anticipate the feat they would have attained if the execution of their prophetic role had been done collectively, not denominationally.

In the survey, only 45 percent of the Laity respondents saw the prophetic voice of the Clergy to be effective while 55 percent of them thought otherwise. Impliedly both the Laity and the Clergy themselves conceded that the prophetic voice of the Clergy in Ghana was silent.

The Clergy was expected to do more as far as their prophetic role was concerned. The Laity expected the Clergy to be sensitive and proactive to issues that came to the state. They should know that their silence condemned the society if they claimed to be the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of society. This is in keeping with Osei Bonsu who opined that many of the Clergy in Ghana had diverse intellectual, corporate and social backgrounds spanning from education, law, banking, business, economics, engineering, security, medicine and more. These attributes well qualified them to contribute meaningfully to national discourses.⁴¹ The background survey of the respondents revealed that 60 percent of the Clergy respondents had other academic and professional qualifications aside the Theological/Biblical certificates they got from the seminary.

This fact cannot be simply ignored. We agree with those who posit that the Clergy is indeed the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of society. They must bring their rich experiences and expertise to bear on the governance process of the nation.

A hypothetical picture on what the respondents thought may be the stance of the Clergy should they face vilifications and persecution after they had executed their prophetic role in the country was created. While only 27.5 percent of the Laity assumed that the Clergy might be silent, 50 percent of the Clergy themselves anticipated that they would be silent

⁴¹ Osei Bonsu.

completely if they were persecuted for exercising their prophetic role in the nation. Yet, 15 percent of the Clergy and Laity thought that the Clergy would not be entirely silent but they would be inactive under the circumstances. More importantly, over 57 percent of the Laity believed that the vilifications may cause the Clergy to become more active, only 35 percent of the Clergy themselves hoped that their prophetic voice would be more active in the face of the imminent castigations and vilifications.

In their explanations, some of the Clergy indicated that they would be silent or inactive because the democratic dispensation in Ghana just like elsewhere in the SSA was still young and fragile. Hence, some African politicians could be too drunk with power that they saw people who did not agree with them as enemies, and were ready to wipe them out from the surface of the earth. Thus the Clergy under those circumstances ought to be wise in their political involvement. Others were categorical that due to the inconsistent expectations from the Laity coupled with the fact that they were handicapped and ill-equipped on how to deal with political issues in a politically sensitive and polarized nation such as ours, they had no option rather than to keep quiet.

The Anticipated Posture of the Prophetic Voice of the Clergy in the Near Future

The picture painted, seemed gloomy for the nation. Yinkah Sarfo feared that an inactive prophetic voice would plunge the nation into a plague.⁴² Kwaku Asante also thought that if the prophetic voice became silent, it would not augur well for the nation.⁴³ He explained further that if the people who were supposed to be the voice of the voiceless and the voice of God declined to speak, the devil would speak and evil would carry the day.⁴⁴

⁴² YinkahSarfo.

⁴³ Kwaku Asante.

⁴⁴ Kwaku Asante.

Consequently, the Laity (57.5 percent) expected the prophetic voice of the Clergy to be more active after being harangued by the politicians. The Laity explained that their anticipation for the prophetic voice of the Clergy to be more active was based on the fact that the Clergy came across as a formidable class in the society who could not easily be scared by any politician through vilifications and propaganda. They believed that the Clergy were powerful and influential people in the society leading a large mass (71 percent) of the people. As a result, one would say that the Laity's point of view that the Clergy ought to be more active in their prophetic role in the face of vilifications was very legitimate.

Some other Clergy declared their intention to damn the consequences and make the prophetic voice more active in the face of any persecution from the politicians. With those sampled, 35 percent of the Clergy in Ghana was poised to make their voices louder on national issues in order to ensure the total well-being of the larger society. Kwaku Kwarteng was of the view that if the prophetic voice was not contested then it ceased to be the voice of God.⁴⁵ He added that the Clergy who spoke the truth were not perturbed by what people said about them.⁴⁶ According to Osei SarfoKantanka, the Clergy would continue to confront the state to ensure that the populace especially the middle-class and the down-trodden were

⁴⁵ KwakuKwarteng, '2012 Ashanti Regional Moderator for Civic Forum Initiative, interviewed by the researcher, Emmanuel Methodist Church- Suame, March, 24, 2014.

⁴⁶ Kwaku Kwarteng.

fairly treated.⁴⁷ He added that any Clergy who attempted to exercise his prophetic role in a state such as ours should have the guts to withstand the vilifications and the persecutions from the leaders of the state.⁴⁸ King Binambo too said “The insults and the vilifications should cause the clergy to speak the more as Jeremiah did.”⁴⁹ This accordingly implies that to a segment of the Clergy, they considered their continued activeness in the political arena from a moral and social justice point of view.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the Clergy in Ghana who were leading the various Christian bodies were gradually becoming more assertive in the political arena. However, an individual Clergy's prophetic voice seemed essentially silent or inactive due to the vilifications and bashings that sometimes came with it. We encourage the Clergy to be more active in their prophetic role. However, the Clergy, engaging in partisan politics would not be countenanced in Ghana.

Conversely, some Clergy have indicated their desire to influence the Laity to make decisions during national elections as well as get affiliated to political parties in the country. This undoubtedly, implies that the perception from a section of Ghanaians that some clergymen in Ghana indeed indulged in partisan politics in camera was quite material. But it is a fact that in Ghana, politicians do and will treat with contempt clergymen perceived to be partisan in their political participation. This is because Politicians have conflicting view about the Clergy's criticism of the government which culminates to inconsistent expectations from the Clergy. The Clergy are likely to use the pulpit to address national

⁴⁷ OseiSarfo-Kantanka.

⁴⁸ OseiSarfo-Kantanka.

⁴⁹ King Binambo,

issues; a posture, repugnant to the politicians. This makes one foresee a show down in the ensuing years.

The posture of the politicians and the clergy arguably, has serious implications for the nation. If the prophetic voice becomes silent, witty politicians would always have their way to subject the people into serious hardships. It will also give room for corruption to wear its ugly head in the state. The Church will eventually lose its relevance in SSA. Much the same way the politicians stand to lose a lot of their monopoly should they give the Clergy a field day in the political arena.

We recommend that Theological/Religious Institutions should consider introducing Public Theology as one of the core courses to help train the Clergy to function effectively in the nation. Also, there should be a Ghana Bishops' Conference to speak for the Church. More importantly, the Clergy should research, consult, and discuss issues with one another before coming out on controversial national issues.

Bibliography

- Adebanwi, Wale. "The Clergy, Culture, and Political Conflicts in Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 53 (2010): 121 -142.
- Akoto, B.E.A, Dorothy. "Church and State: A Contemporary Understanding of The Book of Joel." in *Christianity, Mission and Ecumenism in Ghana*, edited by J. Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu, Accra: Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 2009.
- Asante, Emmanuel. *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological Reflections on the Ghanaian Experience*. Ghana: Challenge Enterprise, 2007.
- Assimeng, M. *Religion and Social Change in West Africa*. Accra: Ghana University Press, 1989.
- Bosomprah, Ben. "P.C.G as God's Voice for the Nation. " *Christian Messenger*, March/April, 2012.
- Campbell, E. David. "Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement", *Political Behavior* 26 (2004): 155 -180.
- Deifelt, Wanda. "Advocacy, Political Participation, and Citizenship: Lutheran Contributions to Public Theology". *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49 (2010): 108 -114.
- Feinberg, L.Charles. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.
- Kamaara, Eunice. "The Role of the Christian Church in Socio-economic and Political Development in Kenya." *Journal of Third World Studies* 17 (2000): 165 -176.
- Kempkey, Kristina. "The Political Relevance of Religion in Africa". *SAIS*, 17(2011).
- Kudadjie, J.N., and Aboagye-Mensah, R. *Christian Social Ethics*. Accra: Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 1991.
- Manglos, D. Nicolette, and Weinreb, A. Alexander. "Religion and Interest in Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa". *Social Forces* 92 (2013): 195 -219.
- McGuire, Meredith. *Religion: The Social Context*. Belmont, California:

Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981.

Okyerefo, K. P. Michael, Fiaveh, Yaw Daniel and Asante, Kofi Takyi. "Religion as a tool in strengthening the democratic process in Ghana". *Journal of African Studies and Development* 3 (2011): 124 -142.

Phiri, Isaac. "Why African Churches Preach Politics: The Case of Zambia". *Journal of Church and State* 41 (1999): 323 -347.

---"Proclaiming Peace and Love: A New Role for Churches in African Politics". *Journal of Church and State* 42 (2000): 781 -802.

Pobee, S. John. *Religion and Politics in Ghana*. Accra: Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 1991.

---*Kwame Nkrumah and the Church 1949 -1966*. Accra: Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 1988.

Radoli, A. *How Local is the Local Church?* Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1993.

Simms, Rupe. "I am a Non-Denominational Christian and a Marxist Socialist":

A Gramscian Analysis of the Convention People's Party and Kwame Nkrumah's use of Religion." *Sociology of Religion* 64 (2003): 463 -477.

Yirenkyi, Kwasi. "The Role of Christian Churches in National Politics: Reflections from Laity and Clergy in Ghana." *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000): 325 -338.