

## **Godfatherism and Democracy in Nigeria: Lessons from the Old Testament**

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### **Abstract**

Going by the recent hand over from one civilian government to another in Nigeria, one would quickly conclude that democracy has come to stay. This is a welcome development. However, there is a feature in this democracy, which in actual sense is capable of rubbishing the whole essence of democracy and that is godfatherism. This is a concept that is found operational or in use else where both in the church and other social or economic undertakings. Even in politics, godfatherism is as old as politics itself. From the look of things in Nigerian society, the practice of godfatherism is prominent. The godfathers are more or less the political slave merchants while the godsons are the political slaves or political articles for sale. The godsons are purchased with big sum of money under demonic oath. Their aims include appointments, stealing, robbery and looting of government treasury. Arising from this backdrop therefore, the aim of this paper is to re-establish the fact that godfatherism is needed in any system such as politics. Again the paper aims at pointing at the biblical pattern of godfatherism, which is more of mentoring than opportunistic lords. It is believed that when godfatherism in Nigeria politics is practiced in the light of mentorship as found in the bible, politics and democracy will be cherished human practices.

## **Introduction**

The concept of “Godfatherism” has its origin in Christianity. Godparents are chosen as surrogates to help biological (or adopted) parents raise a Christian child to become a God-fearing, law-abiding adult (Anakwenze: 2004). Many had Godparents that helped to shape their moral development and some, whose parents died early, were raised by their Godparents. The relationship between a Godfather and a Godchild is a sacred religious responsibility in the Christian faith that is designed to guide and nurture the child to succeed.

The phenomenon of “godfatherism” is not a novel idea to politics. It has been with it but its overblown negative tendencies and impact in Nigerian politics has made it rather incongruous to the politics of the day. When it gained entrance into Nigerian politics just like other nations, it became a different ball game at least as has been witnessed since the return of democracy in 1999. Ordinarily, in a critical analysis, no one person is an island and it is obvious that a tree does not metamorphose into a forest. It is only reasonable humanly and a welcome omen that somebody could assist someone to engineer his political career to the apex. Such relationship is no less than god-fatherism.

From the standpoint therefore, it becomes apparent that god-fatherism is not evil as it is usually painted but the style with which it is played in Nigerian politics is what makes it monstrous. It is interesting to remark that god-fatherism is somewhat a structure that has become inevitable in the politics of the day worldwide especially in Nigeria and so must be practiced within the framework of biblical pattern otherwise the democracy in Nigeria would develop an intractable problem especially as its graphic movement in Nigeria politics at the moment is capable of causing a still birth to the practice of democracy.

This biblical framework for a cultured god-fatherism is that of mentorship. This is a situation where godfathers sponsor or support their benefactors or godsons and give them advice on how to excel in their area of assignment. The relationship creates a mutual atmosphere capable of enhancing social integration and providing good governance. This kind of relationship or god-fatherism was exemplified in the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro and between Eli and Samuel. Bearing in mind this kind of god-fatherism and consolidating it within the political exercise would not only save our democracy from premature death but

would also make god-fatherism an inevitable tool for ensuring responsible politicking.

The work is made up of four sections namely, definition of concepts with vaunted emphasis on conceptualizing godfatherism and democracy; godfatherism within Nigerian context; references to the Old Testament godfatherism and lessons therein. The paramount objective is to transform the mischief of godfatherism inherent in Nigerian body polity to the model obtainable in Old Testament history and literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work has as its main theoretical thrust on the fact that those godfathers in the Nigeria political scene have no sanguine interest in their godsons. They have their own hidden agenda and selfish corrupt interest to gag their godsons and give them no breathing space to enable them “get it all”.

Godfatherism is a kind of politics whereby an influential person in a popular of ruling party will assist someone (Usually a lackey, i.e. godson) to emerge as the governorship candidate of the party at all cost and either by hook or crook; he will help him to emerge victorious in the State governorship election irrespective of whether he is a popular candidate or not.

(<http://www.shvoong.com/law-and-politics-godfatherism/>)

This made Mbamara to define godfatherism as “the invasion of the political candidate by discarnate powerful sponsor, tending to complete possession for the purpose of selfish gratification.” (2004:143). It is a political slave trade or political sponsorship based on political manipulation with several evil agenda. Mbamara continuing averred that:

The godfather is the political slave merchant while the godson is the political slave or slave boy or political article for sale. The godson is purchased with big sum of money under a demonic oath. Their aims and objectives include appointments, stealing,

robbery and looting of government treasury. The decision-making appointments and contract award is usually manipulated by the godfather. It is like drug abuse. (2004:143)

The problem associated with the cancerous phenomenon is that the perpetrators are no less a people in the society. The paradox here is that these godfathers do not share the core defining attributes of God. Political parties lack the capacity to act contrary to the wishes and aspirations of these godfathers because they look up to them to bankroll their campaigns and to use their influences to see their candidates through elections. Their influences at certain points even overshadow the judiciary and court orders are seemingly not regarded. Equally rule of law does not apply in their scheme. It is indeed a bizarre political scenario.

This is the bane of our democracy. It is evidently seen at every nook and cranny of our society but is more pronounced in some states of Nigeria like Oyo, Anambra. But the fear is who knows other states that may be affected within the on coming dispensation of 2007 polls.

### **GodFatherism and Nigeria's Democracy**

Godfather, is as old as politics itself. Godfather is even in the church. In the Christian circle, the godfather assists the godson to attain the level of a responsible person in the society. In other words, he teaches the godson the norms and values of the society and inculcates in him a better character as in most cases the godson comes to live and serve in the same household to effect this symbiosis. Political godfather has a totally different tinge. Political sponsorship or godfatherism is as old as humanity and when applied selflessly has helped to advance human kind. The political godfather usually brings the political godson to the lime light in politics. He (godfather) introduces him (godson) to the people that matter. However, the godson having successfully clinched the political stool with the support of his godfather quietly wants to sideline their political godfather. This may be, as a result of over lordship, by their godfather, wanting to dominate the Government; giving directives and controlling the administration.

The godfather phenomenon as a structure in Nigeria's democracy is rather described as unfortunate. The game plan of the godfathers, which has been on display since the return of democracy in 1999 is somewhat retrogressive to the long awaited democracy in Nigeria. The conventional

civic sense of godfatherism, which is inclined to posturing a credible candidate and granting him a mentorship support to enhance resulted oriented governance, is however opposed by entrepreneurial sense of politics. It is a term now reserved for God forsaken criminals who will go to any length to achieve their set goals of wielding political power including arson, intimidation, warning flogging and sometimes assassination. This derivative meaning of godfatherism and its negative application in Nigeria is loathsome.

Godfatherism is one of the pandemic that is endangering our polity. It compels elected official to siphon funds made for public infrastructural development to private accounts, of their godfathers, thereby jeopardizing and mortgaging the future of the citizens. The modus operandi of the Nigerian political godfather is clear even to the blind. The godson occupies an exalted position in government, rather than spending the available fund to establish a factory or set up a process that will employ our youths like school leavers and university graduates, the money is diverted to Swiss or other European or American banks. School leavers and university graduates are therefore made jobless and provide fertile ground for recruiting an infantry that will do the evil bidding of these godfathers.

Against this background Gambo was right when he opined that “the Fourth Republic political godfathers are essentially predatory in their motivation to influence electoral politics” (1) Indeed from the look of things, godfathers are a major plague of party politics in the country. To understand the more reasons why the Fourth Republic godfathers exhibit atomic political behaviour in promoting their exclusively defined interest, it is important to provide a sketchy picture of the origin of godfatherism in electoral politics. According to Gambo “the origin of godfatherism in electoral politics could be traced to the city of Chicago in the United States of America in the pre-World War II era. It was within this period that “the heads of criminal gangs sponsored politicians in elections, manipulated the results to get them elected and in return, received protection and contracts from their political godsons”. (2007:1) It can be seen from this account of origin that the key defining characteristics of godfatherism in the USA and in Nigeria are broadly speaking similar. Undoubtedly, godfathers employ whatever means, legitimate and illegitimate to ensure victory for their godsons in return for unlimited and intangible benefits. The above view was that of Chimaroke Nnamani when he averred as was cited by Ome that:

Strictly, the godfather is simply a self-seeking individual out there to use the government for his own purposes. The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is that when the incumbent godson is at pains to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined. (2004:52)

He goes on,

The character of the godfather-negotiation for settlement has the obvious strings of brutal intimidation and other terms of manipulation. The god-father would not take pleas on leanness of resources nor would he take the prayer of the godson for alternative personnel in recruitment into the higher level and strategic positions in government because he must exert his “pound of flesh” or power of influence in all cases. (2004:52)

Many godfathers in Nigerian context today are unfortunately the vehicles for the delivery of victory to predestined winners. This is so because it has become a common practice for many politicians regardless of their party affiliations to pay obeisance to the godfathers, believing that with their anointing, success would come at the polls. With such developments, candidates with questionable character emerge. This would definitely truncate our democracy. Vice President Atiku views are apt here as was cited by Ajayi (2007:1) that “the godfathers are gradually taking over the Nigerian political institutions parties and the role of the electorate are diminishing and the concept of godfathers as “owners” of political parties or sections thereof is a threat to the development of democracy”.

### **The Effects of Godfatherism in Nigeria Politics**

The destabilizing effects of this for democratic consolidation, no doubt is loud and clear. Evidently, looking at the trend of event in the present political dispensation, one is not left with any doubt whether or not godfatherism in Nigerian politics should be allowed. Many politically parties at various levels of government are structurally and financially

weak to organize themselves for any free and fair electoral context without the unwieldy influence of these political entrepreneurs-the godfathers. This is so because godfatherism as it is practiced can be better described as a plague. This plague like insurgence manifests in a number of ways. The reality of the two parties (godfathers and godsons) to fall apart is always eminent. When that happens, it is usually calamitous, good governance is thrown overboard.

The story of who installed who as a governor or the like and who accounts to who has rendered political administration of some states in Nigeria morbid. In some instances, properties of the state government are set ablaze due to the unreasonable feud emanating from the practices of godfatherism. There is a break down of law and order. The Anambra state logjam during the Chris Uba and Governor Chris Ngige feud is very wonderful example to the menace of godfatherism when the godson wants to be independent.

One of the most absurd displays of political madness, which was abduction of an executive governor, was seen in Anambra state. This followed the defiant attitude of Governor Chris Ngige in rejecting the selfish terms of Chris Uba his godfather. This of course did not make for a good picture of democracy but an aberration. In Oyo state, Adedibu and the governor Ladoja's quagmire is also a negation to the phenomenon of godfatherism and as a result of Ladoja's insistence to break away from such evil of godfatherism, there has been no peace in Oyo state. This could also be heard of Dr. Olusola Saraki (godfather) and Alhaji Muhammed Lawal (godson), the governor of Kwara state between 1999-2003. Dr. Saraki was purported to have endorsed the candidature of Lawal against other contenders as the governor of the state and also bankrolled his campaign expenses. But Lawal failed to reciprocate the gesture of Dr. Saraki by giving him adequate government patronage and by acting in other ways as a loyal "godson". "This resulted in the battle for supremacy between Saraki and Lawal, which seriously affected good governance in the state". (Thovoethin 2004: 64)

However, when the godson wants to compromise his integrity and to swallow the mess of his godfather, the story is rather unfortunate to the smooth governance and the delivery of the "almighty dividends of democracy". The syndrome of the winner takes it all arises. Those greedy godfathers would therefore "pocket" the state into their pockets and decide who gets what and who becomes what in the state government. Since many of these godfathers have no knowledge, ideas and expertise to impart

except that they assumed their current political position because of their enormous wealth, which they invested in to politics and expect a return or profit, such states where they unleash their terror are always described as unfortunate.

According to Joseph (1991:54) “this development has left democracy in Nigeria to assume the form of *prebendalism*”. Within this context, state power is treated as a congeries of office, which can be competed for, appropriated and then administered for the benefit of individual occupants and their support group. This is the case of Anambra state under the regime of Governor Mbadiniju and Emeka Offor. During that era, there were all sorts of evils in the state. Infrastructural development in the state was thrown over board. Nothing was moving in Anambra state. It was on record also that during this period, schools were closed down for over ten months. Democracy became an illusion in Anambra state.

At this juncture, it becomes pertinent to turn to another side of godfatherism, which would serve us well in the bid to sustain and consolidate our democracy even as we are at the verge or threshold of another republic. This is the biblical pattern of mentorship. With this pattern of mentorship, godfatherism would be seen as a veritable tool in bringing about an enduring and viable democracy. This we shall discuss under two separate relationships.

## **Biblical Example of Godfatherism**

### **(i) Moses and Jethro’s Relationship**

In the Old Testament, we find cases of exemplification of godfatherism. However, for the purposes of this paper we are going to consider only two. One of them is the Moses and his father-in-law Jethro. Moses meeting with Jethro is one of the texts from Elohist (E) source, but an editor has probably added verses 2-4 and perhaps other phrases in an effort to harmonize with the Yahwist (J) material about Moses’ family. Since the name Jethro is usually followed both here and elsewhere (3:1; 4:18 ) by Moses’ father-in-law, which is the only designation used in verses 13-27, it gives the impression of having been inserted later. Thus the father-in-law may have been nameless in the E tradition. [E and J are designates for



the scholarship sources of the material used in the Old Testament scripture others though not used are D for Deuteronomist and P for Priestly traditions]

The approach of Jethro is announced as a man of importance, a sheik and a priest. Considering the roles he played in life of his son-in-law he is no less a person than a godfather. Hence Moses goes to meet him bowing to him as his elder, his father-in-law, the head of his household and godfather and greeting him in Bedouin fashion with a kiss. As a godson, Moses narrated to him of the deliverance and the mighty works of Yahweh so far in to the wilderness where they were at the time. As a godfather Jethro acknowledged the power of Yahweh.

Though, the administration of justice, which was another point of the exhibition of Jethro's godfatherism to Moses, was linked by *on the morrow* to verse 13, "it relates a separate tradition of a later event which occurred after the giving of the law" (Laymon 1983:138) According to this biblical narrative, the next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law the ideal godfather saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he condemned it hence he asked, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

Now the ideal godfatherism has come into play. Moses though was into a right duty and project but the mechanism he adopted was not to the full welfare of the people. Jethro knew that the center of every government was the people. Hence his disqualification of the method of Moses governance exemplified in his dispensation of justice. He did not end by rubbishing such anti-people oriented governance but quickly recommended a better and people oriented style. This among others included delegation of powers to some people. Although care must be taken on the quality of the people to be appointed to such high and exalted position of responsibility. This included men who are able, those who fear the Lord, men of truth those who hate covetousness. Jethro did not give out list to that effect as to those he would want to recommend but allowed his "godson" to use his wit to make such recommendation.

Moses was reported to have listened to his father-in-law and godfather and did everything he said. After that Jethro returned home. It is worthy of mention here that what Jethro did was the perfect exhibition of godfatherism. He never did anything to get richer. He did not in any way hijack the polity and governance of the time even when he would have

influenced Moses his godson or protégé. And when he had given his counsels, he returned home possibly waiting for another opportunity.

### **(ii) Samuel and Prophet Eli's Relationship**

The second case we are considering in this paper is the Samuel and Eli's relationship. Young Samuel, while serving the Lord was doing that under the directive of Prophet Eli. Eli here is nobody but the godfather to Samuel who was to him a spiritual son. God's purpose in life concerning Samuel came to reality a result of the guardianship of prophet Eli. When God was calling Samuel. He did not understand that it was God who was calling him. Eli, perceiving that it was the voice of God that Samuel heard, instructed him on what to say. Though it was a disgrace to Eli, for God's call to be directed to Samuel, yet he told him how to make it. Thus the elder should do their utmost to assist and improve the younger ones that are rising up. That is the essence of godfatherism.

As Samuel continued to rise, Eli was never envious of him in the sight of the Lord over his two sons. The height of it was the revelation to Samuel concerning the calamity to befall the household of Eli his godfather. Samuel was however, afraid to confront Eli. Being a godfather, an instructor, Eli called Samuel to ask question concerning God's revelation. Eli was aware of the fact that his role in the life of Samuel was a call to service and duty. Whatever message from God through Samuel is an act of God. Here the concept of godfatherism and godson as expressed in the Samuel and prophet Eli saga is a reciprocal one. (Kehinde 2004:33)

From the forgoing, it becomes clear that the Old Testament has got huge package of lessons to make godfatherism a worthwhile venture capable of turning the political landscape in Nigeria to a viable and enviable posture. This in no small measure will reposition Nigeria in its leadership role in Africa . This kind of godfatherism encapsulated in the personalities above is what we need in Nigeria in order to sustain and consolidate our democracy. A kind of godfatherism that is devoid of bullying, economic parasitism and the denial of the rights of the electorate. The Old Testament's pictures are suggestive of the fact that godfatherism should not be seen as a business outfit where the godfatehr sets out to maximize profit using the godson but rather as a social apparatus within a political terrain to provide mentorship and guidance to the godson to ensure a healthy political outfit.

The Old Testament also provides a kind of godfatherism that brings out the true tenet of democracy viz- equal and even participation of the people. A kind of godfatherism that would be based on guardianship rather than intimidation, and political hegemony. A kind where godfathers leave or allow their godsons to do the “thing” rather than sitting tight and forcing them to act on scripts authored by them.

### **Recommendations**

Having discussed thus far, it is only reasonable to put up a few recommendations that would enable us run our democracy and godfatherism with decency and a sense of decorum.

- i. Politics of money should be discouraged forthwith. By this much emphasis should be placed on the quality of the person vying for a particular position and not how much money he possesses.
- ii. The prospective godsons on choosing their godfathers should take much care. Experienced and prestigious persons in politics should be sought for and not whoever has money.
- iii. Also prospective godfathers should place themselves in the shoes of Jethro and Eli. This of course would make them appear honourable at the end.
- iv. Legislation should be made empowering the security agents to arrest and prosecute selfish godfathers like Emeka Offor, Chris Uba, and Adedibu (late). This would therefore be a deterrent for other intending gluttons and profiteers.
- v. The National Orientation Agency (N. O. A) and other related Non-governmental organizations should intensify efforts to making people understand the dangers of mal-handling godfatherism of the democracy of our dear fatherland.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that godfatherism is not a new concept in human activities and without it no meaningful impact would be made in most endeavours of humanity including politics. However, the effects of godfatherism are glaring and starring people on the face. It has metamorphosed into hydra-headed monster, which if nothing is done is capable of truncating our hard earned democracy.

The crux of this paper is therefore to assert that godfatherism is not evil as it were, hence the advocacy for the change of style and pattern of managing godfatherism from intimidation and slavery to mentorship.

This has been typified in the biblical personalities discussed earlier. There is no doubt that having the mind of mentorship in displaying godfatherism in Nigeria politics that our democracy will soar like the eagles.

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