

**THE SILENCE OF THE PROPHETIC VOICE OF THE
NIGERIAN CHURCHES AND WILLING
COLLABORATORS: THE REAL BANE OF
RELIGIOUS, CIVIL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRACY
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

For most people, democracy has proved to be the best framework for religious and civil liberties as it promotes freedom of speech and conscience, the exercise of faith and religious pluralism. For their parts, religious and civil liberties are valid partners of democracy as they help it maintain the principles of democratic society. In many nations of the world, people are worried about how democratically elected governments are destroying religious and civil liberties thereby destroying the principles of democracy. This paper uses library and online materials to discuss about religious, civil liberties and democracy. Contextually, it explores the status of these values in the Nigerian society and argues that the silence of the prophetic voice of the Nigerian churches and willing collaborators with the government are really the bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. The paper ends by proposing a way forward.

Keywords: Religious, civil liberties, democracy, government, Nigerian churches, the silence of the prophetic voice, and willing collaborators.

Introduction

Religious and civil liberties usually serve as a buoy to democratically elected governments to pilot and navigate safely through anything that can ruin the values of democracy for the common good. Sometimes, some well-meaning leaders in order to curb extremism, wittingly or unwittingly, clamp down on religious and civil liberties. Some other selfish leaders consciously destroy these principles of democracy for selfish purposes. All these, weaken democratic societies and make life unbearable for the common people. While it is true that some government leaders do this, this paper is of the opinion that the silence of the prophetic voice of the Nigerian churches and the willing collaborators with government officials especially in Nigeria, are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy. It will briefly explain the concepts of religious, civil liberties and democracy. It will also explore the status of these values in the Nigerian society and avers that the true bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria are the silence of the prophetic voice of the Nigerian churches and willing collaborators with government leaders. Finally, it will make a proposal for a way forward.

The Concept of Religious Liberty

Religious freedom or liberty is the recognition of the right one has as a human being to freely choose and practice the religion of one's choice without coercion or hindrance of any kind. Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, puts it succinctly. It says:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Religious liberty is ontological in the sense that it is a universal inherent right given to one for being human. Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged this in his message to the world on January 1, 2011, when he proclaimed that “Religious freedom expresses what is unique about the human person”; and any attempt to deny this freedom or “eclipse the public role of religion” is not only essentially unjust, but stifles “the growth of the authentic and lasting peace of the whole human family.”¹ Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* shows that this milestone declaration anchored universal rights in the “inherent dignity” and “worth of the human person”, and in the “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” who are “endowed with reason and conscience.” Both Jewish and Christian traditions acknowledge that the human person is “made in the image and likeness of God”, which shows that people are endowed with an outstanding dignity, which orders respect for their integrity and conscience. In fact, the document of the Vatican II Council on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae* no. 2, declares that “the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” The document further declares in the same paragraph that “the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person.” Based on this dignity, the document maintains that the right to religious freedom cannot be impeded even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it as long as a just public order is maintained. It is important to note that the Council Fathers who

¹ “Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace”, January 1, 2011.

wrote this document, acknowledged that there are some limits to religious liberty when they added the phrase “within due limits” to the declaration. However, the purpose is to protect public safety, maintain order, good health, morals, and the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. In fact, for James E. Wood, Jr., authentic religion must be free from coercion, as faith imposed by force is not genuine.²

So, religious liberty can be understood as a fundamental human right of a person to freely choose or not choose, to practice or not to practice in public or in private a religion of his or her choice without compulsion or hindrance, provided a just public peace is maintained and the freedom of others is respected. It is the cornerstone of all civil liberties and a democratic state. Without freedom of religion, other freedoms such as speech, press, assembly, and association are endangered.³

Civil Liberty

Like religious liberty, civil liberty is a fundamental human right of individuals either by themselves or in association with one another, to choose and pursue objects which they consider good, provided they all enjoy that liberty in an equal manner.⁴ Article 20 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognizes this as a right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association made without compulsion. Any arbitrary actions or other meddling of the government without due process of law in issues of civil liberties is a violation of the fundamental human right of the citizens. This is because civil liberties are basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to individuals as protection from any

² James E. Wood, Jr., "The Relationship of Religious Liberty to Civil Liberty and a Democratic State," *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 1998, 479.

³ James E. Wood, Jr., "The Relationship of Religious Liberty to Civil Liberty and a Democratic State," 490.

⁴ A. C. Kapur, *Principle of Political Science*, (India: Nirja Publishers & Printers Ltd, 2012), 253.

arbitrary actions or other interference of the government without due process of law.⁵ Civil liberty, therefore, refers to the fundamental rights and freedoms that protect individuals from government overreach and ensures their ability to participate in the civil and political life of the state without discrimination or repression. These liberties are rooted in the dignity and sanctity of the human person and the inviolability of human conscience. It is based on the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, as highlighted in the Preamble of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which speaks of "the inherent dignity... of all members of the human family" and "the dignity and worth of the human person."⁶ Freedom of conscience is integral to civil liberty. Marsilius of Padua recognized the right of conscience as both a natural and political right, asserting that no person is above another in the freedom of its exercise.⁷ Civil liberty, including freedom of religion and conscience, has been increasingly recognized in international law and ecclesiastical pronouncements. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) affirm the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.⁸ Civil liberty has often been championed by religious minorities and dissenters. However, constitutions, legislative bodies, and courts of law play vital roles in advancing it.

⁵ A. C. Kapur, *Principle of Political Science*, 254.

⁶ James E. Wood, Jr., "The Relationship of Religious Liberty to Civil Liberty and a Democratic State," 484.

⁷ James E. Wood, Jr., "The Relationship of Religious Liberty to Civil Liberty and a Democratic State," 486.

⁸ James E. Wood, Jr., "The Relationship of Religious Liberty to Civil Liberty and a Democratic State," 492.

The Concept of Democracy

Perhaps there is no unanimously accepted definition of democracy anywhere. However, most people believe that the simplest definition of democracy is that of the former president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who defined democracy as “A government of the people, by the people and for the people.”⁹ The concentration and abuse of power by the ruler, primarily gave rise to the idea of democracy. Democracy in itself is not perfect, except that most people believe that all the other forms of government that have been tried over time produced fewer desirable results than democracy, and that all the problems of democracy can only be solved by even more democracy.¹⁰ Up until today, man has been incapable of creating any system of government that could control public affairs better than democracy. In fact, the contemporary theory of democracy was not articulated until the 17th and 18th centuries, an era that is called the age of enlightenment in the history of western philosophy. It was only then that philosophers defined the vital elements of democracy. These are separation of powers, basic civil and human rights, religious liberty, separation of church and state.¹¹ Baron Montesquie, a French Political Philosopher made a very substantial contribution to the concept of modern democracy when he articulated the doctrine of separation of powers. This is the breaking up of political powers into three independent but mutually complementary branches of government – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary to checkmate abuses.¹² The idea that the people are the decisive authority and the foundation of the authority of government is a fundamental

⁹ Abdullahi Dan’asabe Jibrin, “Democracy in Nigeria: An Overview”, *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies Vol 4 Issue 1 January, 2016*, 39.

¹⁰ Abdullahi Dan’asabe Jibrin, “Democracy in Nigeria: An Overview”, 39.

¹¹ Abdullahi Dan’asabe Jibrin, “Democracy in Nigeria: An Overview”, 40.

¹² Abdullahi Dan’asabe Jibrin, “Democracy in Nigeria: An Overview”, 40.

principle of democracy. In the same vein, the political equality of all citizens is an indispensable principle of democracy, ensuring that every individual has an equal right to participate in the political process. In a democratic society, elections must be free, fair, and sufficiently frequent to enable the people to exercise their control of government. This includes the right of all adult citizens to vote and stand for office, and ensuring that elections are honest and votes are accurately counted. In its 2007 report on “Governance for Sustainable Human Development,” the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), acknowledges participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision as core characteristics of democratic governance.

The use of constitutions to limit government by law, ensuring that government power is defined and restricted to protect the fundamental rights, interests, and welfare of the people is an essential element of democracy. This includes the rule of law and judicial review. Another crucial principle of democracy is the recognition of the moral primacy of the individual and protection of the individual’s fundamental rights such as freedom of religion, political freedom, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, right to privacy, and freedom of association. In fact, The Inter-Parliamentary Union recognizes these principles of democracy. Article 1 of its adopted Universal Declaration on Democracy maintains that:

Democracy is a universally recognised ideal as well as a goal, which is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world community irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic differences. It is thus a basic right of citizenship to be exercised under conditions of freedom, equality, transparency and responsibility, with due

respect for the plurality of views, and in the interest of the polity.¹³

In other words, democracy in principle, ensures that the religious and civil liberties of citizens in a democratic society are well protected.

Religious, Civil Liberties, and Democracy in the Nigerian Context

This section of the paper briefly examines the situations of religious and civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.

The return to democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, after several years of military misrule, which was marked by much suffering, intimidation, institutionalized corruption, and absence of religious and civil liberties among others, was received with prevalent jubilation and optimism as people looked forward to a new era of stability, peace, and prosperity. Above all, people expected the return of religious and civil liberties along with other fundamental human rights that are dividends of a democratic society. In fact, the hope of the citizens, especially the common man, for a just and egalitarian society became relit with the institution of a democratic government.¹⁴ No doubt, the return to democratic rule in Nigeria is a milestone achievement for the country. With the return of democracy, a constitutional system of ruling is revived. With the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended, Nigerian citizens have the constitutional right to elect their leaders in free and fair elections as Nigeria has once again become a democratic society. Among other liberties, religious and civil liberties are enshrined at least

¹³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Democracy: Its Principles and Achievement*, Geneva, 1998, IV.

¹⁴ Lanre Olu-Adeyemi, "The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria", *International Journal of Business and Social Science* Vol. 3 No. 5; March 2012, 167.

in principle in Nigerian constitution, paving the way for religious and civil freedoms in the country. While this is a step in the right direction, many are of the opinion that Nigerian political system is marred by nepotism, corruption, greed, god-fatherism, and police and military intimidations. Lanre Olu-Adeyemi, is probably right when she averred that democratic governance in Nigeria, is seriously challenged by issues such as leadership failures, corruption, human rights violations, civil strife, and the need for electoral reforms since the country's return to democracy in 1999.¹⁵ In line with Chinua Achebe, she maintains that the problem with Nigeria is bad leadership where leaders lack leadership qualities and skills like the ability to formulate and implement right policies, innovative and creative visions, listening skills, and maintenance of the rule of law.¹⁶ The process for electing public officers into leadership positions appears to be the major challenge of democratic governance in Nigeria. It is clear that political parties in Nigeria are dominated by god-fathers, ex-military leaders, and money bags. This ugly context makes party primaries in Nigeria to be mostly choosy or selective, non-participatory and undemocratic. Politicians who get into leadership positions through this avenue, very often institutionalize corruption, profess loyalty to god-fathers and patrons, and become indifference to the electorate and citizens in their style of governance. In fact, they exhibit lack of accountability not only to the constitution, but also to their political parties and the electorate.¹⁷ Most Nigerian citizens believe that their fundamental human rights which include but not limited to religious and civil liberties still come under serious

¹⁵ Lanre Olu-Adeyemi, "The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria", *International Journal of Business and Social Science* Vol. 3 No. 5; March 2012, 167-171.

¹⁶ Lanre Olu-Adeyemi, "The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria", 168.

¹⁷ Lanre Olu-Adeyemi, "The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria", 168.

attacks despite the advent of democracy. In the same vein, people believe that the 2023 election in Nigeria was a disgrace to democracy despite the introduction of new technology, like the Bi-modal Voting Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Results Viewing Portal (IReV), which supposed to have made the election credible, free and fair as the benchmark of democracy is free and fair elections. But the system was believed to have been manipulated by those who supposed to have protected it.¹⁸ Indeed, according to Ojukwu, Uchechukwu Grace et al,

several accredited election observation groups reported that the credibility of the 2023 election was greatly marred by numerous pitfalls in election administration such as inefficient management of permanent voters' cards (PVCs) distribution, failure of operational and logistical arrangements, malfunctioning of election technology, instances of vote manipulation, political violence, lack of transparent results collation and declaration.¹⁹

“Nigeria’s Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: An Audit of the Electoral System”, is a title of a paper presented by Professor Olanrewaju Fagbohun at the June 12 Anniversary Lecture organized by the Political and Legislative Powers Bureau of Lagos State Government in conjunction with the June 12 Coalition on 12th June 2013 on the theme Electoral System, the Bane of Political Instability in Nigeria. In this paper, Professor Olanrewaju discussed the challenges of Nigeria's electoral system and its impact on political instability, reflecting on the historical significance of the June 12, 1993 election. Like many other

¹⁸ Ojukwu, Uchechukwu Grace et al., “Democracy and 2023 General Elections in Nigeria:

Retrospect and Prospects”, *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*: Vol. 11(4), 54-66, July 2023.

¹⁹ Ojukwu, Uchechukwu Grace et al., “Democracy and 2023 General Elections in Nigeria:

Retrospect and Prospects”, 54.

Nigerians, he believed that “Nigeria at this point in time does not have a self-correcting majoritarian democracy” and for majority, there are not even vestiges or relics of hope.²⁰ He went on to aver that:

it is a matter of common knowledge that elections in Nigeria have consistently been characterized by: problems with voter registration, god-fatherism, political violence, intra-party violence, violent disruption of political meetings, parallel party congresses, delegate bribery, duplicate polls, refusal to send election materials to supposed rival constituencies, ethno-religious slurs, manifestoes devoid of concrete vision and ideologies, imposition of candidates, perversion of election procedures, kidnapping of opponents, assassination of would-be candidates and political chieftains, stealing of ballot boxes and outright rigging. On and on, we can catalogue the fraudulent manipulations and vices which have now become regular features of elections in Nigeria.²¹

Quoting Professor Attahiru Jega, he went on to say: “Elections in Nigeria have historically been conflict ridden.... And the election outcomes have often been neither free nor fair, characterized by violations of the process (both inadvertent and willful), corrupt conduct by officials, rigging of results and so on...”²² An efficient and reliable judiciary is a sine qua non to a democratization process. Where electoral cases are disproportionately delayed or are arbitrated in a manner that

²⁰ Olanrewaju Fagbohun, “Nigeria’s Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: An Audit of the Electoral System”, A paper delivered at the June 12 Anniversary Lecture organized by the Political and Legislative Powers Bureau of Lagos State Government in conjunction with the June 12 Coalition on 12th June 2013 on the theme Electoral System, the Bane of Political Instability in Nigeria, 3.

²¹ Olanrewaju Fagbohun, “Nigeria’s Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: An Audit of the Electoral System”, 8

²² Olanrewaju Fagbohun, “Nigeria’s Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: An Audit of the Electoral System”, 8-9.

strongly suggests concession on behalf of the adjudicator, it vehemently violates electoral governance. In a bid to avoid delays, many election tribunals in Nigeria participate in giving technical electoral justice as opposed to substantial social justice. And “technical justice is nothing short of injustice pretending and / or parading itself as justice.”²³

Adeyinka Theresa Ajayi and Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo, examined the challenges and prospects of democracy in Nigeria, highlighting issues such as corruption, leadership failures, and the need for genuine electoral participation. They noted that Chief Obafemi Awolowo had decried the horrible state of democracy in Nigeria as far back as 1962 and maintained that the situation is worst today.²⁴ Onyinyechi and Ayuba argued in the same vein that democracy and electoral activities in Nigeria have assumed a crisis level because almost every attempt to conduct a free and fair election in Nigeria to ensure transition from one leadership to another has often ended up with serious political violence and conflict.²⁵ A. U. Tar decried the nature of the democratic rule in Nigeria where government’s human rights record has been poor. He wondered how democracy could thrive in a system where elections are abused through commercialization of votes, ballot box stuffing, buying of the election officials and manipulation of election result.²⁶ Wole Soyinka in response to former president Goodluck Janathan on fuel subsidy protest remarked:

²³ Olanrewaju Fagbohun, “Nigeria’s Democracy and the Crisis of Political Instability: An Audit of the Electoral System”, 19.

²⁴ Adeyinka Theresa Ajayi et al., “Democracy in Nigeria: Practice, Problems and Prospects”, *Developing Country Studies Vol.4, No.2, 2014*, 116.

²⁵ C. Onyinyechi and H. Ayuba, “Democracy and Political Governance in Nigeria”, *International Journal of Administration and Development Studies*, 2:2., 2011.

²⁶ A.U. Tar, Nigeria: Contested Elections and an unstable democracy. *Review of African Political Economy Journal*, 2007, 540-548.

The president sent in the army and shock police squads to forcibly seize and occupy grounds from a demonstrating public, a violation of the people's right as it happens, that has been further consolidated by a pronouncement of the Courts of law. This should be seen as a grave danger to democracy, and a warning both the participants and those who like myself...though unable to be present, lent both vocal and moral support to the demonstration, have been maligned and insulted by such reductionist reasoning.²⁷

Abubakar S.R. Matazu, lamented the violation of fundamental human rights of Nigerians which include, but not limited to discrimination, extra judicial execution, disappearances, torture and unfair trials by the security personnels in Nigeria, whose responsibility it is, to ensure protection of lives and properties.²⁸ Uchenna Emelonye, on his own part, discussed the implementation of international human rights obligations in Nigeria from the perspective of civil society, focusing on the Universal Periodic Review Process. He noted that despite claims of advances, there are still plethora of problems and gaps in the application of Nigeria's international human rights obligations.²⁹ On a similar note, Elkanah Babatunde made a study of police brutality in Nigeria, examining its historical roots, legal frameworks and international obligations. He maintained that Nigeria is in breach of its obligation to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and pointed out the need

²⁷ sunnewsonline./com/... ./Soyinka - replies -Jonathan on fuel subsidy protest, <http://twitter.com/sunnewsnigeria>.

²⁸ Abubakar S.R. Matazu, "Violations of Fundamental Rights in Nigeria during Internal Strife and Civil Disturbances by the Nigerian Security Personnel", *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 19, Issue 8, (Aug. 2014), 01-05.

²⁹ Uchenna Emelonye, "Implementation of International Human Rights Obligations in Nigeria: Civil Society Perspective", *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol. 8, No. 6, (June 25, 2021)*, 330-344.

for accountability and anti-torture legislation.³⁰ In the same line of thought, Jacob Abiodun Dada examined the historical development, current status, and future goals of human rights protection in Nigeria, probing its evolution from pre-colonial times to the present and the roles of various actors in promoting these rights. He averred that significant human rights abuses still exist in the country and the social, economic and cultural rights have become an abandoned class of human rights in Nigeria.³¹

The incidents noted by these authors and scholars, whether they are in the form of human rights abuses by the police, military, drug, and other law enforcement agents or in the form of election violence, buying of votes, manipulation of results, and imposition of candidates on the people, are indexes of a failed democracy. The state of a democratic society, determines to a greater extent, its level of the protection of the religious and civil liberties of its citizens. All most, if not all the authors blame the Nigerian government for the violation of the democratic principles and consequently, the violation of the religious and civil liberties of the citizens. While the government cannot be exonerated, it seems that the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria are the silence of the prophetic voice of the Nigerian churches and the willing collaborators whom the government uses to achieve its goals.

³⁰ Elkanah Babatunde, "Torture by the Nigerian Police Force: International Obligations, National Responses and the Way Forward" *Strathmore Law Review*, (January 2017), 169-187.

³¹ Jacob Abiodun Dada, "Human Rights Protection in Nigeria: The Past, the Present and Goals for Role Actors for the Future", *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, Vol.14, 2013, 1-13.

The Silence of the Prophetic Voice of the Nigerian churches and Willing Collaborators: The Real Bane of Religious, Civil Liberties and Democracy in Nigeria

Willing Collaborators in this paper refer to all those who willingly and wittingly assist the government to consciously or unconsciously truncate the democratic process and principles, consequently affecting adversely the religious and civil liberties of the citizens. These include but not limited to Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials, Professors and other Personnel INEC uses as returning officers at polling units and centers, police, military, and other law enforcement agents the government uses to intimidate, torture, and violate citizens' religious and civil liberties; religious leaders and self-acclaimed prophets who willingly or unwillingly collaborate with the government to instigate religious violence for selfish reasons. The judges and lawyers who made themselves willing instruments in the hands of ruling parties to manipulate and overturn the decisions of the masses at electoral tribunals. Leaders of powerful foreign nations who cooperate with political leaders to influence and impose leaders of their choice against the will of the masses. This paper maintains that these and the prophetic voice of the Nigerian churches, particularly the Nigerian Catholic church which has remained silent for some decades now, are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.

Some of the authors reviewed above noted that some INEC officials willingly collaborate with the government to manipulate election results, thereby violating democratic principles. Most Nigerian citizens, including most observers of the 2023 national elections, believed that the results were manipulated by INEC officials as mentioned earlier. The insistence of the ruling party and the INEC officials to continue with the calling of the results then, despite the alarm raised by other parties' representatives and citizens who were at the polling units when the results were

counted manually, seems to prove that the allegations were true. The government, no doubt, might be at fault, but those willing INEC officials who collaborated with the government are the real bane of democratic principles in this case. Jesus prophetically confronted the political and religious situations that dehumanized and enslaved the people of his time. He became the voice of the voiceless, the poor, the marginalized and oppressed and liberated them from unjust structures that were dehumanizing them. He gave them back their lives. The Christian churches, in the footsteps of Jesus, are the voice of the voiceless wherever they are. Like Jesus, they prophetically speak out and fight unjust structures dehumanizing people. This prophetic voice was not heard during the 2023 national elections in Nigeria when the results were believed to be manipulated; where it was heard, it was through the usual communique that lacks the potential to effect the desired change. This intentional or unintentional silence of the churches' prophetic voice is the real bane of democratic principles.

The electoral judges and lawyers who willingly decide to deliver technical justice instead of substantial justice in post-electoral cases, knowing that technical justice is nothing short of injustice pretending to be justice as noted above, are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. The church leaders who hear and see judges and lawyers deliver technical justice in place of substantial justice and choose to mute their prophetic voices are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.

The Nigerian government has been accused several times as noted earlier of using the police, the military, and other law enforcement agents to intimidate, torture, and sometimes kill innocent people during elections, religious and civil protests thereby violating their fundamental human rights, as well as their religious and civil liberties. If the accusations are true as they seem to be, the government is at fault, but the real culprits and

true bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in these cases are those police, military and other law enforcement agents who willingly and consciously collaborate with the government to carry out these heinous crimes and the church leaders who deliberately or out of fear shelve their prophetic voices in the face of such heinous crimes.

When some religious leaders willingly allow themselves to be used either by the government or their religious members to instigate religious violence and violate the religious liberty of others, they are the real bane of religious freedom. In the same vein religious members who willingly listen to their leaders to violate the religious freedom of others are the real bane of religious liberty. The same is true with leaders of civil organizations who willingly align themselves with the government to violate and trample the civil liberties of the citizens. There are some religious leaders who willingly collaborate with the government by keeping mute when they suppose to speak-out for the people either because they compromised or are afraid to speak-out; and when they speak, it is either through a communique or other avenues that cannot produce the desired changes. Some others sway their congregations to vote for leaders who are incompetent and have no respect for democratic principles. Religious leaders like these, are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. Members of such religious congregations who, though aware of the incompetence of these political leaders, willingly collaborate with their religious leaders to bring them into power are also the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. Some Nigerian citizens during elections vote according to tribe and religion even when they know that the candidates they are voting for have no respect for religious, civil liberties and democratic principles. These Nigerians, are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. Some leaders of foreign powerful nations have selfish interest in what

is happening in Nigeria. They, therefore, willingly collaborate with the politicians to manipulate elections and force candidates of their choices against the will of the masses. They are the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. The politicians who willingly cooperate with these foreign leaders are the true bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.

In an article titled “Character-led leadership: Celebrating Prof Nnenna Oti” published in *Business Day*, March 28, 2023, M. A. Johnson noted that Professor Nnenna Oti was reported to have said as the people of Abia State and well-wishers waited patiently for the gubernatorial election results of March 2023:

“I’m Professor Nnenna Oti from Afikpo, I am the Vice Chancellor of the Federal University of Technology Owerri. The people’s mandate shall stand... I have spent all my adult life in pursuit of the ideals of good governance. We shall stand by these principles. The pastor in me and the mother in me will not permit me to do anything that will adversely affect the future of our children. I shall do right by God and by man!”³²

As the INEC Presiding Officer in Abia State during that election, the accomplished scholar refused to be procured to manipulate election results and cause chaos in Abia State. She ignored any message that came from any powerful individual or organization and decided that the will of Abia voters would not be subverted under her watch. She knows the principles of democracy and stated firmly, “I shall stand squarely and unapologetically on these principles.”³³ Professor Nnenna Oti refused to willingly collaborate with the government and other political officials who

³² M. A. Johnson, “Character-led leadership: Celebrating Prof Nnenna Oti”, <https://businessday.ng/columnist/article/character-led-leadership-celebrating-prof-nnenna-oti/>.

³³ M. A. Johnson, “Character-led leadership: Celebrating Prof Nnenna Oti”,

wanted her to destroy democratic principles and manipulate election results against the will of the people. If INEC officials, the police, military and other law enforcement agents, post-electoral judges and lawyers, religious and civil leaders, politicians, and indeed, every Nigerian citizen stop collaborating willingly with leaders who are after selfish interests and if the churches in Nigeria willingly decide to let their prophetic voices in the footsteps of Jesus be boldly and clearly heard, democracy will thrive in Nigeria and religious and civil liberties of the citizens will be protected. Below are some proposals for a way forward.

Recommendations

- For religious, civil liberties and democracy to flourish in Nigeria, in the long-term, schools in Nigeria whether missionary, private or government, should prioritize reward of integrity and punishment of its lack, and character formation in their curricula. In the short-term, every well-meaning Nigerian should rally behind any politician with credible records of integrity in the next coming national elections. The “Obidient Movement” that started during the last national elections appears to be a positive sign that this is achievable and the desire of many if not most well-meaning Nigerians particularly, the younger generations.
- Unfortunately, the political and social structures of Nigeria have wittingly or unwittingly influenced and shaped the structure of the church in Nigeria adversely, making it difficult for credible church leaders with high level of integrity to emerge. For the churches in Nigeria especially, the Catholic Church to regain their prophetic voice in the footsteps of Jesus, election of church leaders must be free from god-fatherism, nepotism and corruption of any kind. The secret alliance between corrupt

politicians and most church leaders must come to an end if the churches in Nigeria must regain their prophetic voices and consequently, stop being the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.

- All well-meaning Nigerians must insist on the real-time electronic transmission of results in subsequent national elections in Nigeria. It will greatly improve transparency and minimize rigging by corrupt and integrity-lacking politicians. The importance of this, is evident in the fact that Section 60 (2) of the 2022 Electoral Act, mandated real-time electronic transmission of polling unit results to INEC's Result Viewing Portal (IReV). Anybody or group of people directly or indirectly collaborating with the government to manipulate or suppress this is the real bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria. On Saturday, February 8, 2026, during its meeting in Maiduguri, Borno State, the Nigerian Bar Association's National Executive Council, under the leadership of its President, Afam Osigwe, warned against making real-time electronic transmission of electoral results optional. This is a call to the right direction. However, the Bar Members should not end with merely issuing a statement of warning. Knowing that there are willing collaborators with the government among them, they should liaise with other well-meaning Nigerians to organize and stage a peaceful and non-violent protest until the political, religious, civil, and human rights of Nigerians are respected by their leaders. Church leaders in Nigeria should go beyond publications of communique and let their prophetic voices be loudly heard in a different way by courageously and prophetically joining other well-meaning Nigerians in organizing carrying out peaceful and non-violent protests to demand a permanent end to the violations of the religious, civil, and human rights of

the Nigerian citizens. If we all imitate the likes of Professor Nnenna Oti there will be no more muted prophetic voices and willing collaborators to be the bane of religious, civil liberties and democracy in Nigeria.