

TOWARDS 2023 ELECTION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE CHOICE OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

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Preamble

In the ear 2020 I visited Edo State to attend the burial of my late father-in-law. At that time, preparations for the gubernatorial elections that brought in the incumbent Governor, who decamped from the All Peoples Congress (APC) to the People's Democratic Party (PDP), were on-going. It was just five days to the election when the burial of my father-in-law took place that I visited at a hotel in Auchi, Edo State. I came across some of the grassroots leaders of the PDP ranging from ward women leaders and their officials; and some members of the party. Obviously, they had just finished some campaign activities and were there to eat from the fruit of their labour. Since, they were in the restaurant with me, and just sitting next to me, I decided to engage them in a conversation. I casually asked them, “who do you project would win the Governorship election?” They all in one voice said: “Edo State is owned by PDP”; and invariably the incumbent Governor who had just decamped from APC to PDP was their choice. I asked them how sure were they? They were so certain that PDP would win. I further asked them if really they were voting for PDP or the incumbent Governor. At this point they were all speaking from different perspectives. I went further to ask: “Should the incumbent Governor not have decamped to PDP, would you have it in mind to vote for him considering the fact that he came into PDP because of the internal conflicts in APC?” No response... I went further to ask: “Why did you not vote him when he was in the APC, and all of a sudden you now see him as the 'messiah' of Edo State? The same man who was in APC you castigated as one who was not competent to serve you in Edo State; yet, still won the election. How come that now he is in PDP, you now see him as the best candidate? Should he not have come under the platform of the PDP, would you have considered him as the best candidate for the job”? At that point I took an introspective reflection and asked myself; what are really the criteria of our choice of leadership in this part of the globe? At the end, they all said in one voice as if planned “Bros all na Politics”. This is where we are in Nigeria; we play politics without principles; devoid of critical thinking. The crux of what informs bad leadership in

Nigeria is the ability of its people to think critically. Every discipline has traces of critical thinking; but critical thinking is the very nature of Philosophy. That other disciplines do critical thinking, does not strip philosophy of its very nature.

The Function of Philosophy

The discipline of philosophy in Nigeria has often been considered the most neglected, outdated, anachronistic and academically out fashioned or an out-modeled discipline because of its supposed irrelevance. Most students in the department of philosophy did not on their own choose philosophy as their field of study; and for those of us seated here, if not because we are priests-to-be or priests; few of us would have been very glad to take philosophy as a choice of destination. This is really no fault of ours as I'm also a victim to have studied philosophy because of my initial intention to become a Catholic Priest. Recently, I was at the Department of Mass Communication in Veritas University, Abuja where I got engaged in an academic discussion with a colleague from that department; the discussion was related to the death of Mrs. Osinachi Nwachukwu popularly known as "Ekwueme". He strongly opined that we have completely lost it in this country; and, he went further to say that "it is very hard to see Nigerians thinking critically because of the lack of seriousness in the study of Philosophy which is the basis for critical thinking". Let me paraphrase further, he opined that the General Study (GST) course in *Philosophy, Logic and Human Existence* which is the groundwork to instill critical thinking in students is now taken for granted and taught dispassionately. He extended the issue of this lack of critical thinking from marriages to politics and from politics to religion; no thanks to the logical positivist school. The logical positivists were not 'so fair' to their mother discipline (philosophy) because they had wanted to prove to the world that their relevance outshines that of their mother discipline (philosophy) as she will always raise fundamental questions to the methods applied in the social sciences. The social sciences were not just comfortable with the questions posed by philosophers, because of their metaphysical nature; questions that would help guide the results and answers to the theories of the logical positivists. The separation of the sciences from philosophy was as a result of the metaphysical inclination of philosophy compared to solving problems that relates to existential realities because of the vital questions raised in philosophy.

The question as to the role of philosophy and its contemporary relevance is still a matter of scholarly argument amongst philosophers and those outside the discipline. Hence, in my own opinion the argument as to the relevance and purpose of philosophy is what makes philosophy relevant and important. Philosophy has no exclusive or distinctive subject-matter of its own. It is a general mode of enquiry about the concepts and theories presupposed in other disciplines, sciences, for example mathematics, history, law, or religion, and is concerned, moreover, with the

arguments and justifications found in their theories. Its aim is to bring clarity to the concepts, to test the coherence of the theories, and to serve the therapeutic purpose of resolving those problems which persist only because of linguistic confusions. The purpose of this key note address is not to argue so much as to the relevance and purpose of philosophy; rather, as the topic implies, it seeks to state the relevance of philosophy to solving existential issues especially in the 2023 elections. I also think it is not so much as to what philosophy can do in the 2023 Elections; but, what we can do with philosophy in order to produce credible candidates for the 2023 General elections. Philosophy does not walk on two legs and cannot do anything on its own without applying the principles that constitute its application. Therefore, human beings apply philosophy and not philosophy applying itself. I therefore put the question back to us all as philosophers; how can we put philosophy to use in the choice of good leadership in Nigeria? This question is related to the question asked by one of the students of Martin Heidegger; the question put across to him was “what can philosophy do for me”? The reply from Martin Heidegger was “it is not so much of what philosophy can do for you; but, what you can do with philosophy”? This is the task I shall attempt to undertake as a lead paper presenter in this Conference so as to challenge us on the role we have to play as philosophers in the 2023 Elections. I choose to add the noun *philosophers* (a people who offer views or theories on profound questions in different fields) to the topic so as not to lay so much emphasis on Philosophy as a discipline. The discipline philosophy cannot function without the person who is a philosopher. Therefore, as characteristic of a philosopher I will ask the following questions:

- Why do Nigerians have a problem in the choice of leadership?
- What informs our leadership choices in Nigeria?
- What is the leadership recruitment process in Nigeria?
- What constitutes our democratic process of selection and election in leadership recruitment?
- Is there something wrong with our electoral process?

The issues relating to credible elections are central to democratic consolidation. To produce a credible choice of leadership there has to be a credible umpire to facilitate credible elections. Electioneering is central to the studies in political science which is domiciled in the Faculty of Social Sciences to deal with electoral processes. psephology is a branch of Political Science; it is the quantitative analysis of elections and balloting. It attempts to explain elections using the scientific method; psephology is related to political forecasting. It also involves the study of elections, voting patterns, and electoral behavior. The psephological process of elections and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is central to the choice of leadership in Nigeria. Again, I shall ask the following questions and they are these: How Independent is the Independent National Electoral Commission in Nigeria to

facilitate a credible election? As an umpire, what has INEC done to ensure that votes are safeguarded? What has been done in resolving the issues around balloting and elections? There is a certain discomfort that comes with philosophers and quantitative analysis as it relates to philosophy of social science. Quantitative data could be manipulated hence; philosophers should begin to engage the psephological framework and theories of psephologists. Nigerians might elect a credible leader; but with the manipulative tendencies of data, the umpire can also decide to thwart the will of the people through the manipulative industry and give leadership to the highest bidder. Philosophy and Philosophers ought to engage and show interest in the political stage by asking questions that are vital to psephological analysis and in ensuring their voices are heard in policies that surround electioneering. The questions relevant for philosophy and psephology are:

- What method of elections have we adopted as the basis for effective and credible electioneering?
- How effective was the method of voting in the past towards the realization of effective elections in Nigeria?
- What effort has been made to deploy Information Computer Technology to out fashion the old way of voting?
- What effort have we explored in ICT to improve active participation in the electoral process?
- How serious is the business of elections in Nigeria for government to exhaust every strategy to bring about credible elections?

Philosophers and philosophy should not leave the center stage for the dramatic influence of only a particular discipline to manipulate the center stage of electioneering. Philosophical psephology becomes an area of interest for philosophers to engage in the process of legal formulation that will guide the electioneering process and procedures; and to frame ethical principles for the regulation of the electoral body in the conduct of credible, free and fair elections.

The Quest for Transformative Leadership in the 2023 Elections: What Philosophers Can Do and Should Do?

Philosophers should begin to get interested in the politics and polity of our dear country to salvage it from the current situation we have found it in. Let us not think that as students of Philosophy we must wait to graduate before we can begin to play a role. I was impressed recently when I saw a Seminarian from the Missionary of St. Paul (MSP) Abuja from the Philosophy Department, educating via social media (Facebook) and encouraging members of the public to get their voters' cards. This is a clear example of what philosophers and philosophy should be doing. In as much as

we cannot be moving from one place to another as itinerant teachers (as the Sophists did), the social media becomes a platform to tell members of the public that their votes count. The Sophists were itinerant teachers disseminating information in Athens and making philosophy relevant to the Athenian society. In fact, the Sophists brought Philosophy from the cosmological to the anthropological so as to relate more with people than the cosmos. As the Sophists kept moving from one place to the other, people began to question the status quo; thereby, making the comfortable uncomfortable and the uncomfortable comfortable.

Once, I was reading through the Philippines' History and I came across one of their legends Jose Rizal. He was a thorough going figure in the time of the colonial occupation when the Spaniards were in control of the Philippine territory. One day, the Filipinos beckoned on him to lead a revolution against the Spaniards; he (Jose Rizal) told his Country men and women that a violent revolution cannot succeed against the Spaniards on two grounds: firstly, the Filipinos had no weapon enough to chase them away; secondly, he (Jose Rizal) went further to say that in his study of revolutions in the world, no revolution succeeds when the end cannot be determined from the beginning. Hence, he admonished the Filipinos to keep using the pen as their tool and sword to continuously disarm the Spaniards. Dele Giwa put it clearly thus: "the pen is mightier than the sword". Philosophers always have the pen as their sword to put in the minds of people and aid them to think critically when their emotions and self-aggrandizement cause their sense of reasoning to decline.

Most times when I see Philosophers after graduation waiting and looking for jobs when they themselves should be employers of labour, it gives me a sense of worry. When we say as Philosophers, that the problems we create are more than the solutions we proffer, it does not mean we are destructive; it only means that when people are comfortable with their thinking and settle for it as absolute certainty, we make them see things from another perspective so that, they can be more careful in their decisions, critical in their thoughts, and more observant before making hasty conclusions. Our duty in this coming election as philosophers is not to hastily choose a candidate for the Nigerian people; rather, we must be sure that we make people have rational justification for their choices. We ought to make them realize that to vote and elect a leader should not be because the aspirant is a Catholic; not because the candidate is from my local government; not because the candidate is a priest; is not because the candidate is a Muslim; but, because the candidate can deliver either based on antecedents; competence, merit, or on the capacity of what Karl Popper called a Social Engineer.

The choice of leadership in Nigeria constitutes a heavy burden due to so many factors which do not exclude ethnicism, religious sentiments, party and money politics, vote

selling etc; again, philosophy ought to play a very critical role in ensuring that values are very fundamental to the idea of leadership selection and the recruitment process. Leadership is a very serious business and should not be taken for granted. As philosophers or Philosophy students your thoughts and ideas on the choice of leadership for the 2023 elections is also not to be taken for granted. You all must get involved directly or indirectly through the ballot box, the pen or getting involved in Non-governmental Organizations that help to foster democratic processes in the selection of good leadership. You might ask: “How I should get involved?” I would say, the internet has made the world a global village. You can be part of so many Organizations and be known just because of what you say and what you do. I remember I once wrote an article and posted online as it is usual of me; as I wrote and posted it online, I included my email. I never knew the article was reposted in various platforms. A lawyer wrote me from the United States and asked if I am a lawyer and I answered in the negative (by then we had exchanged numbers). He asked how i came to be able to relate such issues from a legal perspective; I made him understand that I am a Philosopher and I did my analytics based on a sub-branch in philosophy known as Philosophy of Law; he immediately took a deep sigh. He requested my permission to adopt an idea from the article. At the beginning of my key note address, if you would remember I said, it is what you can do with philosophy and not what philosophy can do for you that matters. Let me say this here, it is true that you are interested in becoming priests; but, remember that if we have a bad economy your priesthood will suffer. I am not saying that as Philosophy students you should get distracted; but I am saying there are a lot you can do as seminarians even before you become priests. Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto did not begin today. He began from his seminary days and was writing in national dailies; till today he is known to be an Institution. His thoughts are highly influential in the field of Philosophy, Politics, Political Science, Theology, Law etc. As philosophers, you can influence the polity and politics. Your philosophy, if well harnessed can help in making Nigerians change the narrative of who they decide to choose as their leader. The voice you echo can make a lot of meaning; but your silence can be dangerous to the polity and politics.

Conclusion

To conclude in a manner that reiterates my point, the function of philosophy is not limited to metaphysical assumptions. It has a very critical role to play in the 2023 elections, only if you resolve to use Philosophy to carry out its task. The tasks of philosophy and philosophers are multi-dimensional and these are largely dependent on your gift and interest. Not every philosopher will be interested in the 2023 elections; not every philosopher will be interested in politics; not every philosopher will be interested in leadership. Some philosophers could be interested in religion, some could be interested in domestic violence, some could be interested in

education, some could be interested in marriages and family life; and some could be interested in witchcraft. In the long run, as a philosopher, carve a niche for yourself. There is no better time for the philosopher to be interested in the Nigerian Project than now. Let us all get involved so that this Country which is the only Country we have, will not be destroyed by those we either erroneously elect or those who have decided to make life unbearable for us.

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