The Election of Mathias and Deacons in the Early Church Vis-À-Vis Electoral Process in Nigeria Political Process

Taiye Adamolekun PhD
tadamolekun@yahoo.com
Senior Lecturer in Church History and Christian Studies
Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria.

Abstract
This paper discusses the election process of Mathias and Deacons as servants as recorded in Acts 1:26; 6:1-6 and electoral process in Nigeria. Two democratic elections were identified for the post of servant hood in the early church. The first was the replacement of Judas in the Apostolic band (Acts 1:26) and the appointment of seven Deacons to serve in the distribution of food (Acts 6:1-6). It discusses the due process of prayer and casting of lots in the election of Mathias and the appointment of seven deacons. The paper compared the electoral process in the early Church with the shadow elections called primaries in ward, local, States and national levels before the main general elections. It discovered that Nigeria has had several electoral bodies such as Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), National Electoral Commission (NEC), and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in previous elections. It is noted that the methods of praying and casting lots in early church were transparently convincing to the candidates, there was no favouritism or imposition. It is also discovered that politician in Nigeria had previously crafted several methods of robbing their opponents of deserved victory through manipulation of election process. The paper concludes with suggestions and recommendation that the rule which guides electoral process should be strictly followed in order to have free and fair election to any political office in Nigeria.

Introduction
Election is the process of choosing a person or a group of people for a position while process is a series of things that are done in order to achieve a particular result.¹ Electoral process in form of political party in Nigeria can be traced to pre-Independence era when three political parties namely Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) emerged in the country in preparation for Nigeria Independence. The Action Group (AG) was led by Obafemi Awolowo, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello the Sadunana of Sokoto.² All the three political parties were regionised that is, they were based on the three Regions. AG in the West, NCNC in the East and NPC in the North.

No less than twenty six (26) parties were registered to contest the 1959 elections to the Federal House of Representatives that 184 consisted of elected members but by common consent the main contests lay between the (NPC), (AG), and the (NCNC). Each of these parties contested the elections either directly or through its allies throughout the Federation. The Senate that consisted of 56 members were also elected. For the first time, voting was by secret ballot throughout the country. All registered adults in Western and Eastern Nigeria were voted while only registered adult males were voted in Northern Nigeria excluding women. This political electoral process ushered Nigeria into Independence in 1960.

Attempt is made in this paper to discuss the election of Mathias and Deacons in the early church vis-à-vis electoral process in Nigeria political process. The paper evaluates electoral process to political office in Nigeria through comparative analysis of the electoral process in the early church with the shadow election called primaries in Nigeria electoral process. The paper concludes with suggestions and
recommendations, that the rules which guide electoral process should be strictly followed in order to have free and fair election in Nigeria.

**Election of Mathias: Acts 1:26**

The death of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and thereafter hanged himself created a vacuum in the Apostolic Band. There was need for the replacement of Judas Iscariot. Two people were qualified for this post according to the given criteria as started in Acts 1:22-23:

> So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas and Mathias.

In determining which of the two, they had to pray and cast lots William Barclay describes casting of lot in this way:

> The normal way of casting the lot among the Jews was that the names of the candidates were written on stones, the stones were often put in a vessel and the vessel was shaken until the stone fell out and he whose name was on the first stone to fall out was elected into office.³

In this election Mathias was chosen as a result of the lot. The praying and casting of lots was transparently convincing to the candidates that there was no friction or favouritism. Furthermore the praying to God assured the loser that it was not chance game that disqualified him but divine arrangement.

**The Appointment of Seven Deacons Acts 6:7**

The appointment of seven deacons was occasioned by the problem that arose as a result of numerical growth in the nascent Christian community. There was neglect of the Hellenistic widows in the distribution of foods. The Apostles summoned the body of the disciples and explained the necessity for appointment of leaders to distribute food to the people. The Apostles stipulated the number of people to be elected and their requisite qualifications.

> It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables; Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty (Acts 6: 2-3).

Lucan account is silent on the method of choice of the seven deacons. It does not say how the nomination of the candidates was done, how many were nominated and how they arrive at the successful seven and whether the election was done by open or secret balloting. Seven men of good repute, full of wisdom were picked out and appointed for distribution of food. Another silent area in the election of the Deacons, is the issue of electoral officers. It is not clear whether the Apostles themselves conducted the election or they appointed some others to do so. But it is clear from the result that whoever conducted the election did a good job.

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**Electoral Process and Election Method in Nigeria**

This section gives a survey of political过程 in Nigeria up to date. A very important aspect of modern democracy is party politics and conduction of Party primaries elections before the real election. Primary election is part of electoral process in Nigeria.

It is a shadow election for the aspirants before real elections. In the present day considerations, hardly is a political system adjudged democratic without the central placement of political parties in its political and electoral process. This centrality emerges from the simple reasons that the Political parties are the major vehicles for the expression of an essential feature of democratic process, the unfettered contest or struggle for political supremacy by divergent political view points in a society. The functioning and organization of political parties occupy a very important place in the understanding of electoral process in any democracy. The success or failure of any election depends largely on the electoral body and the machinery it adopts for the electoral process. Nigeria as a nation has had several electoral bodies such as Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) of General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1978 with Michael Ani as electoral chairman; General Ibrahim Babangida’s National Electoral Commission of 1993 (NEC) with Humphrey Nwosu as electoral Chairman; General Abdusalami Abubakar INEC with Ephraim Apatas as chairman which conducted 1999 elections. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which conducted the controversial April 2007 Election with Maurice Iwu as electoral Chairman, and currently the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Goodluck Jonathan 2010 with Professor Attahiru Jega as Electoral Chairman scheduled for April 2011 of which its party primary elections were conducted in January 2011.

The first electoral and political process that gave Nigeria Independence in 1960 terminated in January 15, 1966 as a result of military intervention in Nigeria. It is to be noted here that the country was peaceful until Western Nigeria crisis in 1963 that eventually snowballed to military rule in 1966. The split in the Action Group, the emergency rule in the West, the Census of 1963 and crisis over elections of 1964 greatly weakened the bonds of trust among peoples in Western Region. Discontent reached its high point when Chief Ladoke Akintola’s group with the NPC support retained power in Western Region. Charges of rigging were made and were duly believed. The elections were however, declared legal. The results were announced but was followed by widespread violent disturbances in the West; many people were killed and properties destroyed. This snowballed to army coup de tat and military rule in January 15, 1966. From 1966 to 1979, there was “13 years of military rule”

In September 22, 1978 the ban on political party was lifted and on December 23, 1978, Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) announced registration of five Political parties namely, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP), Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) The political parties had primary elections to elect their candidates for elective positions. There were kin contests within parties for their primary elections. Shehu Shagari of the NPN was eventually elected as the President. He ruled for 4 years, 1979-1983 before the military seized power from him and suspended the Constitution. Army ruled with Marshal law and decree under General Buhari/Idiagbon military rule.

General Ibrahim Babangida’s military administration that ousted Buhari planned eight years transition programme to civilian rule. Babangida established two political parties in his plan to make Nigeria two Party system of civil rule. He founded two political parties namely, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC). The 1993 Election under Ibrahim Babangida used Option A4 as method in the conduct of the election which was regarded as the most free and fair election ever conducted in Nigeria. Moshood Kasimawo Olawale Abiola won the election but it was annulled by Ibrahim Babangida on June 23, 1993. There was no convincing reason for the annulment.
Interim National Government under Ernest Shonekan followed the annulment of 1993 June 12 election. General Abacha ousted Shonekan’s Interim National Government and instituted a reign of terror. Abacha’s sudden death brought General Abdusalam to leadership position. It was Abdusalam that organized election and eventually handed over power to a democratically elected civilian government led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 19996, he ruled for eight years as a civilian President, May 1999-May 2007.

The Political parties that emerged under General Abdusalam include Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD), and All People Party (APP). After eight years of civil rule, Chief Obasanjo handed over power to Umar Musa Yaradua on May 29, 2007. As a result of the sudden death of Musa Yardua after a protracted illness, Goodluck Jonathan, the Vice President under Yaradua became the President, he completed the tenure of Umar Yaradua in May 2011.

Nigeria had another Presidential election in April 2011. Professor Attahiru Jega, the chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission, fixed the conduct of party primary election to January 2011. He announced the adoption of “Electronic voter register” for the general elections to “enhance credibility and acceptable results from the electorate”7. The election was eventually held and Goodluck Jonathan emerged as the duly elected President under the platform of People Democratic Party (PDP).

Qualification and Methods of Election Process Compared

In this section, attempt is made to discuss and compare the qualification and methods adopted for election in the Early Church and electoral process in Nigeria political process. Election is the process of choosing a person or a group of people for a position especially a political position by voting.

The qualification required for voting in election process in Nigeria is universal adult suffrage minimum of 18 years old. At Independence, it was 18 years of universal adult suffrage in Western and Eastern Regions while it was 18 years male suffrage in the North. After 13 years of military rule since 1979 the qualification for voters registration was limited to universal Adult suffrage of 18 years old and above for both male and female. Anybody to be elected into any position must be a registered member of a political party on good standing. He/she must be a financial member of the party where he/she seeks election. The qualification for election of Mathias in Acts 1:26 was that the man must have accompanied the Apostles during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out beginning from the baptism of John until the day when Jesus was taken up from them. He must have been an eye witness of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For the position of Deacon in Acts 6:7, they must have good report and be of good report, full of the spirit of wisdom. They must be honest truthful, and trustworthy.

Method of Election

In the Early Church, the method adopted for the replacement of Judas Iscariot in the Apostolic Band was specified. Two people were qualified according to the criteria the Apostles set. Barsabbas or Mathias would be chosen by prayer and casting of lots. The method in the opinion of Nkwoka was transparently convincing to the candidates that there was no favoritism8. Furthermore, the praying to God assured the loser that it was not chance game that disqualified him but divine favour.

As for the appointment of the Deacons in Acts 6:7, Lucan account is silent on the method of choice of the seven9. It did not state how the nomination of candidates was done, it is silent on how many candidates were nominated and how it arrived at the successful seven. No idea on whether the election was done by open or secret balloting. The Apostles only stipulated the number of people to be elected and their requisite qualifications and the necessity for election of leaders to distribute food to the people.

The method adopted for electoral process in Nigeria political process is secret balloting of one man, one vote. The political parties would conduct party primary elections to elect the candidate to be presented to the chairman of Electoral commission for general election. All the elections conducted in Nigeria since 1979 used secret ballot for primary and general major elections. It was only election
Conducted under General Ibrahim Babangida administration that used open-ballot-system called “Option A4”. In Option A4 there was no secret voting, people simply lined up behind their choice candidates and were counted in the full glare of both the electorate and party agents. This system, which was described as the most free and fear ever conducted in Nigeria which was won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola was eventually annulled by President Ibrahim Babangida. It is to be noted that previous elections in Nigeria since Independence were characterized by rigging and series of electoral malpractices.

**Observation/Evaluation**

It is observed that rigging and electoral fraud, malpractices, and ethnicity had dominated election in Nigeria since Independence. The first three major political parties that emerged and controlled the three Regions in the First Republic were ethnically based. Northern People’s Congress (NPC) was based in the North, Action Group (AG) was based in the West and National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) based in the East. The Political Party of the Second Republic were the incarnate of the First Republic Parties.”

It was generally believed that AG rose from its ashes to become the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Awolowo, while the NPC leaders spear headed the birth of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) while NCNC leaders led by Azikwe formed the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP). A breakaway faction of NPP later formed the Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP). NEPU, which was led by Aminu Kano transformed into Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). UPN, like AG, controlled the five South West States of Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, and Bendel. NPP formed government in Anambra, Plateau and Imo states; PRP held sway in Kano and Kaduna States. GNPP controlled Gongola and Bornu States. NPN controlled Rivers, Cross River, Sokoto, Niger, Benue, Bornu, Bauchi, and other Northern States. The curtains were drawn on the parties on December 31, 1983 when the military sacked them. In the Third Republic, the military President, General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd.) packaged a porous and elongated transition process that did not bear a positive result after eight years of implementation. He decreed two political parties, The Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) into existence and commanded the politicians to enlist in either of them. The first was a little to the left and the other a little to the right. Their formation coincided with the period of monetization of politics by the operators of the system. What informed the two-party system in our observation was that previous political alliances in the country showed a tendency towards two-party system. SDP was led by Alhaji Baba Gana Kingibe and later Tony Anenih. NRC was led by Tom Ikimi and later Hammad Kusamotu. The parties contested the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections won by SDP’s M.K.O. Abiola but the poll was annulled; thus the transition of Ibrahim Babangida was not concluded.

In the 4th Republic, the military government under General Abdusalam which was in a hurry to handover power in 1999 wanted to return the country into two party presidential democracy. Thus, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Peoples Party (later All Nigeria Peoples Party) ANPP were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) led by the late Justice Ephraim Apata (rtd). However, the plan changed when many progressive elements pulled out of the PDP and APP to form Alliance for Democracy (AD). In the first four years, AD formed the government in six states, APP in nine states and PDP in 21 States and in addition controlled the Federal government. As at February 2011, PDP has, 28 States, AC two States, and Labour (LP) one State. The ANPP hold sway in three States.

Following the verdict of the Supreme Court which further opened up the political space, Nigeria now has 63 parties. Many of them are “roadside parties and weak structures sustained by INEC grants.”

The ruling parties in the opinion of Oladesu are administered as a department, in those States ruled by the Parties. The parties in power depend on government largesse to meet up their financial obligations, contrary to the earlier period, when financial membership of the parties was in vogue. Personal programmes in our observation have also replaced party manifestoes which are hardly known by the
money bags who hijack them for partisan contest during electioneering. As the political train rolls through 2011, many of the parties in our observation are not likely to field candidates for the array of polls slated by INEC. In 2011, many of the parties may die a natural death when funding is withdrawn by INEC following their woeful performance at the polls. Today, as a result of April 2011 General Elections, PDP controls 24 States, CAN 6 States, CPC 2 States, Labour Party(LP) 1 State, ANPP 1 State and APGA 2 States.

**Electoral Malpractices and Suggested Solution**

In modern elections, the number of elective posts and the qualifications of candidates are normally contained in the Constitution of the country in question. But whereas there is no indication that any of the emerging leaders in the early church tried to falsify their qualifications in order to run but many of the contemporary candidates sometimes try to present false credentials as was the case with the “Toronto ‘degree’ saga of the first Speaker of the National House of Assembly in 1999”.

It is observed that politicians in many parts of the world have devised several methods of robbing their opponents of deserved victory through manipulation of electoral process. This monster called rigging ranges from the crude force of thugs, forcibly removing the ballot boxes, to the advanced and sophisticated electronic maneuvers employed in the developed countries. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in defending the April 2007 elections in Nigeria in which unprecedented rigging of elections took place, said that ‘no election anywhere in the world is perfect. The 1993 elections in Nigeria which has been hailed as the most free and fair election ever conducted in Nigeria (though annulled by President Ibrahim Babangida) used what should be called the simplest and primitive method tagged ‘Option A4’’. This system as earlier pointed out was described by M. Olusola in Nkwoka as “a sign of political maturity devoid of hypocrisy in the secret ballot in which money may be collected from one and voted for another”.

In comparison to the election of seven Deacons in the early Church, two parties were noticeable, namely the Palestinian Jews and Hellenistic Jews. They were not equally strong for fair contests, but the parties were neither political nor tribal as it happens in many African countries. They were more cultural than any other type of parties. It is obvious that the Palestinians outnumbered the Hellenists. Even if the number was balanced the Apostles that exercised supreme authority in the community were all Palestinians. They were credible free and fair in their electoral decisions than Nigeria.

On the other hand, in the modern concept of democracy, we have what is called the ‘power of incumbency” where the person in authority uses the vantage position to favour his party. The mass media such as the television, radio, and government newspapers as well as funds and other equipments were monopolized or dominated by the party in power. Apart from the use of the facilities, law enforcement agents are also employed to intimidate the opposition and the electorate known to be supporting them. Elections conducted in this manner are not likely to be credible, free, and fair.

In attempt to find solution to the problem of rigging, multiple voting and other electoral malpractices, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) led by Professor Atahiru Jega have adopted strategies to check election rigging. Amendments had been made to Electoral Acts. One of the amendments is to allow ”observers to join INEC official in counting votes but not to announce”. The observer will not be restricted but would have unfettered assess to the processes leading to the election including the results. Another point on amendment is to use the swift count option as was used in Ghana and Tanzania two African Countries whose elections were adjudged as free and fair. Adoption of electronic voter register during the 2011 general election would enhance credibility and acceptable results from the electrode. In the description of Emmanuel Umenger, ‘this electronic mechanism would include electronic voter register, voter authentication mechanism, use of constituency specific ballot papers and the electronic voting machine.’ These factors combined together would eliminate people from voting fraudulently. The voter authentication mechanism would identity the photography on the
voters cards to make sure it is the same as the one in the voters register. The ballot papers would also be produced according to constituencies. Party agents and security details would also have assess to cross check the sensitive materials before they would be moved to their destinations. There would be decentralized stores and movement of people and materials to right places at the right time to prevent hitches. Instant release of results at the polling centre would also check rigging. Results would be released at the polling centre immediately after vote cast through an electronic rapid result transmission system and results made available to the party agents. Attempt to register more than once through the electronic vote registration would disenfranchise the person because electronic voters registration mechanism has the ability to expunge any one that tries to embark on multiple registration as it captures biometrics, pictures, and other data to ensure that one does not impersonate and vote in multiples. The amendment described above could lead to free and fair election if in our opinion it is properly applied in its practicality and not in theory.

However, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) party in a statement credited to its National Publicity Secretary Alhaji Lai Mohammed raised an alarm on Tuesday February 1st 2011 over the capacity of INEC to detect multiple registration. In his words Lai Mohammed said:

The INEC server lacks the capacity to detect double or multiple registrations because verification is only at the machine level and not at the server level.... That this means that anyone who registers in five different centers, for example, can indeed vote in all those centers without being detected. ACN therefore challenged INEC to disprove the claim of its ability to detect multiple registration by demonstrating to all stakeholders how it plans to do it. 17

The press secretary to INEC chairman, Mr. Kayode Idowu replied Lai Mohammed by saying that “The embedded software in the DDC machine would effectively detect multiple registrations once the data is aggregated at Ward, Local Government, State, and, National level”. 18 To negate the alarm raised by ACN secretary Lai Mohammed, Jide Babalola reported in The Nation of February 5, 2011 that INEC has acquired and started test running “a special software programmed solely for the detection of multiple registration.”19 It is our hope that the next April 2011 election would be credible, free and fair devoid of rigging and malpractices if the machinery for election are properly executed. It is to be noted that the INEC followed her promise to conduct credible, free and fair election as every vote cast in 2011 election were counted. International observers from the European Union (EI), the Common Wealth and the United States Democratic Institute (NDI) endorsed April 2011 Presidential Election as free, fair and credible. 20

Conclusion

We have attempted in this paper to discuss the election of Mathias and Deacons in the early church vis-à-vis electoral process in Nigeria political process. Due process of prayer and casting of lots in the election of Matthias in Act 1:26 and the appointment of seven Deacons in Act 6:7 are discussed. A survey history of political party system and electoral process in Nigeria are discussed. The work compared the methods of election in the early church and shadow election called primary in Nigeria electoral process. It evaluates our observation in the course of electoral process in Nigeria and identified malpractices and rigging as the bane of political process. It discovered that Nigeria has had several electoral bodies such as Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) National electoral commission (NEC) and Independent National Election Commission (INEC) at one stage or the other to handle elections. It finds out that the qualification for a voter is 18years old of universal adult suffrage and that method of secret ballot system and option A4 known as open-ballot-system had been used for election at one time or the other. It is discovered that the major problems of electoral process in Nigeria is the ugly trend of wrestling power from the right person through rigging of election.
It is our recommendation that the rules which guide election process should be strictly followed in order to have free, fair and credible election into any political office in Nigeria. The revised electoral voters system and method of conducting election should be allowed to work. The attitude of honesty, truthfulness, trust worthiness and obedient to laid down electoral rules and regulations such as practiced in the early church should be imbibed in Nigerian electoral and political process.

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