Joshua's Declaration (Joshua 24:15) *Religious Authenticity in Nigeria in the Face of Syncretism, Hypocrisy and Conversion:* Lessons

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> *Now, if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living;* ***but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD****. (Joshua 24:15)*

Abstract

Right from the origin of man, he seems not to be contempt with one deity. He is always doubtful of the effectiveness of his deity especially, when this deity seems to delay in response, and hence, tries to possess another deity as a substitute or as plan B. This uncertain attitude results in polytheism or best termed, syncretism and hypocrisy. He, by this approach, finds it abstruse to remain under the providence of one god/goddess but tries to worship him/her alongside another deity or to change totally from the worship of this deity to another which is termed conversion. For Joshua to tell the Israelites to choose which God to serve means that there was a conflict in the dual allegiance the people paid to the

God of Israel and to some other deities. To extricate them from this dual inauthentic obeisance, Joshua had to make them lay bare their belief and have a one directional attitude towards one deity, either the God of Israel or the god of the Canaanites.The religious obscurity shown by the Israelites must have caused Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, to make his religious authentic declaration on whom he and his family have chosen as their God and whom they would serve. He, by this, has bashed the fidelity of Israelites to idols and made a proactive bold step towards the God almighty whom many Israelites followed.The method used in this write-up is analytical.

Keywords: Household, Service, Religious authenticity, Syncretism, Hypocrisy, Conversion**.**

1. Introduction

We are in the era of doubts, infidelity, inauthenticity and confusion. In our time, our mental sight is blurred to the extent that we suffer from mental astigmatism. This sickness affects everything we do especially our morality and politico-religious authenticity. We find it difficult to distinguish between two deities because the credo of 'variety is the spice of life' has engulfed us to the point of indecisiveness. There is little or no need basking our hope of recovery from these maladies on most of our political and even religious leaders because the same environmental infection may have engulfed them as well. Most of our religious leaders are shaky in making some prophetic declarations for the fear of oppositions and subsequent persecution. They by this, find it very uneasy to declare some truths and worthy decision in the open. Italians would say: ***Cosafaciamo***? (What do we do?) Do we relapse on the wooly mattress of religious indecisiveness and inauthenticity or do we declare with Joshua: as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord? This is the question this article tends to respond to.

As we voyage through this write-up, we should note the importation of certain terms into either politics or religion. They are to aid us in analyzing the politico-religious situation of Nigeria herein discussed. Furthermore, this work does not tend to present a biblical exegesis neither is it purely a biblical theology. Here, we try to draw a comparative analysis between the ancient Israel and the current Nigeria while indicating the lessons to be derived from them.

2. Background of Study

> The religion of the Canaanite agriculturalists proved to be a strong attraction to the less sophisticated and nomadic-oriented Israelite tribes. Many Israelites succumbed to the allurements of the fertility-laden rituals and practices of the Canaanite religion, partly because it was new and different from the Yahwistic religion and, possibly, because of a tendency of a rigorous faith and ethic to weaken under the influence of sexual attractions. As the Canaanites and the Israelites began to live in closer contact with each other, the faith of Israel tended to absorb some of the concepts and practices of the Canaanite religion. Some Israelites began to name their children after the Baalim; even one of the judges, Gideon, was also known by the name Jerubbaal -Let Baal Contend. (Robert A. Guisepi**)**

Theselukewarm attitudes towards God on the side of the Israelites could have precipitated the authentic and courageous proclamation of Joshua, the then leader of the Israelites. He then warned the people of Israel against mixing up with the remnants of Canaan in order not to either religiously syncretize by inter marrying each other (Josh. 2:12) or fall

totally into worshipping or converting to their gods other than remaining in the worship of the God of Israel (Josh. 23:16). Because of the presence of some Canaanites in the Promised Land, Joshua foresaw the possibility of syncretism/hypocrisy and total conversion to idolatry. This could have made him raise alarm against this oncoming religious subversion and its consequent divine catastrophe on Israel.Joshua's public declaration could have also caused the subsequent acquiescence of the people with his (Joshua's) decision to serve the Lord (cf. Joshua 24:16-18).

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem (Grindel: 2001).Shechem was about thirty miles north of Jerusalem. He then addressed them. The main part of this address is the trace he made of the faithfulness of God on Israel, spanning from the times of their ancestors, in the presence of their enemies and till the time of Joshua. This could be seen as an elongated speech intentioned at making the people know the reason for which they should choose to serve God above all else. This also appears as the farewell speech of Joshua because shortly after this speech, the death of Joshua is recorded. (cf. Josh. 24: 29). In his speech, Joshua publicly made known his allegiance (and that of his family) to the God of Israel whom some Israelites had abandoned for other gods. The people later chose with him, the God of Israel as their own God whom they would serve also together with their families.

In order to approach this topic in a clarified manner, some terms have to be adumbrated on. By this, we shall comprehend their relevance in this write-up, in the Israel community and as well, in the Nigerian politico-religious communities.

3. Clarification of Terms

3.1. Household

Household has its origin in the word 'house' or 'family'. In the scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments, three major words are used to depict family: **בַּיִת** (bayith, a Hebrew word O.T.); **οικια** (Oikia, a Greek word- N.T.) or **οικος**(a Greek word also- N.T.). These three words imply "house" from which 'household' is derived. "The unit of the national life of Israel, from the very beginning, was found in the family. In the old patriarchal days each family was complete within itself, the oldest living sire being the unquestioned head of the whole, possessed of almost arbitrary powers. The house and the household are practically synonymous" (Dosker: 2017 in http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/household/). In our biblical passage of discourse, Joshua could have made good use of this 'arbitrary power' to make a declaration on behalf of his family who also shared the same belief with him. In the Old Testament, household is a strong unit to the extent that a sin committed by the Sire of the family is inherited by all the members of the same family. For instance, the "households" of the rebels in the camp of Israel shared their doom (cf. Numbers 16:31-33; Deuteronomy 11:6). David's household shares his humiliation (2 Samuel 15:16)". On the same instance, the good or covenant done or made by the fathers favours and follows their generations. Thus, the reaffirmation made by Joshua, the head of his household and on behalf of his household, was not out of place. This does not imply that salvation is inseparably attached to household. Individual effort is the major determinant factor of salvation (cf. Ezekiel 18:1-20).

3.2. Service

Avodah , **עֲבוֹדָה** is a Hebrew word for 'Service' meaning "to work", "to serve", "to till", "to enslave". It means different things in different

circumstances. "The word is used in describing work in the fields (cf. Exodus 1:14, et al.), work in the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 27:19, et al.), sanctuary service (Numbers 7:9), service of Yahweh (Numbers 8:11), Levitical or priestly service (Numbers 8:22), kingly service (1 Chronicles 26:30)" (Raffety: 2017 in http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/service/). Another word that implies 'service' in Hebrew is **פֻּלְחָן** *(polchan). This means: to worship, to minister to. This is presented thus in Ezra 7:19:* **מִתְיַהֲבִין לָךְ לְפֻלְחָן בֵּית אֱלָהָךְ** (The vessels that have been given you for the **service** of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem). The Hebrew word used for 'service' or 'to serve' in our context is **עָבַד**(abad) which means to work, to serve et cetera. Thus, '**abad'** is of the same origin with '**avodah'**(abodah) and both of them imply 'service'. This service is in terms of working and enslaving oneself in the service of God. Thus, Joshua promised with and on behalf of his family, to worship, work for, and serve God to the point of *enslaving* themselves to Him.

3.3. Religious Authenticity

An authentic approach to religion is not the approach that dissociates one's religion from one's culture. It is the situation whereby though the new religion can be understood through the already existing culture of the people, but the people's religion is not alternatively practiced as a substitute to the new religion. Thus, religious authenticity implies possessing a firm identity of a particular religion without any admixture with a different religion. Thus, one is authentically a Christian if the person portrays his/her Christian identity both externally and internally without any admixture with another religion. By this approach, one can publicly proclaim and announce his religion to the hearing of everybody without any fear of contradiction. Here, one possesses a religion and he/she is faithful to that religion and its principles. This attitude was the intent of the declaration of Joshua and promise of the people of Israel. Joshua averred that he and his family had chosen to be authentic in their

worship of God almighty unlike some Israelites. His declaration spurred many derailing Israelites to return to God their saviour.

3.4. Syncretism

From the nineteenth century, syncretism became a common term in the field of history of religions. During this time, it was understood to be a "mishmash of religious elements of diverse origins" (Colpe: 1987). The religious atmosphere in which these religions existed was described as disorderly and confused. Therefore, syncretism came to be used as the mélange of different religions and combination of different deities (Muonwe: 2014). Syncretism in the Old Testament involves Israel's absorption of Canaanite religious practices into the religion of Yahweh. It arose in Israel because Israel did not practice its religion in isolation, detached from its Canaanite neighbors. Hence, when Israel conquered the land of Canaan, the books of Joshua and Judges say that the Canaanite cities were not destroyed. Rather, many Canaanite cities were left unconquered and, as a result, the Canaanites lived among the people of Israel (Mariottini: 2014). This cohabitation brought about a syncretic type of worship towards God on the part of the Israelites. By this, most Israelites were charmed by the Canaanite idol worship but at the same time could not relinquish totally their worship of Yahweh. The best they could do for themselves was to merge the two worships. This syncretic worship was made Joshua scurry to his declaration. Importing the word, syncretism, into politics, one can understand political syncretism as

3.5. Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy comes from the Greekword, ὑπόκρισις (hypokrisis), which means "jealous", "play-acting", "acting out", "coward" or "dissembling" (Moorwood& Taylor: 2002). The word *hypocrite* is from the Greek word ὑποκριτής (*hypokritēs*), the adjective noun associated with υποκρίνομαι (hypokrinomaiκρίση, "judgment" »κριτική (kritikē), "critics") presumably because the performance of a dramatic text by an actor was to involve a

degree of interpretation, or assessment.Alternatively, the word is an amalgam of the Greek prefix *hypo-*, meaning "under", and the verb *krinein*, meaning "to sift or decide". Thus the original meaning implied a deficiency in the ability to sift or decide. This deficiency, as it pertains to one's own beliefs and feelings, informs the word's contemporary meaning. (Online Etymological Dictionary: "hypocrisy" Etymoline.com). Thus, one senses hypocrisy pervading the whole facets of Nigerian existence in the sense that politicians and religious leaders are caught in this web. This was what Joshua tried to dissuade Israelites from doing when he made his contagious but firm resolution to worship the living God of Israel with his family.

3.6. Conversion

Religious conversion is the adoption of new religious beliefs that differ from the convert's previous beliefs. It involves a new religious identity, or a change from one religious identity to another. Conversion requires internalization of the new belief system. This implies that either some of the people of Israel were completely converted to the Canaanite religion (conversion) or practiced it along with the Jewish religion (syncretism). The former point could mean that they were enticed by the loose religion of the Canaanites which lured them to their practices. The later point could imply that the Israelites were enticed by the Canaanite religion and practiced it but at the same time entertained some fear and respect for their Jewish religion. Conversion is a change of religion.

Having voyaged through the explication of some vital terms in this write-up, and having before now, briefly examined the Israel's situation which serves as the background to this discourse, we shall now concentrate on the syncretic/inauthentic attitudes in Nigeria especially, in her politico-religious milieus. While discussing this, we shall not also fall short of adumbrating certain converse politico-religious attitudes that could be

termed very inappropriate to the authentic demonstration of one's belief and ideology.

4. Nigerian *Syncretic*and *Hypocritical*Politics

Politics becomes syncretic (though syncretism is more aptly applied in the religious field) and hypocritical and hence, inauthentic, when it partly depicts its main objective and partly favours another different ideology that is incompatible with its real intention. It may have been in the mind of Nigeria to practice democracy which is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. In its actual sense then, democracy should operate by the rule of the majority. Thus, when authoritarianism mishmashes with democracy, the true identity of democracy is expulsed, placing everyone on the platform of indecisiveness and inauthenticity. This kind of incompatible political interweaving calls for a serious outcry for authentic declaration of what one really chooses to practice (e.g. either democracy or authoritarianism). Though, this write-up does not intend to suggest any better type of government to be practiced in Nigeria but it suggests that a favourable one that pleases the majority be adopted and implemented adequately.

Over the years, since the existence of Nigeria as a country,it has experienced different kinds of governance. The most prominent among them have been military and democratic systems of government. Quite unfortunately, the two of them have been the regularly *syncretized*and *hypocricized*systems in the sense that the current Nigerian democracy is run by *military-men–in-mufti* (*MMM*). Most of the current rulers have proven to be dictators, yet they have ever surrounded themselves with every ceremonial parastatal of a democratic government. Nigerian political syncretism and hypocrisy is made so glaring in the way the application of the constitution is squashed at the presence of the mighty/victor and is strictly implemented in the case of the poor/vanquished. Authenticity jettisons this kind of inequity.Nigerian

political syncretism and hypocrisy is born out of selfishness and greed as every ruler wants any form of administrative crisscrossing that will solely serve his ends and nothing more. Hence, Nigerian democracy is more in speech and in print than in actuality.

4.1. Politics/Politician

Mistakably, some see politics as supportive of inauthentic and flexible decisions with the aim of pleasing everybody. They usually tag this attitude with the word "smartness". Thus, if a politician does not keep his promises, instead of terming him inauthentic and false, the average society usually terms him smart and in fact, a true Nigerian politician. To better understand our discourse, a look into the words: 'politics' and 'politician' is of paramount importance.

Politics is an art of governance. It is also the means by which the will of a community is arrived at and implemented. Furthermore, it is the activities of a government, politician, or political party. (Osuji: 2014. 6). It is the pursuit and exercise of the political process necessary to make **binding policy decisions** for the community and to distribute patronage and other government benefits (Osuji: 2014. 6-7). If the real term of politics is structured for making binding policy decision, it means that it eschews any form of syncretism and hypocrisy. Politics therefore should be for the good of the majority and the person who has the good of the community should be elected to political positions.

Furthermore, while discussing politicians, Osuji observes that we can identify two or three types of politicians: a politician by hobby, Occupational politician and a professional politician (Osuji: 2014. 9). A politician by hobby is one who participates in political process. He is likely to belong to a political group or party but does not take active part in its affairs. But when occasion demands it, he may become a little active but withdraws after a while. An occupational politician is the one whose

daily concern is politicking. He may belong to a political group or party but takes part even in the activities of other parties. Professional politician has nothing else to do but to participate in political activities. Above all, a politician should have the interest of all at heart. Though, a politician is from a particular political platform, he does not restrict his service to only his party members but to all.

This latter expectation of a good politician does not suggest any form of syncretic politicking but an accommodative politicking whereby the incorporation of the people from other parties does not suggest concatenation of opposing groups but harmonization of variety into one,under the pursuance of one political goal – the good of the society. Therefore, this coexistence does not indicate any form of hypocrisy.

5. Nigerian Christian Religious Syncretism/Hypocrisy

Here, we are discussing the situation in which there are substantial and independent reinterpretation and reshaping of the basic theological insights of the Christian faith, without any recourse to the established Christian Tradition (Schreiter: 1997: 147).It is an incompatible mixture of Christianity with another religion(s). This results in incomprehensible Christian identity hence, inauthenticity and hypocrisy. People who are engaged in such a jam-packing of religions always find the latter religion as an alternative in their difficult moments in Christianity. Thus, while the church is very much inclined to pointing out the irreconcilability or contradiction of such practices to the Christian faith, those involved, more often than not, seem to judge the two as complementary. Some even see it as an opportunity to exploit all possible avenues for communion with God (Schreiter: 1997: 148).

The question has always been whether such people could be regarded as Christians at all. To this, ChukwudumOkolo responds that they should not be regarded as Christians in the real sense of the word since their

allegiance to Christianity is merely nominal. He further described them as 'half Christian, half 'pagan', half God-worshippers, half devil worshippers, half believers in God, angels and saints and half believers in juju, fortune telling, magic, superstition, the 'abracadabra' religious rites and symbols (Okolo: 1999: 76). This kind of syncretism could also manifest itself in such a way that the other religion is practiced as a subordinate religion to Christianity. This attitude was presented towards Christianity upon its entry into Sri Lanka (Harris: 2002: 78).

It is good to note that whether the second religion is subordinate to Christianity or not, such incongruent merging of the two religions is syncretic and thus, those into this kind of worship can be termed hypocrites. Hence, the Israelites of the time of Joshua shared in this inauthenticity by their negligence of Yahweh and by their combination of the worship rendered to Yahweh with that rendered to other gods. This called for an abrupt decision making as was spearheaded by Joshua and his family. Hence, it became of a paramount necessity that the people of Israel make a choice of whom to worship, Yahweh or other gods. The tentacles of syncretism herein discussed, could be doubtfully stretched to the situation whereby one recognizes some values inherent in many religions, show great respect for them, or even agree with some points in each of the several, without actually feeling any sense of commitment or full identification with any of these religions. Grace Davie, a British sociologist captured this as 'believing without belonging' (Cobb: 2002). This could be more rightly termed a form of dual or multiple religious systems (Muonwe: 2014: 192).

6. Application: Nigerian Politico-religious Syncretism, Hypocrisy and Conversion: Lessons

When one tries to apply our discourse to Nigerian political milieu, he finds out that political authenticity is farfetched. Nigerian politics is seen through the spectacle of deceit, fraud, blind ideologies and retrogression.

Thus, the policies made by some politicians or rulers have nothing to do with facilitation of any kind of good governance. They are full of selfishness and impassibility to the poor and average Nigerians. One can rightly aver that Nigeria professes a different constitutional credo but in reality practices the politics accruing from their selfish instantaneous emotional promptings. This becomes political syncretism and hypocrisy. Nigeria worships the false god of politics that is antagonistic to the common good of the country which the politicians pretend to protect. To protect the interest of one's tribe, one wielding political prowess can vanish the lives of fellow Nigerians just to please himself. This is a detestable interweaving of contradictory act because killing to save life is a big contradiction and thus, syncretic and hypocritical.

By letter, Nigeria practices democracy but in praxis, she practices any form of government decided upon by either the president, governor or any of such rulers. What is professed is democracy but what is practiced is in accordance with the instincts of the one wielding power. The rule of law bows to the mighty but indicts the lowly. This is a great 'demonstration of craze' as the jazz musician; Fela Anikulapo Kuti would term it. Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to have a leader who would be another Joshua whose declaration of authenticity will not only be matched with his actions but will entice others to emulate him.

Christian religion in the Nigerian context is not spared of this ravaging syncretism and hypocrisy. In fact, the offices in Nigeria are not only occupied by people of other religions but also by Christians. Quite lamentably, they join suit in making the country miserable for others. Many religious leaders are never making any frantic effort to merge their belief with action. Many a time, they make the profession of faith but leave its practice to their followers while reclining to some other gods from whom they derive their powers. This has been fanned by the craze for miracles from both the pastors of souls and their followers. To satisfy

their church members, these so called pastors would go to any length to obtain miraculous powers while at the same time professing the name of Christ as the miracle worker. Their followers are not left out in this as they follow their spiritual fathers in words and deeds. This chameleon attitude has disrobed many church goers of their true identity as Christians and adorned them with the garment of hypocrisy.

The authentic public declaration of Joshua rarely finds its semblance in our religious realm today. Most pastors of souls have baptised their cowardice with their misconceived water of prudence. They seek first the kingdom of the world but enjoin their followers through every means to seek first the kingdom of God (which in turn becomes the kingdom of their pastors' pockets). The appearance of any political bigwig at their church services simultaneously thwarts the true message of the Gospel to their favour. Eulogies are poured on those bigwigs who do not merit them. At times, these pastors jolt the congregation into applauding such sycophancy because they needed someone to build their structural church and not their souls. In this kind of mess, the pastor has smashed every religious and prophetic mandate given to him by Christ to speak the truth and only but the undiluted truth of the gospel. Something very interesting is that at the end, these mischievous preachers lose their relevance in the eyes of those bigwigs. Most surprisingly, these bigwigs look for spiritual assistance in the hands of other more authentic pastors but come to their miscreant counterparts for either praises or invite them to their social events.

Joshua did not consider the hatred he would possibly get from some Israelites who found their syncretic attitudes favourable. He, as an authentic leader, declared his choice of religion and that of his family to serve the living God. Thus, the right thing must be done regardless of the ill feelings of the guilty. Instead of getting greater opposition, Joshua got many supports. Thus, having made his declaration, the people responded,

"Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods" (Joshua 24: 16). This is a great lesson to Christian religious leaders and Christians of nowadays. Authenticity is attractive and contagious as it brings out the reality cowardice and hypocrisy try to hide. Trying to please everybody could be a step in the wrong direction as far as authenticity is concerned.

Here, it is apt to discuss briefly on conversion. The conversion herein discussed is the movement from Christianity to the worship of other gods or to another religion that is bedeviled but claims to have God as its source. Some parts of the Canaanite religion must have enticed some Israelites. This must have lured them to idol worshipping. The dancing, eating and even religious carnality entertained in the Canaanite religion could have attracted some Israelites to idolatry even to the point of jettisoning their Yahwistic religion for idolatry. Thus, many of them converted to the worship of false gods. This attitude is not found lacking in our today's Christianity when some Christians find other religions enticing and more interesting and then turn towards them, quitting Christianity totally (or even fighting it). Many Christians have found Christianity to be so dull that they need a faster religion wherein they would draw to the earth, the Supreme Being at their whims and caprices. When Joshua made them understand the implications of their actions, they returned to the living God.

Another striking point is that Joshua, having gathered all the tribes of Israel, gave them a sermon on their salvific history. He, by this, reminded them of the works of God in their life as a people. He spoke to their minds and not to their heads which resulted in their binding response and agreement with Joshua. The question is: would they not have believed with Joshua if he had not made the sermon? From the look of things, the sermon strengthened their faith in God. This is demonstrated in their response which appears to be a restatement and summary of the

marvelous deeds of the Lord in their life as a people which Joshua had earlier spoken to them about. Consequently they added:

> For it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed (Joshua 24:17).

This response points to the relevance of good sermons and homilies that would lift up the minds of the people to God. The historic/salvific sermon rendered by Joshua aided the affirmative response from the people of Israel. Thus, pastors of souls should preach the Word of God and not the words of men. The Word of God has everything it takes to make true disciples for God. The congregation needs to be reminded of the love God has towards them and not always of the punishment He will give them for not making huge financial donations to the church, even to the detriment of their families and loved ones. They should as well be reminded of the detriments of converting to the worship of other gods other than the God who saves them.

On their own side, Christians should be able to detect when their pastors have made a right choice and should not find it off beam to align their own acquiescence with theirs. Christians are the followers of their shepherds especially, when their followers are in turn, following Christ. If Joshua had narrated the deeds of Baal to Israelites or better still, the deeds of Baal to Canaanites, in order to lure them into worshipping him, most conspicuously, there would have been discordant responses. Baal was nowhere to be compared with Yahweh in greatness and even the Canaanites were convinced of that, not to talk of the Israelites. Some Israelites yielded to the worship of Baal not in search of a greater god but in search of a god whose proximity was depicted in a carved image. They

needed a god whom they could physically behold, touch and dance for. Furthermore, they needed a god who would lessen the moral adroitness the worship of Yahweh entails. They needed a god who would think like man and as well, behave and feel like man. However, they did all these but still entertaining a deeper longing for Yahweh who had already left His imprint in them. Therefore, the strong belief they had in Yahweh was excavated by the sermon and declaration of Joshua.

7. Conclusion

Our world today needs authenticity that would mirror that which Joshua demonstrated before the people of Israel. Authenticity eschews any form of syncretism, hypocrisy and conversion for the sake of enticements. It behooves on our political and religious leaders to be authentic in their administrations so that people may be drawn to a better stand towards a better future. The political leaders have to lead us to a good society while the religious leaders have to lead us to God. Anything less than these, falls back to syncretism, hypocrisy and possible erroneous conversion.

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