

**SALT AND LIGHT IN MATTHEW 5:13-14:
A PARADIGM FOR DEMOCRATIC *SUSTAINABILITY* IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this paper is to unearth the impact of metaphors ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in Matthew 5:13-14 as a paradigm for stable democracy in Nigeria. Historical, sociological and exegetical methods were adopted. Historical method was used to reconstruct the past both in biblical times and in this 21st century Nigeria. Sociological method located the concept of salt and light metaphors in the society, while exegetical method examined both the content and the context to enhance better interpretation of the text. Data were gathered through secondary source. Finding was that Nigerian democracy is experiencing many challenges which have been making the country ungovernable since leaders fail to positively influence their followers as both salt and light. The paper recommends that the same metaphors should have expressions in the Nigerian leaders so as to enhance stable democracy and governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Matt.5:13-14, Salt, Light, Democracy, Sustainability, Paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus addresses the need to be in the world as well as overcome the world through two analogies. “Ye are the salt of the earth”, Christ states metaphorically and then adds a second comparison, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matt 5:13-14). Salt and light are metaphors used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which also part of main teachings of Jesus on morality and discipleship. These metaphors in Matt 5:13-16 immediately follows the Beatitudes and refer to expectations from the disciples. When salt is personified, it reveals the worth of an individual. Furthermore, as light of the world, we are supposed to dispel darkness and let our life shine so bright that our neighbors and the world at large can emulate us as Christians. Jesus is the ultimate example of what it looks like to be salt and light in the world. He was poor in spirit and humble, pure in heart, He was meek and merciful, a peacemaker and persecuted for our sake. Philippians speaks of what a salt and light life looks like: “Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but did not think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human.

On the other hands, democracy is an avenue through which member of the society possesses the right of choosing the leadership through elections. However, a situation whereby election is marred by rigging and corrupt practices does not seem to represent a government of the people. The debate over resource control and corruption, colonialism, ethnicity and religious bigotry have been identified as inhibiting factors in democratization in Nigeria. The persistence religious violence and terrorism in the country has raised many unanswerable questions among patriotic Nigerians too. The collapse of the past few democratic administrations came as a result of the weak foundations of democracy paving the way for military incursion into politics and governance. This paper attempts to probe into the influence of the salt and light issues and their consequential effects on the Nigerian polity for democratic *sustainability* in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

For the purpose of conceptual clarification and to limit the level of ambiguity, which as a rule is the hallmark of academic research, it is important to examine some of the concepts and terms that are used in this study for example, salt, light and democracy.

Salt, (ἅλας)

Salt, ἅλας is a noun, nominative singular neuter and it has various spelling of ἅλα and ἅλο which is commonly translated as “salt” (Mark 9:50). This great word is used eight times in the New Testament (Mounce, 2008, p. 325). According to Multhauf, (1978, p. 78), ἅλας, has a variety of natural qualities and uses in the ancient world. It was so important that it was used as a medium of exchange in commercial ventures across the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Adriatic seas. The variety of uses of salt according to Carson (1984, p. 60) leads to different interpretations of what Jesus meant to communicate with the analogy: (1) A primary use for salt until recent years was as a preservative. In a society with no refrigeration, salt could be rubbed into meat or fish to slow decay. Some suggest that with this analogy Jesus was indicating the influence his disciples would have on the moral decay of a fallen world. (2) Salt is also an essential

element in the diet of human beings and other warm-blooded animals. For humans, salt is normally ingested as a seasoning added to foods, while animals commonly ingest salt from natural or artificial salt licks. In the words of Deatrick (1962, p. 41), this is the most familiar use of salt to modern readers, so many people suggest that Jesus indicates that his disciples will provide a God-enhanced, kingdom seasoning to this world with their presence. Salt was also used in small quantities as a fertilizer when applied to certain types of soil ("earth"). Thus, Donald (1993, p.102) said that some suggest that Jesus' disciples will enhance the growth of God's work in this world. A widely held view suggests that since salt had a varied use in the ancient world, Jesus is not pointing to one specific application but is using it in a broad, inclusive sense to refer to a vital necessity for everyday life.

Donald (1993, p.102) further adds that, Sirach echoed such a perspective, and Pliny commented that "there is nothing more useful than salt and sunshine". Taken in this way, the metaphor indicates that Jesus' disciples are vitally important to the world in a general religious sense. This last suggestion is appealing because to stress too closely one particular application of salt can lead to inappropriate allegorizing. In other words, Jesus indicates with this metaphor that his disciples themselves ("you are the salt") are necessary for the welfare of the world. That is, the disciples have experienced a transformation in their lives as they have come into contact with the kingdom of heaven. They are now different from the people of this earth, and their presence is necessary as God's means of influencing the world for good. Jesus' next statement has caused considerable discussion: "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matt. 5:13).

Strictly, speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness, because sodium chloride is a stable compound. What then did Jesus mean? According to Garland (2001, pp. 21-22), (1) One possibility is that Jesus is alluding to rock formations that contained deposits of chloride. Meat and fish were packed in these rocks to preserve them. After a period of time the salt leached out of the rocks, so the rocks were not good for anything and so thrown out. As believers, we are either a preservative or a worthless rock! (2) Jesus may also have had in mind the salt that was collected from the Dead Sea by evaporation. This salt often included crystals of another mineral, gypsum, which is formed by the precipitation of calcium sulfate from seawater. Salt and gypsum were often mixed in various saline deposits. When people went to collect salt, this impure mixture of salt and gypsum could easily be mistaken for pure salt. But the mixture was not usable for either preservative or seasoning, so was regarded as having lost its usefulness (3) Jesus may be alluding to the use of salt blocks by Arab bakers to line the floor of other ovens. After some time the intense heat eventually caused the blocks to crystallize and undergo a change in chemical composition, finally being thrown out as unserviceable. (4) A quotation attributed to rabbi Joshua ben Haninia (c. A.D. 90) may offer some help when rebuffing a trick question, Rabbi Haninia alludes to a proverbial saying when he asks, "Can salt lose its flavor?" The context of the saying implies that it is impossible for salt to lose its flavor, because he parallels the saying by asking, "Does the mule (being sterile) bear young?" Sterile mules can no more bear young than salt can lose its favor.

If this last option is the background, Lane (1991, p. 21) opines that Jesus is citing a known proverbial saying on impossibilities to describe an equally impossible characteristic of his disciples. As they go out into the world as salt, they must recognize that the proof of the reality of their profession is in the nature of their lives. True disciples cannot lose what has made them disciples, because they have become changed persons, made new by the life of the kingdom of heaven. However, imposter disciple, who simply attempt to put on the flavoring of the kingdom life, will be revealed.

Their salt is only an ephemeral flavoring not a real personal change. This imposter cannot be made salty again because he or she never had that kingdom life in the first place. Jesus' next statement drives home the seriousness of the issue "It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men". The response to imposter disciples is rejection and judgment by the very people for whom they are to have value. Imposters will be known for what they are. They have nothing to offer the world, because they are no different from the world. So the world turns on them for their arrogant hypocrisy. The challenge is for professing disciples to examine their nature and to confess honestly whether or not they have been transformed by the life of the kingdom of God. ***In other words, their efforts towards sustainable development of their target audience.***

Light, (φῶς).

Light, φῶς. is noun, nominative, singular neuter and this Greek word is used 73 times in the NT which literally means "light" Matt. 17:2; "radiance, blaze of light" Matt. 4:16; "day light," "broad day" Matt. 10:27; "an instrument or means of light, Matt. 6:23; from the Hebrew, "the light of God's presence" 1Tim. 6:16; met "the light of the diviner truth" "spiritual illumination", Lk. 16:8; "a source of dispenser of spiritual light", Matt. 5:14; "pure radiance", perfect brightness 1Jn 1:5. Light indicates the true knowledge of God (Matt 6:22, Ps. 36:9). It may be sufficiently comprehensive to include all the blessing of "salvation" (Ps. 27:1; Lk. 1:77-79), so, perhaps, also here in Matt. 5:14 (Barnes, 2002, p. 458).

The light metaphor continues the salt metaphor and takes it one step further to illustrate Jesus' point. "Light" is an important theme in Scripture, normally emphasizing. The literal contrast between physical light and darkness provokes a profound metaphorical contrast between metaphysical good and evil, God and evil forces, believers and unbelievers. Jesus later declares that he is "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12, 9-5), who has come as the light that enlightens all people (1:4-14), so that those believing in him will no longer be in darkness (12:46). Light is the most widely attested of the 'primal words' in a phenomenology of religion that describe the archetypal human yearning for God. With the feast of Tabernacles still in mind, Jesus now talked about being the light of the world. The point of contact was the emphasis on light at this feast. Every evening, four great candelabra were lit in the court of the women. These illuminated the whole temple area, and by their light Levite musicians played, the greatest, wisest and holiest men of Israel danced, and the people in general sang and watched right through the night (William, 2000, p.11). Jesus' claim to be the light of the world linked up with this celebration of light. It was in the hearing of the crowd that stood around him and of those who were passing by to make their offerings that Jesus made his second great 'I am declaration: (Jn. 8:12). Carson (1991, p. 338) argues that "In the context of such powerful ritual, Jesus' declaration must have come with stunning force". Ngewa (2003, p.152) further adds that Jesus' claim here is that he illuminates the whole world and not just part of Jerusalem, as the light from the candelabras did during the feast of Tabernacles. Moreover, he does not illuminate only one particular activity (for example, the evening dancing during the feast), but the whole of life. He directs all aspects of human life.

In addition to the immediate association of light with the four great candelabra, Jews would also associate it with the teachings of the Old Testament., where light was closely associated with Yahweh. For example: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation' (Ps. 27:1). 'The Lord will be your everlasting light' (Isa. 60:19); 'Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light' (Mic. 7:8b). In all these passages, the word LORD is the Jewish way of writing Yahweh. In essence, therefore, Jesus was equating himself with Yahweh. He was claiming to illuminate the lives not just of Jews or of Gentiles but of both—of the entire world (Ngewa, 2003, p. 152). In the same way as Jesus' life and message of salvation bring light to those in darkness (Matt. 4:15-16), his disciples are a living demonstration of arrival of the kingdom of

heaven. The light of revelation from God that accompanies Jesus' announcement of the kingdom is not just carried by his disciples, they are that light (Matt. 5:14, of Eph. 5:8, Eph 5:8, Phil, 2:15). Jesus continues the proverbial "impossible" language he used in the salt metaphor by stating that "a city on a hill cannot be hidden, "and" neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl." The city to which Jesus refers may be Jerusalem, which sits on Mount Zion, since Israel with Jerusalem as the holy city was considered light to the world (Isa, 2:2-5, 42-6, 49-6). But since Jesus is now in Galilee near Capernaum, according to Hippos (1972, pp.127-128), he may be using a local city as his illustration, because he often used images from his surroundings to illustrate his teaching. In either case, it is impossible to hide a city located on a hill.

Dan (2001, p. 65-66) also adds that, the lamp used in a typical Palestinian home was a partially closed reservoir made of clay. It had a hole on top to pour oil in and a spout on one end into which a wick of flax or cotton was set. It was fairly small lamp, which gave off only a modest light, thus, to give maximum illumination it was placed on a lamp stand. Since many Jewish homes were often modest one room structures, such an elevated lamp could give light to everyone in the house. Lamps were essential for finding one's way in enclosed areas during the night and were place under a measuring bowl only to extinguish the light. Jesus' disciples are called to be the light of the world. They cannot be hidden, for their very nature, the kingdom life within them, is living testimony to those in the world who do not yet have that light. Their good works are produced by the light and life that come from God. It is not of their own making because those who see them in action will glorify not them but their "father" in heaven" (cf. the motive of the religious leaders in 6:1). The title "father" is used in Matthew here for the first time, introducing the special relationship that exists between God and Jesus' disciples, Jesus has been declared to be the beloved Son (3:17), and now those who have received the kingdom light are children of the heavenly Father as well (cf. John 17-13) (Hobb, 1965, p. 64). Jesus' disciples possess kingdom life, which produces good deeds from a changed life. Bearing the light of the gospel in both message and life will bring people to know that the kingdom of heaven truly is in the world, and they will glorify their heavenly Father. The Beatitudes hinted at this direction, but the metaphors of salt and light are the first explicitly indication that the presence of the kingdom produces changed lives.

Bromiley (2007, p. 1297) also adds that, in philosophy, pre-Socrates usage treated φῶς as a physical phenomenon while Parmenides, Plato e.t.c talk of it as truth and an illumination of the mind, In the cultus – "in the cult of the dead, φῶς drives out demon..." meaning that φῶς is that which overcomes evil. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word used for light is roa (°ôr) (William & Gingrich, 1979, pp. 871-2). Similarly because of the extremely delicate, subtle, pure, brilliant quality of light, Bromiley (2007, p. 1297) asserted that it came to be used as an appellation of God (corporeal, spotless holy etc.). In the New Testament, the synoptic Gospels and the Acts, the word φῶς is used both figuratively, literally and transferrable (Matt.17:5, 4:16, 10:27). In Pauline corpus, Thayer (2004, p. 1234) opines that 'Paul followed Jewish usage in a mostly eschatological context (1Cor. 4:5, 5:10, Col.1:12). Johannine writings present the Logos as the True light shine: The Hebrew words הָלַל* hâlâl, רָאָה* zâhar , וְנִרְאָה* yâpha, are all translated "shine", indicating either the direct or indirect diffusion of beams of light. In a figurative sense, it is used of reflected light or brightness in any sense (Ex.34:29, Isa.60:1, Eze 43:2 and Da. 12:3) God as the sun of righteousness is thus depicted in Ps.50:2. In a direct and literal sense, the word "shine" is used of the heavenly bodies or of candles and fire (Job 18:5, 25:5, 29:3, 2 Kg.3:22). The New Testament words ἀστράπτω, ἀνγάζω, λάμπω are translated "shine". Thus literally it is said of the lightening that it shines (Matt. 24:27, Lk.17:24).

Democracy

The contesting nature of words like democracy, which cannot be solely subjected to a single meaning, need to be indepthly appraised. The ideological, historical and cultural variations largely explain the underpinning and meanings which democracy is subjected to in different climes, regions, and societies world over. Democracy has been variously defined and observed as a technique through which popular participation is enjoyed among the civil masses to decide whom their leader is. In the same view, Abraham Lincoln, the famous American p

resident, viewed democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people (Wada, 2017). The understanding that could be discerned from Lincoln's observation pointedly expressed is that democracy is an avenue through which popular participation of the masses is involved in the selection of their representatives. However, a situation whereby election is marred by rigging and corrupt practices does not seem to represent a government of the people.

In understanding this view, we can clearly state that, for democracy to thrive, it must supersede any hegemonic disposition. Nevertheless, democracy should be based on honesty, decency, and good governance whereby the will of the people in choosing their representatives is most effectively respected. This study will adopt Seward's definition of democracy because of its adequacy. He stated that "democracy is a political system in which citizens themselves have an equally effective input into the making of binding collective decisions' (Seward, 1998, p. 54).

Democracy has become the most fashionable form of governance in the world. In all societies of the world today, the issue is not which political system is appropriate but rather when will society become democratized or fully democratic. The democratization project is therefore, regarded as the age of civilization that every society should strive to attain rather than a political option among many others (Owolabi, 2003, pp.431-432). Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered. In this regard, democracy not only prescribes how political power should be acquired but also what to do with it or how it should be exercised. Therefore, Parekh (1993, p. 345) states that, democracy specifies who constitutes the legitimate government and wields the authority inherent in the state (the elected representatives), how they acquire authority (free and fair elections, choice between parties) and how they are to exercise it (in broad harmony with public good).This makes democracy amenable to moral and ethical justifications or judgments. Hence, good governance forms the philosophical foundation upon which democracy and democratic theories are built.

SALT AND LIGHT IN MATTHEW 5:13-14:

A PARADIGM FOR DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

Despite all social and economic policies that have been implemented by successive administrations, Nigeria has remained a laggard in social, economic and political developments. Subsequently, political instability, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects, widespread malnourishment have been the main features of Nigeria's political economy. It is not an overstatement therefore to contend that the return of the country to electoral democracy in 1999 has not made significant impact on the economic and social well-being of the people. Several other factors explain the development tragedy in Nigeria. These are: the colonial legacy, bureaucratic and

political corruption, poor labour disciplines, globalization and unfavourable international environment, unpatriotic followers and bad leadership to mention a few.

Politically, people may disagree about the best means of achieving good governance, but they quite agreed that good governance is absolutely imperative for social and economic progress (Owolabi, 2003, p.388). According to Madhav (2017) good governance has much to do with the ethical grounding of governance and must be evaluated with reference to specific norms and objectives as may be laid down. It looks at the functioning of the given segment of the society from the point of view of its acknowledged stakeholders, beneficiaries and customers. It must have firm moorings to certain moral values and principles. The question dealing with governance, though significantly related to democracy, is culture specific and system bound. For instance, the fundamental objective principle entrenched in the Nigerian constitution provides the yardstick for measuring good governance. Section 14(1) states that, “the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice”.

This is further strengthened in Section 16 (1 and 2) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 16(1) a, b, c and d, says that, “The state shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution - Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy; Control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy, other than the major sectors of the economy, manage and operate the major sectors of the economy; Without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy. Section 16(2) states that, “the state shall direct its policy towards – The promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens (Eboh, 2003,p. 13).

Since salt had a varied use in the ancient world, Jesus is not pointing to one specific application but is using it in a broad, inclusive sense to refer to a vital necessity for everyday life. The Christian’s task is to be the salt of society, preserving, reconciling, adding taste, giving meaning where there is no meaning, giving hope where there is no hope, prick the conscience of the world and be an irritant to ungodly behavior. As a moral antiseptic, Christians keep the corruption of society at bay by opposing moral decay by their lives and their words. It is about the quality of life. It is interesting that when the early Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire, the Christian Apologists pleaded for tolerance saying that society continued to exist because of Christians. What they were saying was that Christians upheld the good values in life, they worked for reconciliation and peace, and they prayed for the empire and its well-being. To be the salt of society means that we are deeply concerned with its well-being. We preserve cultural values and moral principles and make a contribution to the development of cultural and social life. We add taste and flavor to the common life. Because there are Christians in a city or in a village, its people should be able to praise God for the harmony and fellowship, joy and happiness which Christians bring to the common life.

In the same vein, Thayer (2004, p. 1234) states that, Christians are called “φῶς τοῦ κόσμου” light of the world one in whom wisdom and spiritual purity shine forth, and who imparts same to others. The New English Bible translates: ‘You are the light for the entire world’. It means we are to be light in all aspects of the world’s life. It also means we are to be light for all the people of the world. It takes us out of our preoccupation with the welfare of the Christian community alone. Christians are to be torch bearers in a dark world. We are called to make a visible impact on the world around us. One should not try to hide the light which God has lit in our lives. Rather we should shine so that others may see our good deeds and praise God; Shining does not mean self-propaganda, self-publicity, self-glorification, but bearing fruit in our life, bringing life and light to others. It is about our deeds in society -- in politics, in culture and in social life. Christians are not to be indifferent to politics but must actively participate in the political life of their country. There is a saying in India that it does not matter whether Rama (God) rules or Ravana (the Devil) rules. This is not so with Christians. It matters very much which political party rules and which policies are implemented. Christians benefit the world only when we live as light.

The Bible does not give us a programme for political action, but it gives us a picture of God and his purposes for his creation. In the Beatitudes we see a God who comforts those who mourn, a God who satisfies the needs of the poor and the hungry. To be a light is to follow this God, struggling to bring about social justice in our society, to safeguard human rights and to work for peace and reconciliation. “If you cease to prevent justice, if you feed the hungry and satisfy the needs of the wretched, then your light will rise like dawn out of darkness”. (Isaiah 58:8)

TOWARDS ENSURING *SUSTAINABILITY OF DEMOCRACY*

Due to the fact that transparency, justice, accountability, reciprocity, righteousness, mutual trust, rule of law, neighbourliness, well-feelings among others, are conspicuously absent, it is pertinent to assert that these Christian moral values which are salt and light are necessary in Nigerian governance and in the stability of democracy. Good governance has 10 major characteristics. They are participation, consensus oriented, accountability, transparency, representation, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness, procedural stability, openness and disclosure, and justice. Good governance assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. Therefore, to promote good governance sound anti-corruption policies devoid of rhetoric must be put in place. In addition, the legislature and the judicial arm must be functional and alive to their responsibilities, since a healthy and sound judiciary and legislature are sine qua non for good and democratic governance. Again, we align ourselves with the foregoing by asserting that those in authority should govern well with quasi-autonomy as derived from God. The hallmark of their message being that all should exercise good thoughts, good deeds, pursue justice, pursue living, maintain an equilibrium in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and search for sanity in an insane world so that they might live worthy (Mcmuun, 1999, p.126).

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that, the salt metaphor informs us that our lives are important to this world regardless of our status or profession, the kingdom life that we possess is invaluable for the preserving, seasoning, fertilizing effect it will have in our daily realm. The metaphor also has a warning for imposter disciples, because the kingdom life that is transforming the lives of true disciples cannot be imitated or manufactured. The light metaphor continues the thought, but emphasizes more directly the positive influence disciples will make in this sin darkened world. We are not only carrying the light of the gospel of the kingdom of God, but we are that light. Therefore, we need to be concerned about only having salt and not displaying our light. Though there are many Christians pretending to be salty, they have to face the facts that genuinely pursuing Christ will always produce the light of good works. We must not focus on either social works or having a spiritual life. For Jesus spiritual means rightly relating to people you do not like. We must stop faking a spiritual life when we see little good works coming from our lives. In the end we will see God's work in us when people see our good works and do not applaud us but God's remarkable work in their lives through us. The church should therefore cease her disgraceful fornication with the world and return to her first love and her true Lord. Her living has degenerated, her tastes have declined, and her standards have sunk to the bottom. *This in return prevents sustainability of democracy in Nigeria.*

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