

“...I don't need anybody to pay me to do politics”

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Lady Funke Awolowo is a Pastor of the Sovereign Word Church and House J. She serves as the treasurer of the Alliance for People's Trust.

The politically-inclined woman of God is the first grandchild of the late Nigerian political sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his wife of precious value, Yeye Oodua H.I.D Awolowo. She is the first child of Chief and Mrs. Awolowo's first son, Olusegun Awolowo Snr. who tragically passed on at age 24 in 1963 following a car crash, a tragedy that ensued eight months after her birth. She is the older cousin to Dolapo Osinbajo, Nigeria's second lady and wife of the country's Vice-President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo.

Emerging from an illustrious family with such a prestigious political heritage, it is almost impossible for her to dissociate herself from the goings-on in the political scene in the country. With that in mind, she is holding her own by playing her part in the progress of the country while ensuring the legacy of her grandfather is upheld.

Get enthralled and inspired by her exclusive chit-chat with Livinghope Magazine as the politically inclined woman of God shares with us an insight into the roles Christians play in politics and how beneficial it is.

Excerpts below:

LHM: In your opinion, what is the relationship between Politics and Christianity?

Pastor Awolowo: Politics has to do with the government of the day, how things work and all that. Integrity is very important in politics. The main place where integrity is being emphasized is in Christendom. If you go into the Bible, it lets us know that the government shall be on the shoulder of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reference point. I don't know how things deteriorated and Christians especially, were eliminated from politics. I have a call and one of the things they tried to tell me from the onset was not to dabble into politics. I realized that was a heinous error because God needs people who have integrity and the fear of God in government. Without that, we have chaos, tyranny, and all the anomalies set in motion. For instance, right now, our Vice-President is a Christian and Pastor. I think that inspired a lot of Christian votes and it has also sent the message that Christians should get up and get rolling.

There is no use in us criticizing if we are not involved. One of the things we see that has happened a lot now is that many Christians were killed by Boko Haram. What message is that sending to us Christians? That we should get involved. You'll find out that we didn't have that unified voice within to speak to us because what you avoid cannot speak for you.

Today, especially with the mantra of “stop corruption” that's really sold, that's the voice of the Christian. What is God saying? We must relate with

each other in love and in the fear of God. When you fear God, you don't steal, abuse or kidnap, you allow for the three strata to be according to how God wants it. You don't abuse, you don't diffuse ready-made powers that should work for the people.

LHM: In the light of that, from your own perspective, what impact has Christianity made on the Nigerian political sphere so far and what roles do we Christians still have to play?

Pastor Awolowo: You saw how involved Bishop Oyedepo was and other pastors. They were speaking into the affairs when they saw people were being killed, they were the voices. When they saw what we call tribalism in play, they had to speak. You see the church must speak because a great number are in the church and they must be represented. The minute we begin to get involved, speak, recruit people and explain why people must get involved even in churches, you will see a difference. I remember I went on a platform during testimony time. I spoke and I had the backing because the people are looking for a hope in a hopeless situation and we Christians must tell them that things are possible through the eyes of God.

LHM: We have had and still have devout Christians hold various positions in government, but so far, there seems to be little or no impact or difference in terms of their performances. What reasons would you allude to their non-performance?

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Pastor Awolowo: I don't agree with the little impact. If we have a Vice-President that is a Christian and a Pastor, you can't say that is little impact. Christians are taking their place in the polity of the day and I think there is a lot of impact. It was Apostle Suleman that spoke very early this year concerning the herdsmen issue, so Christians are making impact. What we want is a consistency. Let them continue to speak and not let go. During elections, I enjoin Christians to be that voice, that succor that people need. Keeping away and saying “no impact” will not help. We have to keep at it, we have to be consistent. We must let people know even in churches, recruit people into parties so that they will know that you have their back.

LHM: Do you agree that Christian politicians too often sacrifice their spirituality for political relevance?

Pastor Awolowo: That's debatable. You know, every Christian has an individual call. If we make a simple statement and say Christians sacrifice, I think that's very unfair. It depends on the Christian. I think if we go into history, I don't know who was telling me that the late Akintola was a minister of God, he went into politics. I think whatever you have as a Christian must be a plus and I will not go with that statement that Christians have sold out, if that's what you are saying. No, I don't think it's a fair statement. Every man, as the Bible says, will stand before God and be judged according to their works.

LHM: As a pastor now venturing into politics, how do you address criticisms from some quarters that pastors should remain on the pulpit and not participate in politics or contest for political positions? What Biblical backings prove your point?

Pastor Awolowo: Well, when you talk about politics, what are you talking today? We are talking money, corruption, and many other things. What Christians should do is that we should dictate the pace. If you are coming into politics, what is the motive? Is it because you have a heart for the people or is it because you have a personal ambition? Yes, it's good to have an ambition but it should be Godly. Everything has to do with the motive. God said we should seek after justice. If you are seeking after justice as a Christian, I think the best place to be is in the government; therefore, Christians are needed. I think at some point the Bible said “I looked for a man to stand in the gap and I found none.” God is constantly looking for men, for us Christians to stand in the gap, especially when things have gone haywire. Therefore, I'm calling on Christians through this medium, Livinghope Magazine, that we should join and let the people, when they cry, know that there is somebody there speaking for them, reaching out to their needs and making things good.

LHM: Nowadays, there are endorsements of politicians by pastors and prominent preachers. What justifications have they for their actions when compared with the evidences in the Bible where in 1st Samuel 9-10, Samuel anointed Saul and in 1st Samuel 16:1-13 where Samuel also anointed David?

Pastor Awolowo: Doesn't that confirm what you are saying? If they were anointing, that means Samuel was involved in the government. They said a king is not there in vain. Most of the people in government are there, be it Buhari or be it a Muslim, because God put them there. We must learn to seek the face of the Lord. I remember four years ago when APC was out there and they hadn't announced their Vice-President. I think things changed for me when I saw that Osinbajo was the Vice-President because I said this is somebody I can identify with as a Christian, as a Pastor, and as a lawyer. My expectation was almost doubled that this one would speak and he would do right. Yes, God is in the business of initiating Kings, Presidents and people in leadership. The choice and the onus to do right are on that person. God is saying, I present to you good and evil, choose good. Man is constantly faced with choices and whatever they seem to choose is between them and their God.

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LHM: The Christian Association of Nigeria has increasingly gotten more involved in politics. Do you think this is necessary for a body whose primary responsibility is uniting the body of Christ?

Pastor Awolowo: At the end of the day, every Christian, you and I will stand before God and God is going to ask you, when things were going haywire, getting bad and there was decadence, what did you do? So, the Christian Association of Nigeria, in their well-meaning motives, came together to exert the purpose of God to see that the people of God conform to be that voice. The Bible said John the Baptist was a lone voice crying in the wilderness. When we constantly speak, when we enable Christians to get involved, and when we pray, God's purpose will be done. God's man will come out. What we are seeking for right now is that Godly man that will lead this nation because everything as you see is in disarray.

LHM: Do you agree with the direct involvement of some men of God in political matters? A case in point is the open harassment of a top politician by a Catholic priest recently. Is there any defense for such behavior by the Christian clergy?

Pastor Awolowo: He's a man that is speaking the truth with the fear of God and the Bible says you should not be afraid of their faces. That is what he is doing. It's exemplary. Yes, he's harassing them because they have done evil and sometimes, as they say, the truth is bitter but somebody's got to speak. That man knows that at the end of the day, he will stand before God and he wants to be justified that he did his part. So, I'm going to give him a clap.

LHM: Considering your position as a clergy, in relation to your involvement in politics, what would you wish to see changed in this country, Christian-wise?

Pastor Awolowo: There is freedom that's part of the constitution to worship God. I would have wished that everyone was a Christian but I think it wasn't even there even when Jesus was around. So, what I believe is that we should allow people to worship God but we should do our own part as the mandate given to us “...go ye into the world and preach the gospel.” We are going to do exactly that. In Africa, most of our foundations were not Christian and we see that we operate in mixtures. Even our churches, we see that we want to mix that bizarre way of worship that we had with modernism. I wish we had less of that but that's who we are. If I were to change anything and I don't know if it has to do with the Bible, but I would do what America did. Write the constitution from the standpoint of the Bible. I think that's what I would do.

LHM: The theme for the 19th edition of our magazine is “THE NIGERIAN PROJECT: The labour of the foolish wearies every one of them, not knowing how to go into the city,” culled from the Bible passage, Ecclesiastes 10:15 (KJV). Can you speak briefly on this?

Pastor Awolowo: It's the ideal of the marketplace. Sometimes, we Christians know the word, but you see, they say the letter killeth but it's the spirit that giveth life. Jesus said something. He said the sons of the world are smarter than the children of righteousness. So you see, you must know the way of the market. That's why we have to get involved. God has called us but always, God is calling Christians to optimize and make sure that they are tops in every area, so that they will know the way of the market, and exert God's purpose. The ignorant cannot do that or the foolish.

LHM: For record purposes, kindly give us a brief introduction of yourself and the positions you've held in Christendom till date.

Pastor Awolowo: My name is Funke Awolowo. I'm the first grandchild of late Chief Obafemi Awolowo. My primary and secondary schools were in Ibadan, then, I went to England to do A levels. I have a B.A in Humanities. I did a stint in Psychology in UNILAG, a



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stint in Law, I also did some banking, some Business Administration so I'm well-versed, I'm well-rounded. I've worked in the government civil service in England, I worked with the Home Office, I worked with the treasury and in different areas. When I finally came to Nigeria, I worked with two insurance companies: ADIC and Royal Exchange, and then with a branding company.

I've done different businesses but now, I have the desire to get involved with the government of the day because that's part of who I am, having been born in government, having read so many books and having lived it virtually. For you to live in the Awolowo home, your life is politics, so it's something that is part of me. Like I was saying to somebody, I don't need anybody to pay me to do politics. There is something that drives me, that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. I enjoy it. I have desire to make things right, to make sure that what papa did, my granddad, does not vaporize or is not thrown away. So, I want to do my part, like papa said, "I've fought a good fight, I've made the world better than I met it. As a woman of God, which is very important, I've always from the age of 12, had a desire for God. I think because basically, my father died from when I was young and my mother wasn't there. So, there was something in me driving me towards that love, that spirituality. I started in a Catholic primary school, I was always at the grotto or at the chapel anytime I had the opportunity.

At that age, I had my encounter where I heard God speak to me. I cried to God and at every stage, I heard God speaking to me, do this. Even though we had the Orthodox Church, I was born into the normal Methodist, Anglican Church. I wanted a spiritual church and as a young girl, I would go into spiritual churches to be a part, hear visions and prophecies which was something that was different and I wanted that. When I got to England, I had to choose a place of worship. I went to the Pentecostal church, the Chestington Temple, the Victory Church and Action Faith. Then, Action Faith was pastored by Pastor Paul Adefarasin and he is a very intense teacher. There, I was taught of the Lord. I learnt to fast, to wait and to hear from God. I got involved in international ministries like the Benny Hinn Ministries, Maurice Arollo. I was a part of it and from then, I've not been the same. When I came to Nigeria, I joined the church called Sovereign Word Church because of my passion. God began to single me out unto His purpose. Everything about me was church, even my children were in church. And from then on, from one training to the other, I was ordained a minister, I became a pastor, I also sing, I do a lot of things. I also minister in a place called House J. I joined them like 4 or 5 years ago or more, and now, I'm the main person, the main speaker.

By: Samuel Mayowa

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