

# A THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF POLITICS

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### 1. Introduction

In his book on *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution*, J. G. Davies <sup>presents</sup> a commonly held assertion concerning the place of politics and religion in society.

The church business - so it is contended - is religion not politics. Just as a bus company deals with transport and the Conservative and Labour parties in Great Britain are devoted to politics, so the church's area of concern is that of religion. Moreover, the religion that Christians profess is a private affair; it has to do with face-to-face relations and not with government acts or social structures. The Christians' objective is not this world - certainly not the world of politics - but the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of dichotomy between politics and religion was the kind of Christianity the Nigerian Christian inherited from the western missionary and it is still held strongly in many circles even today by eminent Christians. Those early Nigerian Christians who turned a deaf ear to this dichotomy, since the African sees no sense in separating life into sacred and profane or secular and religious spheres, were branded as not serious Christians. But is this dichotomy a misunderstanding of what politics is all about or is it based on a mis-interpretation of the biblical teaching or both? The dichotomy created between politics and religion is clear from the above quotation. It understands the Christian religion as a private affair and its objective being the kingdom of God, which is understood as otherworldly. Politics on the other hand has to do with governmental acts and social structures, here on earth.

To understand the English word politics, it is helpful to turn to the first users of this word, the Greeks. The word politics is more of a transliteration than a translation of the Greek word πολιτική (*politike*). According to Aristotle, "*Politike* belongs to the group of Practical Sciences, which seeks knowledge as a means of action, whereas the theoretical Sciences seek knowledge for its own sake." Among all of the Practical Sciences, politics, he says, is the most important of them all, for it is the "science of man's affairs, of man's happiness or good". According to him, politics is practical in the sense that it studies happiness and it also works out how this happiness that should be secured for the good of a given people or society. Thus, "the aim of *Politike* is to discover first in what mode of life man's happiness consists, then by what form of government and what social institutions that mode of life can be secured".<sup>2</sup> It is obvious from this that, for Aristotle, ethics and politics go hand in hand. The verb πολιτεύομαι, *politeuomai* is used in the sense of "to be a citizen", "to act as a citizen" or "to rule the state",

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<sup>1</sup>J. G. Davies, "Political Involvement" in *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution*, London, SCM Press, (1976), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Aristotle, *Politics*, p. xvi-xviii (Loeb Trans.).

while the noun πολιτεία, *politeia*, means, "citizenship", "constitution" and πολίτης, *polites*, means a "citizen", "a member of a city", "a freeman". This then means that from what Aristotle says, politics for the Greek is about power sharing, the sharing of resources and the maintaining of justice for the good of all citizens of a given state or nation. It is about how people in a given society are to relate to one another, how they can organise and develop their resources for the benefit of all and how they can best protect their own interest. And Christians in a given society, as other groups in a society, owe such a society their contribution to making sure that this is so. Not only do they owe the society they belong to their own contribution, but have a right to their share in the corporate possessions of their given society, whatever these may be.

What about religion? Religion generally, has to do with the relationship with the one believed to be the supreme creator of humanity, the universe and all that is therein. Not only is it to do with the relationship with the supreme creator, but it has to do with the demands of this divine being with regard to how humans should relate to one another and with the created world here and now. Thus, religion has not only to do with God, the worship of him and the laws governing that worship of him. As G. W. Van Beek rightly points out,

The infrequent use of "religion" <sup>3</sup> in the Bible is due to the fact that the concept of "religion" is itself alien to the core biblical thought. The basic meaning of faith to the Hebrew is the concrete response of the whole man to God's call and obedience to his command, not intellectual acceptance of a body of truth or even correct observance of special cultic acts. Primary for faith is man's relation to God, not his relation to faith structure or cultic practice. <sup>4</sup>

This paper therefore seeks to show that like in ancient Greek, the biblical concept of politics is centred around the idea of relationship and sharing in power and in material blessings with others within the same political set up. To do that we shall explore the understanding and use of the word politics by its original users, the Greeks. This will be followed by an examination of the use and understanding of the word politics in the LXX and the New Testament. The paper will conclude by outlining the implication of this for a pluralistic society like Nigeria.

## 2. The Greco-Roman Concept of Politics

Mankind according to Aristotle is by nature a political animal so much so that even in cases where people do not need the assistance of their fellows, they still have the desire to live together. He goes on to say,

At the same time they are also brought together by common interest, so far as each achieves a share of the good life. The good life then is the chief society, both collectively for all its members and individually; but they also come together and maintain the political partnership for the sake of life merely. <sup>5</sup>

The word "partnership" (*koinonía*) and politics (*politike*) are common on the lips of Aristotle. In his discussion of the ideal state he uses these words a great deal. He says,

In a state, either all citizens share all things, or they share none, or they share some but not others. It is clearly impossible that they should have no share in anything; at the very least, a constitution being a form of association, they must

<sup>3</sup>i.e., θρησεβεία, θεοσεβεία, ευσεβεία.

<sup>4</sup>G. W. Van Beek, "Religion", IDB, 4 (1962), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278b 20 (Loeb Trans.).

share in the territory, the single territory of a single state, of which single state the citizens are sharers. The question then becomes twofold: if a city is to be run well, is it better that all the citizens should share in all things capable of being shared, or only in some of them and not in others? <sup>6</sup>

Talking about the politics of his time, Xenophon (430 B.C. - 354 B. C.), a historian and biographer, also says:

But in politics, where the gentlemen are the strongest, nobody prevents anyone from forming any combination he may choose for the benefit of the state; surely then, in public life it is gain to make friends with the best, and to see them as partners (κοινωνοί) and fellow-workers (συνεργοί) in a common cause and not rivals. <sup>7</sup>

Thus, for Xenophon, politics is about partnership with fellow citizens in the affairs of the state for the good of the state and its people. Similarly, the Stoic philosopher, Seneca who was Paul's contemporary and Nero's minister (about 4 B. C. - 65 A. D.) has this to say about *societas* or "partnership":

This fellowship, maintained with scrupulous care, which makes us mingle as men with our fellow-men and holds that the human race has certain rights in common, is also of great help in cherishing the more intimate fellowship which is based on friendship ... For he that has much in common with a fellow-man will have all things in common with a friend. <sup>8</sup>

Thus, in the political life of the Greco-Roman world, partnership or sharing in the affairs of the state or nation was at the centre and was non-negotiable. The act of sharing/participating with others in governance of the state was the norm. And those who share (κοινωνεῖν) in the governance of the state in common with each other are referred to as κοινωνοί (partners). Both the verb (κοινωνεῖν, *koinonein*) and the nouns (κοινωνία, *koinonia*) and (κοινωνός, *koinonos*) have to do with ties or relationship with other people in matters of common interest.

As indicated in the quotes above, in Greek politics the state is not the possession of some few citizens or of one man, but of every citizen. As such, representative democracy is no different from oligarchic government to ancient Greek political mind. In Greek political thought, it is the right of every citizen to attend the assembly (ἡ ἐκκλησία), the supreme political institution or arm of government, which had the final say in all vital political decisions. The law makers, that is the *dikasteria* and the *boule* may be by representation but not the *ekklesia*, the assembly. In other words, it was the entire people at their assembly (*ekklesia*) who had the final say on issues that affect them and the state and not the *boule* which was responsible for the day to day running of the state nor the law makers (*the dikasteria*). Thus, the assembly (*ekklesia*) of the citizens of a state was the highest ruling body of a state, where every citizen had the right to speak or contribute his share in the development of the state. Thus, Greek politics was like Nigerian village politics, where every member of the village is expected to attend the village meeting and contribute towards its development, and not only a few in the village called "politicians." As far as I am aware, the word "politician," as a profession of a few, does not exist in any of the Nigerian languages I know.

The Greeks' understanding of politics as sharing in the affairs of the state did not allow them to let a few people monopolise for years on end the political affairs of the state, as is the

<sup>6</sup>Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1260b 36 (Penguin translation).

<sup>7</sup>Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.6.26 (Loeb Trans.).

<sup>8</sup>Seneca, *Epistle*, 48.21 (Loeb translation).

case in many of our political constituencies. So that even in the *boule* and the *dikasteria*, where membership was representative, it was made sure that the term of office was not more than one year. After one year another person was elected to represent the village or the constituency for the following year. A person may be re-elected but usually for a second term and rarely for a third term. This again, was aimed at enabling others to have the chance to display their own political and God-given charisma in the upbuilding of the state.<sup>9</sup> When we turn to the Holy Bible, we find this idea of sharing inherent in Israel's theocratic government, even after they demanded to be ruled by kings like the other nations.

### 3. The Biblical Concept of Politics

#### 3.1. The Old Testament Concept of Politics

The term is not used in the LXX. However, the term *πολιτης*, *polites* is used in Proverbs 11.9,12; 24.28, in the sense of "citizen", "fellow citizen", "compatriot" or "neighbour" as it is done in the Revised Standard Version (RSV).<sup>10</sup> In these passages, the word *πολιτης*, does not convey the political connotation of "one belonging to the city and acting as a citizen" as in Greek circles. Even though the word is not frequent, one cannot help but note that the Greco-Roman political concept of sharing with other fellow citizens in matters pertaining to the welfare of the state is prominent. The fact that the words *πολιτικη* or *πολιτικος* are absent in the Old Testament does not also mean that the political concept found enshrined in the Greco-Roman society is absent. This is clearly stated in the account of the advice given to Moses by Jethro (Exodus 18.23-27), his father-in-law, an advice that was accepted as divine, even though Jethro was not an Israelite. In Jethro's opinion, the monopoly of power is not good for those governed, because it wastes the time of the governed but for the one that governs as well, for every problem. Not only is it bad for the governed but for the one that governs as well, for monopoly of power weighs down such a leader, since he or she has to see every person who has a problem. We may add, it is an abuse of human resources for one person or a few to claim power or the rulership of a state to be their exclusive possession or inheritance. According to Jethro, responsibility and power must be shared so that human resources may not be wasted. As such, he advised Moses not to take the whole responsibility of settling disputes arising between the people of Israel to himself, saying,

Moreover choose able men from all the people, such as fear God, men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe; and place such men over the people as rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times; every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves; so it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so command you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.<sup>11</sup>

It cannot be over-emphasized that in any given society or institution, any one who assumes leadership and attempts to be everything in that establishment cannot endure and cannot expect peace in his domain. Moses knew that early enough and so he accepted the advice of his father-

<sup>9</sup>For further detail, see, P. Yamsat, "The Ekklesia as Partnership: Paul and Threats to *Koinonia* in 1 Corinthians", Ph. D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, (1992), pp. 50-86.

<sup>10</sup>Political terminologies like *πολιτης*, *πολιτεια*, *πολιτευμα* and the verb *πολιτευομαι* are much more frequently used in Maccabees. See below.

<sup>11</sup>Ex. 18.21-23. It cannot be overemphasised that the many failures in our national leadership as well as Church leadership is that leaders are often power drunk so that they do not want to delegate responsibilities for fear that they will lose it or that the credit for successes would go to others.

in-law. He accepted the advice as divine and appointed other leaders subordinate to him who were to resolve lighter matters affecting the people, while heavier ones were to be referred to him. These leaders were to see to it that justice was maintained both in the life of the people set under them as well as in their own duties as judges and heads of the people. "You shall not be partial in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike; you shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God's."<sup>12</sup> Justice was to be the yard-stick in their governance and was to be the quality that guaranteed their remaining in that office and as faithful people of God.

Thus, as we noted in Greco-Roman politics with regard to Aristotle in particular, ethics is integral in the pre-monarchical period of what one may call Israel's religio-political life. This is evident in the ten commandments, for example, which outlines the nature of the relationship between the people and God and between the people themselves. The ten commandments may thus be said to be the constitution of the Israel of the biblical times. As the ten commandments and other laws in the Pentateuch show, the idea of relationship is central. Here we note the Greek concept of *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*), which conveys not only the idea of fellowship but also the idea of sharing with others in material possession. A typical example is the sharing of the promised land among the tribes of the children of Israel. Although the Levites had no land allocated to them as inheritance like the other members of the tribes of Israel, they were to earn their living from the rest of the people of Israel, from the sacrifices they brought to the Lord. They were also to be given land by their fellows to settle in and raise their domestic animals (Jos. 13-21).

All the cities which you give to the Levites shall be forty-eight, with their pasture lands. And as for the cities which you shall give from the possession of the people of Israel, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the inheritance which it inherits, shall give of its cities to the Levites.<sup>13</sup>

It is to be noted here that each Israelite tribe was not to give the same proportion of land to the Levites. Rather, they were to give in proportion to what they possessed. One is to note too, that the apportioning of the land was dependent on the size of the tribe, showing that justice was the yardstick of this kind of partnership (*κοινωνία*) demanded of them.

Though the system of government of the people of God in the Old Testament was theocratic and therefore oligarchic in nature, yet this idea of sharing in the affairs of the state in which one was a member was central. This is shown in the demand of the people for a king like the other nations, a demand which God did hesitate to grant it on the grounds that it was an evidence of a rebellion against him. However, he granted their request (1 Sam. 8). According to Deuteronomy, 17.16f, all that was demanded of the king by God was that he should not multiply horses, wives, silver and gold for himself nor lift his heart above that of his own fellow countrymen and women nor turn away from the commandment of God, who appoints him to lead the people.<sup>14</sup> This demand on the part of the king was meant to guard against the monopoly of the wealth of the land by one person, the political leader.

This is to say that in spite of the introduction of the monarchy, the government of Israel, the people of God, was still theocratic. God was still at the apex of what we may call the religio-political life of the nation. Oligarchic though it was, because the laws governing the nation

<sup>12</sup>This is repeated in Deut. 1.9-18 (cf. 17.20: "that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren ...).

<sup>13</sup>Numbers 35.8; G. L. Lasebikan, "Property Sharing in the Law of Moses: A Basis for Unity in Patriarchal Communities" in *Religion and National Unity* (ed., Sam Babs Mala) Orita Publication, (1988), p. 69-78.

<sup>14</sup>A typical phenomenon among most Nigerian political leaders, Christians or non-Christians alike.

were said to be made by God, at the centre of it was the idea of sharing or partnership in the affairs of the land and in the riches of the land. The prophets were both the spokesmen of God and of the populace when the king set over them came short of that, for example, by suppressing the people.

It is in the Maccabees that we find political terminologies like πολίτης, πολιτεία, πολίτευμα and the verb πολιτεύομαι used with much more frequency. However, they do not convey the political tone that the words convey in Greek circles. In 2 Maccabees 9.19 and 3 Maccabees 1.22 it is used in the sense of "citizen". The word πολιτεία, which means, "citizenship", "the condition and rights of a citizen" or "constitution" is absent in the Maccabees. According to 2 Maccabees 8.17 and 4 Maccabees 17.9, πολιτεία is used rather in the sense of "the pious order of life, ordained by the Law of Moses". Hence in the Maccabees, πολιτεία conveys a religious and moral concept, denoting the kind of life determined by the Mosaic Law.<sup>15</sup>

The reference is always, not to political rights, to their distribution and exercise in the state, but to religion. This religion, however, is a law which by its many precepts regulates both the life of society and also the conduct of the individual; as a religious order of life it confers a specific character on the whole "walk" ... Since membership of this society finds expression in the whole of conduct, the words take on the sense of "walk."<sup>16</sup>

This of course does not mean that because the word takes on the sense of "walk", it loses the political connotation of partnership as Strathmann appears to be suggesting. It simply means that politics for them was to be understood wholistically. That is, for them, it was to be understood in line with one's relation to God and in one's relation to other fellow human beings.

### 3.2. The New Testament

When we turn to the New Testament, it is noted that the word "politics" or politikhv is not used. However, the words polivth", politeuvomai, politeiva and polivteuma are used. Polivth" is used in Hebrews 8.11, in the same sense as in the LXX, meaning, "fellow-citizen", "neighbour", "compatriot". Sumpolitai (sing. sumpolith", *sumpolitēs*) is used in Eph. 2.12, where it is also used in the sense of "fellow citizens. Even though the citizenship or homeland (πολίτευμα) referred to is not of some earthly country, but of heaven (Phil. 3.20), by using current political terminology to show the intimate nature of the relationship that exists within the Christian community, the writer acknowledges the political concept of the time. Thus, as in the LXX, the nature of the relationship in the community of faith is expressed by using familiar political terminology to refer to the Christians' "walk" with Christ. The fact that the early Christians saw themselves as the new Israel or perceived of themselves as the assembly (*ekklesia*) of God, meant that they were to structure and understand this believing community in almost similar fashion as the city assembly, in terms of how the members function and relate to one another. Thus, as in the LXX, the concept of sharing material resources with fellow believers was to be emphasised among them. This was so important as a means of enhancing equality and unity among the early Church to the extent that when Ananias and Sapphira wanted to frustrate the policy of community of goods, they faced severe judgment to deter others. Not only was the sharing of the resources available to a people important, but also the care of the poor and the needy among the community of faith.<sup>17</sup>

Even though Christians and the Church in particular are often called upon to shy away from politics, based on Rom. 13.1-7 and 1 Peter 2.13-17 they are always reminded that they are

<sup>15</sup>E. H. Strathmann, "πόλις, πολίτης, πολιτεύομαι, πολιτείας, πολίτευμα", TDNT 6 (1968), p.526.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>E.g., Acts 2.42-47; 4.32-37; 6.1-7; 1 Cor. 16.1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Phil. 4.10-20.

supposed to be subject to every governing authority on the grounds that such authorities are instituted by God for the good of the people of a nation. The text in Romans says that because the authorities are instituted by God, they are not to be a terror to good conduct but to bad conduct. And being institutions instituted by God, they are God's servants (v.4 διακονοι; v.6, λειτουργοι) "for your good."

It is alongside this reasoning that the Christians of this country have given full support to every government in this country from the colonial era and in the succeeding civilian and military regimes till date. Christians, Muslims and African Traditionalists have not only given support, but have fully participated in the running of all of these governments that have come and gone, on the basis that there can be no government that can be sustained unless that government is ordained by God. As such, no Christian or groups of Christians are reported to have opposed any of these governments, even those that are imposed on the people through coups and the like. If there were any opposition at all, it was on ethnic or personal grounds and not only on matters of religion and overtly so.

The fact that Paul and Peter called upon the Christian community to every governing authority, shows that both they and their readers could not help engage in political matters. But we may ask, is Paul or Peter dealing with an ideal situation or a concrete situation? This question is not answered by Paul nor by Peter. What if a government is a terror to good conduct and not a terror to bad conduct? Do we do away with such a government as the soldiers have been doing with their fellows in government? In other words, should the populace rise up against any military regime, according to Paul and Peter, since it has become clear to Nigerians that the military is no political saint or saviour of Nigeria? This has also not been answered by Paul nor by Peter. Though they were dealing with a political question that needed to be addressed by the believing community, it had to be in line with the concerns of the day. Paul and Peter were concerned with the fact that the Christians of their times should not be found wanting in their behaviour to fellow brothers in the faith, to others outside the faith and to governing authorities. This means that Christians were prone to look down on civil authorities. One, they were prone to be disobedient to civil authorities on the grounds that those who occupy such seats were unbelievers and not Christians. For them, only God-fearing people or believers should rule. Two, the Christians were minorities and were therefore not a force to be reckoned with and be heard. Hence we may say that the slogan for Paul and Peter may be similar to the slogan of the Nigerian second civilian rule which went, "If you cannot beat them join them." Three, the political institution by nature are for good and not for bad. And if they are meant by God for the good of a society, they should be supported so as to enable them to achieve that good. It means that the Christians who stand for the good should spare no effort in warding off evil in the political realm, using just and lawful means, rather than by shading blood or any unjust means. This includes the civilian who got to the throne by the choice of the people and the soldier who got to the throne not by the choice of the people but by the barrel of the gun. That is, such rulers who become a terror to good rather than bad should be shown the way out, as was done to the second civilian government and the recently ousted military regime, but using lawful means. For he who gets up to the throne or reign by the sword shall perish by the sword.

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#### 4. The Implications of Christian Concept of Politics for a Pluralistic Society like Nigeria

How can we relate this understanding of politics in a pluralistic society like Nigeria? In other words, how can this Christian concept of politics as it appears on the pages of Scripture be incorporated into the body politics of a pluralistic Nigeria, comprising of Muslims, Traditionalists and Atheists without jeopardising our Christian faith?

I was thrilled by the report of the debate at the 1988 Constituent Assembly not only because of the open-mindedness of the members, but because I could see in the hot debate on Shari'a and Secular State ideology some positive results, at least in the near future. Apart from the politically worded language and the seemingly religious zeal that gave the impression that Islam and Christianity are posing a threat to the existence of Nigeria, the controversy had some underlying good results to be

acquired.<sup>18</sup> Christians should not shy away from having a share in the political debate going on, because it affects them as individuals and as a believing community of this country. The Nigerian Constitution can be seen as the Ten Commandments of the Nigerian people, comprising Muslims, Traditionalists, Christians and atheists, if there are any. If it is to be perceived in that light, as a document that has the stamp of God, Christians and Muslims should agree and desist from the manipulation of the "Shari'a Law" and "Secular State" concepts in the interest of unity. Nigerians have come of age and as such we must work out our own constitution to suit our unique sensitivity to religion and life. If the religious radicalism we see in our midst is genuine and not the manipulation of religion by political zealots *in their different religious camps*, then Christians and Muslims must agree in order to turn over a new leaf in the history of this country for the good of all. They must agree, for example, that the 'Nigerian Enterprise' is the possession of us all, Muslims and Christians alike. They must agree that the idea of "Secularism" enshrined in our Constitution is alien to the teachings of both the Holy Quran and the Holy Bible and that the "Sharia Law," the possession of only one party cannot be included in the document of our common 'Enterprise.' The Nigerian Constitution, being a corporate document of the 'Nigerian Enterprise,' can only bring in that which would be of benefit to that Enterprise from both sides. Other interests not served can be taken care of in the religious sphere of that religion. Christians and Muslims must agree that Nigeria should be seen as an 'Open State' or 'Multi-religious State' (not 'Secular State', for secularism is some kind of religion) open to religion and the utilisation of religious philosophies that can enhance the political, economical, technological development and dignity and integrity of Nigeria and Nigerians. Thus, Islam and Christianity and other religions should make known to the people of this country what is vital to their faiths and will be of benefit to all Nigerians. Such should be put on the table for <sup>security</sup> consumable by all Nigerians should then be taken on board (in the religious section of the Constitution?) and what is not, should be left as the private property of that religion. This is the way it should be in a modern Nigeria, where everybody has woken up from sleep. This is more so for the ones who have woken up late to find out that the *kwokwo* and *akara* for breakfast has already been taken, and the very people who have taken that breakfast are anxiously waiting for the lunch that is at hand.

Nigerians still want to be one united country with a Constitution that should be claimed by all Nigerians as their sole property in its entirety and as such, Muslims must not insist on having a Constitution within a Constitution to serve their own exclusive interests. For the Shari'a Law is a Constitution in its own right, belonging exclusively to Muslims. A Constitution for a sensitive and multi-religious Nigeria is an awesome task that must not be taken lightly, but must be addressed squarely, cautiously and faithfully, no matter how long it takes and how much it will cost. Why? It is the anchor of poor Nigerians on stormy days, since they will be unable to take refuge elsewhere, unlike the rich in the country. Threats like, "Either we have *Shari'a* in the Constitution or there shall be no Constitution or even peace in this country", as was the case during the writing of the last Constitution,<sup>19</sup> are not only unwelcome but dangerous.

The irreligious nature of the debate is also pronounced in the pro-secular state advocates. It would appear that those who are comfortable with this position are not so much because they want freedom of religion as such, but because they do not want the high ethical and moral standard of the Holy Scriptures to interfere with their mischievous and exploitative political activities. Their religiosity should be seen as no more than a manipulation of the two main faiths for personal political gains. If they are Christians, it is soon noted that after they have been given the mandate by the people, they soon become friends of the very people (Muslim politicians) they had appeared to be against. For such people, there is a political gown (*baban riga*) and a Christian gown (suit) for one to wear, depending on whether he or she is at a political meeting or a religious meeting. It is therefore not uncommon to hear

<sup>18</sup>See for example "Newswatch," October 24, 1988.

<sup>19</sup>See "Newswatch," October 24, 1988, page 15.



such politicians say in social and political circles, *Wannan ba wurin addini ba ne* meaning, "This is not the place for religious talk".

The problem is therefore not that the adherents of Islam, African Traditional Religion and Christianity cannot accommodate one another and live and walk side by side peacefully in a country given them by God. Rather, the problem is with the manipulators of the two dominant religions in Nigeria for their own personal gains. Therefore, if Nigeria is not to be consumed by these political zealots or fanatics in the gowns of their different religions, there is a need for these religions to re-examine their faiths in the context of Nigeria and for the good of Nigeria. More than that, they should screen their camps to know who really represents their religious ideas and who is there only to fulfil his or her hidden political agenda. As they re-examine the content of their faiths, they should try to see what this faith could offer the modern Nigeria and Nigerians as an entity, and still remain faithful to the Christian or Islamic faith, as demanded by their Holy Scriptures. For it cannot be over-emphasized that a commodity imported wholesale into another country without taking cognisance of the new context, will not produce the positive results that were obvious in the original country. And we have more than qualified Christian and Muslim theologians and academicians to do the reworking of the different faiths for the purposes of the Constitution for our common consumption, leaving what the other partners in this "Nigerian Enterprise" cannot subscribe to, for the consumption of the individual religious bodies in their private homes and worship circles. There is no witness that can be proclaimed with a lasting effect than that which assures humanity of his security and endeavours to protect him from that which threatens this security. Thus, any religion that cannot offer Nigeria and her people this security is as good as dead. Yes, any religion that is more interested in the purity of her doctrine than the welfare and security of the people she seeks to claim as adherents is better dead than alive. For we shall not be called upon in eternity to account for the annihilation of a people of another religion, but we shall be called upon to give an account to the Supreme Creator regarding how we have related to Nigerians and other peoples. Indeed, we shall be called by God to give an account of how we have freed ourselves from the kind of religious fanaticism that sheds blood in the name of God, as if God were a lover of people's blood.

Christians and Muslims cannot therefore afford to let Nigeria down. Islam and Christianity can be the hope of this country. There are many things that unite us and as such, we should walk the road of fellow-citizens and companions and ward off neo-colonialism in its different facets, so that Nigerians may enjoy this God-given land that is "full of milk and honey," for it has been given to us to share. To do that, we must work as a team, as one man, to produce a document that will serve our unique national and multi-religious needs, peculiar to our situation and experience. Only then shall we be said to have come of age in that faith we profess and in our political career.

Gone therefore are the days when the Nigerian Christian shies away from politics or participates in politics with timidity or some guilt feelings on the grounds that politics is a dirty game. The Church as an institution and Christians as individuals must be involved in politics indirectly and directly, respectively, if they are to continue as the light of the world. Christians who would not want to enter party politics must act at least as statesmen and stateswomen for the good of Nigeria. This is what it means to be the light of the world, to enter into every sector of the society to shape it in the way God will have it. Thus, in the words of B. J. de Clerq,

If it is true ... that the Christian faith is not indifferent to the major objectives of mankind and of the real course of history, the Church must show the proof of it in practice and achievement. It must be able to make itself heard at the crisis points in the human panorama, there where vital decisions are made, where good and evil are forged, the happiness and misery of men, where the future of the world is being built. It

is scarcely necessary to add that all this takes place not in the church or the vestry, but above all in the field of politics.<sup>20</sup>

This is what we mean when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And since the Lord says, "I am with you always to the close of the age," we can be sure, he is with us not only in church worship on Sundays or in morning or evening prayer meetings, but also out in the political field and in our different spheres of life shaping this beloved country in the way the good Lord would want it to be until he returns.

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<sup>20</sup>J. G. Davies, "Political Involvement" in *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution*, London, SCM Press, (1976), p. 29f, citing B. J. de Clerq, *Religion, Ideologie et politique*, Casterman, Tournai, (1968), p. 54.