

Principles and Programme of a Christian Political Party

The year we opened the Northern Area Office of the Institute of Church & Society, 1977, was an extremely crucial one in Nigeria. It was also the year of the first Constituent Assembly that was supposed to create a new constitution that was more Nigerian in spirit rather than colonialist. In this context, I tried to make a contribution to the first Constituent Assembly. I translated into English a Dutch Christian political statement of the Kuyparian Christian party in The Netherlands. I gave this document to Ibrahim Usman Sangari, our Wukari friend, who was member of that Assembly, for him to share it with his colleagues in the Assembly, both Christian and Muslim. I offered this document to this community because, as I wrote in its introduction,

In the present political discussions many issues debated arise not out of local situations, but are inherited from the international community of Islam on the one hand with its centre in the Near East and of western Humanism that has been influenced by Christianity, but cannot be said to be Christian as to its basic tenets. Thus we feel free to make available from the world-wide context that which seeks to apply the Gospel in that particular context, but that has so far remained hidden in an obscure language.

I am not sure he actually distributed the document. Ibrahim's politics was based more on "reality politics" than on principle, an attitude he shared with many Christians. At its basis lay the unacknowledged assumption that the *de facto* political situation and dynamics is more real and powerful than the principles arising from the Christian world view. Whether or not he did, I distributed it also by sharing it with others in all appropriate circumstances, hoping thereby to effect changes in people's basic perspectives. I have over the years received enough appreciative comments from my readers to know that my literature did have that effect on many people, even as recently as 2012.

There are at least two English translations of this document. The one is mine, which I wrote about in our *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 190-191 with which I open this file above. That is the version I distributed in Nigeria in stenciled copy under the title "An Example of a Concrete Christian Approach to Politics." The other translation is by Dr. Bernard Zylstra of the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto. I bowed to his translation and re-published it as Appendix 16 to Volume 5 of my series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations* (see the Islamica page of this website). That is also the version that forms the core of this file.

Introduction number 1

But before proceeding to Zylstra's translation I present you with the stenciled introduction in the document "An Example of a Concrete Christian Approach to Politics."

Nigeria is presently in the throes of devising her political future. Various groupings seek to leave their imprint on the constitution, both Christian and Muslim. Among Christians themselves there is disagreement as to the role of religion in political matters. Some have a very narrow understanding of their own religion and they champion a politics devoid of religion. Others, like their Muslim counterparts, view religion as a way of life that necessarily and by definition has political over- or undertones. The document introduced here constitutes the principal statement and programme of a Christian political party in The Netherlands. This party consists of church members, but it is not itself an arm of the organized church. It is independent of the church and seeks to live its politician life in obedience to the Word of God within, of course, Dutch culture and history.

We present this document because we note that in present political discussions many issues debated arise not out of local situations, but are inherited from international communities. One of these is Islam with its centre in the Near East; the other, Western Humanism that has been influenced by Christianity but cannot be said to be Christian in its basic tenets. Thus we feel free to make available from the world-wide community a political document arising out of a specific national context that seeks to apply the Gospel in that context, but that has so far remained hidden in the obscure language of a small nation.

The name of this party at the time was Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). This term does not indicate opposition to modern progressive movements that call themselves revolutionary, but, rather, it refers to the spirit of the French Revolution. This Revolution sought not only to destroy the church for her complicity in oppression but also to reject the teachings of the Scriptures themselves. That Revolution sought to replace the sovereignty of God with that of man, also in politics. It is hardly a new party, for it can trace its origins back to the 1870s. The following document is the result of nine decades of political experience and reflection.

The document is presented without comment or changes. We realize that some articles need considerable historical explication for full understanding. We also recognize that some of the articles contain notions perhaps not acceptable at all in our Nigerian context. We have resisted the temptation to eliminate them, for our aim is not to present it as a concrete guide to be copied in Nigeria, but as an example of how Christians in a different situation have sought to apply some basic teachings of the Bible to their political life in a professional way. If the specific application is irrelevant, as Christians we cannot afford to reject off hand the basic teachings of the Bible that have relevance to political life. We are part of the global Christian world as much as our Muslim neighbours are of theirs.

Introduction Number 2

The following is a second introduction to the document that I wrote elsewhere. It supplements the first.

The Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) is the Christian political party organized by Abraham Kuyper and his followers. Its programme was based on Kuyperian principles, some of which are explained in Part 2 of Volume 5 of my series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*. It was established during the 1870s and over the course of the 20th century it has frequently served as the party in power either alone or in coalition. In fact, Kuyper himself served one term as Prime Minister. Towards the end of the 20th century, under the force of changing circumstances, especially the unrelenting secularization that overran The Netherlands during the closing decades of the century, the Party joined with the Catholic and other Christian parties to form the Christian Democratic Party.

The term “Anti-Revolutionary” referred to the spirit of the French Revolution that had put its deep secular imprint on the country. It was really a synonym of what today would be called “anti-secular.”

The Statement below hails from the early 1960s and has been overtaken by events. However, I offer it as an example of Kuyperian political thinking in an age when religious considerations still played an important role in the country. It was still part of the pre-multicultural Christian era when major religious differences were not between different religions as they are now, but between Christian denominations. At that time, major worldview differences were more between two major players: Christianity and secularism. Today, there is a worldview clash between *three* major players: Christianity, Islam and secularism.

I am in no way suggesting that Nigerian Christians adopt this statement as their own. I present it only as an example of Kuyperian wholistic thinking in the political sector. Christianity does not have to be as shapeless as Nigerian Christians have inherited it and as Muslims have observed it.

STATEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES AND GENERAL POLITICAL PROGRAM OF THE ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

(Drawn up by the Meeting of Deputies, June 10, 1961, in
Utrecht, the Netherlands)

Translated by Dr. Bernard Zylstra
Of the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto

PREAMBLE

The anti-revolutionary or Christian-historical movement represents that element of our national character which was formed under the influence of the Reformation and the leadership of William of Orange and which acquired its identity in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Its point of departure is the confession that God is the absolute Sovereign and that He has given to Jesus Christ all power in heaven and on earth. Both the Government and the people are to acknowledge this power and are therefore obliged to keep the commandments of God for the life of the state.

In conjunction with the above, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (A.R.P.) accepts the following Statement of its Principles and general Political Program.

PART I: GENERAL PRINCIPLES

ARTICLE 1

The A.R.P. considers as its calling to strive and struggle for the preservation and strengthening of the authority of the Word of God over public life.

ARTICLE 2

While recognizing the Church's calling to proclaim the message of the Word of God as it applies to all of life, the A.R.P. believes that government and people must learn to understand on their own, in the light of Holy Scripture, what this message means for the political life of every age.

ARTICLE 3

Not the will of the people but the sovereign power of God is the foundation of the authority of Government. While opposed to specifying

any single form of government as the only acceptable one, the A.R.P., grateful for the blessing given by God in the House of Orange, judges that for the Netherlands the most suitable form of government is the constitutional monarchy by members of this royal house as it has gradually developed from the Republic of the sixteenth century.

ARTICLE 4

The A.R.P. acknowledges that the Government is the minister of God invested with the power of the sword, called to maintain justice and to rule the nation for the benefit of the people.

In fulfilling this calling, the Government is to respect the limits determined both by the nature of its office and by the particular calling and responsibility of other societal relationships and of private individuals.

ARTICLE 5

The Government as the servant of God, by Whose grace it reigns, has as its calling

- a. to acknowledge God's Name in all of its public activity;
- b. to take care that God's Word can have free course among the people;
- c. to extend equal treatment to all churches and all citizens, whatever their religious beliefs may be;
- d. to abstain, in view of its incompetence in these matters, from all measures which intend to coerce the religious development of the nation in a particular direction;
- e. to uphold law and order and to insist on sound moral conduct in public life;
- f. to honor the conscientious objections that any of its subjects may have against a governmentally imposed obligation, provided these objections derive from religious convictions and are not incompatible with a proper execution of the Government's task;
- g. to respect Sunday as a day of rest as far as governmental functions are concerned, and to promote such maintenance everywhere within the bounds of its authority;
- h. to use its right to demand the oath whenever necessary to confirm fidelity and truth;

i. to promulgate days of prayer and thanksgiving for special times or occasion in order that the people may be encouraged to invoke the Name of the Lord;

j. and further, in general to do all it possibly can within the bounds of its authority that the people live according to the demands of the Law of God.

PART 2: DETAILED ELABORATIONS

ARTICLE 6

The Constitution

The A.R.P. accepts the existing constitution as the foundation of our political institutions. While taking into account the time and the circumstances, the Party wishes through lawful procedure to develop and reform the constitution in accordance with the demands of the anti-revolutionary or Christian-historical principle.

ARTICLE 7

The Influence of the People

The A.R.P. considers indispensable a powerful influence of the people, to be exercised on the government through the parliamentary medium of a States-General [House of Representatives] fully conscious of its particular task and responsibility with respect to both the government in power and the voters and their several parties.

ARTICLE 8

Province and Municipality [State and Local Government Area]

Provided neither national unity nor civil rights are thereby placed in jeopardy, an autonomous position and a sphere of authority as broad as possible should be guaranteed to the provinces and the counties, firmly rooted as they are in our history and forming specific administrative communities, indispensable for the whole of the Dutch political order.

ARTICLE 9

The Administration of Justice

Justice is to be administered according to laws founded on divine principles of right, albeit that the legislator should take into consideration the condition of the nation's sense of justice.

In civil as well as in criminal cases a verdict ought to be rendered by an independent judiciary.

Penalties should be imposed not only to protect society or to rehabilitate the convicted person but in the first place to restore the violated order of law. For this purpose the government may, if necessary, resort to its fundamental prerogative of inflicting capital punishment.

To the extent that the activity of the Government should give occasion for conflicts of an administrative nature, a binding decision should preferably be handed down by an independent judiciary. Under all circumstances a solution should be sought in such a manner as to guarantee as much as possible that lawful interests be honored.

ARTICLE 10

Church and State

Inasmuch as the Government is to respect the mutual independence of Church and State, it may not concern itself with internal ecclesiastical [religious] matters.

ARTICLE 11

Education

It is a matter of public interest that there be adequate educational facilities and that everyone be enabled to receive instruction and training suited to his aptitude and ability. As a consequence of its duty to protect the spiritual freedom of its subjects, the government must base its educational policy on the principle of freedom in the choice of school, in accordance with the general guideline that the free and private school should be the rule and the state school a supplement. The particular responsibility of the parents for the education and development of their children must indeed be recognized by the Government. The Government must accord equal

treatment, financially and otherwise, to private [non-profit] and to state education, in order that the freedom of private education be respected and guaranteed.

ARTICLE 12

Government and Culture

The policy of the Government with respect to the cultural life of the people ought to be founded on the recognition that all culture originates from spiritual roots and can thrive only in spiritual freedom. The Government should therefore not act directly in this field but restrict itself to making possible, encouraging and protecting the development of cultural life. The citizenry's own activity in this area should always have primacy.

Besides the diversity of spiritual attitudes, the government ought also to recognize and, as much as lies within the scope of its activity, to promote the variety of local and regional cultures, as they form an indispensable source of and stimulus for the culture of the nation as a whole.

The government should safeguard the treasures of culture against loss, see to it that the available products of culture be made accessible to citizens of all social levels, and do its part to promote international cultural exchanges.

As elsewhere, the Government should bar from the cultural life of the nation all that would be contrary to good order and public morality.

ARTICLE 13

Public Morality

The Government should watch over public morality, keeping out of public life all that is contrary to decency or in any other way would tend to debase man, and protecting everything which cannot protect itself against abuse.

The Government should support all spontaneous efforts on the part of the people to raise the level of morality, in particular, actions against improper use of the Name of the Lord, against prostitution, gambling and excessive drinking.

The Government should promote every means conducive to strengthening the moral consciousness of the nation.

ARTICLE 14

Public Health

Health care is first of all a personal responsibility. At the same time, however, the maintenance and protection of the health of the people is a matter of public interest. The Government should watch over the condition of the people's mental and physical health. This ought to be done by supporting the citizenry's own efforts at preserving and improving public health, and, if necessary, by governmental provisions.

ARTICLE 15

Social Policy

Since the doctrine of the class struggle ought to be rejected, our society should aim at a just order for labor, to be realized through mutual consultation of employers and employees in suitable organizations or bodies. Whatever is achieved in this area is to be judged by the Government according to the standards of law and justice, and, in case of deficiency, should be corrected or supplemented by appropriate governmental action.

Industrial law should guarantee to everyone, who is directly involved in industry, the place and the responsibility due to him.

The acquisition of property by all classes of the people merits the active encouragement of every person and socio-economic organ connected therewith. Within the limits of its task and calling, the government should promote this acquisition of property.

ARTICLE 16

Social Work

The Government must allow ample room for churches and private organizations to be active in the wide area of social work. It should support and promote these activities also by legislative measures. Only in case of evident necessity should the government undertake this work.

ARTICLE 17

Economic Policy

With respect to economic life Government and industry have a distinct and different task in accordance with their particular nature.

The economic policy of the Government should aim at creating the general conditions conducive to the maintenance and growth of national welfare.

The activity of industry itself, provided it is accompanied with a sense of responsibility, generally offers the best guarantees for supplying the needs of the national economy. Consequently the Government should take part in the production of goods or the provision of services only to the extent that the public interest definitely requires this and private initiative is unable to supply them or clearly falls short of supplying them.

The legislature must leave ample room for industrial life, both in private-legal organizations as well as public-legal bodies, to regulate its own affairs, but at the same time it must guarantee that the Government have sufficient means at its disposal to nullify any activity on the part of industry which would run counter to the public interest.

The Government should promote the discovery and the development of all the resources of the national economy, and it should stimulate the creation of an optimum level of employment, taking into account a balanced development of the nation.

In general the Government should strive for free international exchange of goods and currencies. The Government should do its part in cooperating with international bodies which aim at removing impediments to reciprocal economic relations among the nations.

ARTICLE 18

Financial Policy

The Government should follow a long-range policy of striking a balance between income and expenditure and of maintaining stability in the value of the currency.

Direct and indirect taxes are to be levied in order to meet the financial needs of the Government. No taxation, however, should be imposed without due consideration of the possible consequences for the socio-economic life of the nation, in particular the course of the business cycle and the level of employment.

When levying taxes on income and property, the Government should take into consideration the composition of a taxpayer's family as well as other circumstances which affect his ability to pay.

As far as lies within its power, the Government should avoid a policy of spending which would necessitate an increase in taxes to such a high level as to deprive private initiative of its power and render it ever more dependent on governmental support.

ARTICLE 19

The Netherlands, Surinam, and the Netherlands Antilles

Though looking after their own affairs independently of each other, the Netherlands, Surinam, and the Netherlands Antilles should, when providing for their common interests, do so as equal partners. Furthermore, the close historical ties between these three parts of the Kingdom should bind them together for the purpose of rendering mutual assistance in case of need.

ARTICLE 20

New Guinea

The Netherlands must energetically carry out its moral duty to develop Dutch New Guinea so as to prepare it as quickly as possible for self-determination. The population's opportunities for sharing the government of this country must be expanded as much as possible.

Missionary work in the area of education and of medical and social care is entitled to the support of the Dutch Government.

[New Guinea is no longer part of The Netherlands.]

ARTICLE 21

International Relations

Relations with other nations must be governed by the divine Law for the family of nations. Accordingly, the Netherlands, while maintaining its own national independence, should vigorously assist in efforts towards the development of international law and thus towards the peaceful settlement of disputes among the nations. All unlawful coercion must be resisted, if

necessary by force of arms. Attempts must be made to build an active community of nations, by general means as well as in the form of special associations, which meet the demands of law and justice and which promote the spiritual and material interests of the peoples.

This may require delegating certain national powers to international bodies or organs; in such a case, however, guarantees ought to be obtained that national interests will not be unjustly harmed.

As far as it is able, the Netherlands should give aid to emerging countries.

ARTICLE 22

Maintaining Our Nationhood

The vitality needed for maintaining our national position among the nations should first of all be sought in a strengthening of the national consciousness in the broadest sense of the word. For this purpose there ought to be stimulated among the people a knowledge of Dutch [Nigerian] history and an understanding of the significance of the struggle for justice and liberty from which dates our independence as a nation.

The Netherlands [Nigeria] has the duty to maintain armed forces strong enough to offer resistance to foreign aggression, to safeguard domestic peace, and to enable the country to fulfill its obligations on the international level. The Netherlands [Nigeria] should cooperate with efforts at international disarmament agreements that include effective controls.

The Government shares the responsibility for the spiritual care of those who are in the armed forces; it should respect and support the official work of the churches [religious establishments] in this field.

ARTICLE 23

Co-operation

In conclusion the A.R.P. declares that it is willing to work together with other parties, on condition and to the extent that such cooperation be useful for bringing about the general aims of its Principles and Program in the actual political life of the nation.

It expressly declares that it strives in particular for the united action of all those who accept the Reformational-Christian mandate, in the sense of this Statement, also for political life. [In practice, when political situations

demanded it, this has translated into cooperation and coalitions also with Catholic and secular parties and could, in the Nigerian context, conceivably be expanded to include Muslims groups.]