

Christians' Integrity and Politics in Nigeria

Rev. Prof. Zamani B. Kafang

Preface

Politics and religion have always been in constant interaction throughout the history of human civilizations. This interaction is classically witnessed in the Greco-Roman civilizations whereby the Greco-Roman emperors act as priests, gods or human representations of the gods in state worship.

Historically, this close relationship between politics and religion also continued to the medieval times when the popes, the church and the governments of the Western world worked together in political symphony, and thus making politics to be about religion and religion to be about politics. However, this long time romance between religion and politics came suddenly to an end with the rise of the secular political philosophies of the Enlightenment period, which sought to separate religion from politics because of the many abuses witnessed during the Medieval period. Even though the Enlightenment period and the democratic developments in the Western world after them have sought to divorce religion from politics, however, the force of religion has often secretly determined the direction of Western politics, and often political decisions have calculated underlying religious assumptions. On the whole, the Western world, since then, has largely tended towards secularism which passionately advocates the absolute removal of religion from politics. This in Islam, for example, is not possible simply because in Islam, religion, politics, and economics are bound together. That is, they are inseparable.

In Africa, the separation between religion and politics has been less successful partly because of the inability to create viable democratic structures or a secular political ideology which will clearly bind the different African tribes together as one united political force. In addition, the failure in the separation between religion and politics has been due to the defining power of religion among the

African people which primarily defined realities through the religious prism. Consequently, this worldview naturally makes religion a very influential and defining entity in the politics of most African countries.

Understanding rightly this dominant role accorded to religion in African politics, Prof. Zamani B. Kafang in this work, *Christians' Integrity and Politics in Nigeria*, seeks to provide ways by which Christians should engage the Nigerian political arena with sound Biblical ethics and a thorough knowledge of the Nigerian political situation particularly in the renewed politicization of the Nigerian society in recent times. It is a "herald" or "wake-up call" to Christians in Nigeria that the time of passive or non-political participation is past and now it is the era of new Christian involvement and participation in Nigerian politics. Prof. Kafang observes that Christian ethics can no longer "be confined to private and personal life," thus the need to engage the political life of the Nigerian society.

In devoting his attention to the politics of Nigeria, Prof. Kafang departs from his previous works in Old Testament, and now takes particular interest in the Nigerian socio-political process because often Nigerian politics receives little or no attention from Biblical scholarship. In this choice of politics, Prof. Kafang shows himself to be a competent voice of awakening, albeit, a political awakening that seeks to call Christians to a life of integrity in Nigerian politics. It moves realistically beyond the missionary Christianity which wrongly discourages political participation and focuses narrowly the vision of the Nigerian Christians to the other heavenly worlds. On the contrary, Prof. Kafang notes that there are competing visions which here and now seek to take over the "political soul" of Nigeria, and thus the need for Christians to rise up in order to take full political responsibility within their local communities.

This work is indeed timely and relevant especially in the light of the current political happenings and thus the need for Christians and pastors to take seriously the warnings, instructions and advice which are hereby presented by Prof. Kafang in this book.

It is in light of this importance that I personally recommend the book to Christians and pastors and hope that the work will alert them to the threats and dangers of

political non-participation and passivism in the increasing politicization of the Nigerian society. To avert our common “political annihilation” as Christians, the church in Nigeria and Christians everywhere must move beyond rhetoric of change and positively engage the political arena with a clear manifest that is truly grounded in Biblical convictions.

Matthew Michael, Ph.D., Acting Academic Dean

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I. Introduction

Parents, brothers and sisters, colleagues and friends, I am neither a politician nor the son of a politician. In fact, I am not even from the tribe of politicians who have played and juggled with the intelligence of millions of Nigerians for the past 50 years, that is, since independence. In the process of playing with our intelligence, some of them have seen politics as a game in which, who gets what and why. However, I have heard, observed, seen and read a little about politics in Nigeria. Thus, I wish in this current period of intense politics in which we are, in Nigeria, that the words of Claude Pepper, December 29, 1946, are taken seriously by our politicians.¹ He said, “If more politicians in this country were thinking about the next generation instead of the next election, it might be better for America and the world.”²

Therefore, I hope this will be a good reflection and projection time on Christians and Politics in Nigeria, especially as we draw closer to our next election. Many Nigerians today are full of trepidation how the elections will be in April 2011 because of how the society is politicized. As a matter of fact, it is not only the society that is politicized, but let me tell you, our names, our tribes, our food, the currency we use, the cars we drive, where we live, our religions (Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion), educational system, the books we read, the news

¹ According to Tom McArthur, *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*, (England: Longman House, 1982), p. 109, “politics refers to the business, art and/or science of government.”

² George Seldes, *The Great Quotations*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), p. 373.

we listen to or watch, etc., have all been politicized. As a result of all this politicization, the entire Nigerian politics is politicized and, therefore, the country is now at the crossroads of her politics. All the political parties, each is looking and searching for who will cut the Gordian knot. No one can depoliticize Nigeria, except the Christians, well-wishing Nigerians, Biblical teaching and sincere religious practice.

Nigeria, like so many other modern African States, was a creation of European imperialism. Even its very name “Nigeria,” after the great River Niger, the country’s dominant feature, was not given by a Nigerian. Rather, it was suggested in 1890 by the British journalist Flora Shaw, who later became the wife of the colonial governor, Frederick Lugard. This creation called Nigeria encompasses 250-400 ethnic groups³ of widely varied cultures, varied modes of political organizations and varied religions. All these were amalgamated in 1914 into one country called Nigeria.⁴

Before going any further, some key dominant aspects need to be mentioned in passing in order to gain some light on past and present Nigerian politics; for example, the spread of Islam, predominantly in the north but later in the southwestern part of the country as well. The creation of the Sokoto caliphate during the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio (1804-1808) brought most of the northern region and adjacent parts of Nigeria and Cameroun under a single Islamic government. This automatically helps account for the dichotomy between north and south. It created divisions within the north that have been very strong during the colonial and post-colonial eras.

The second aspect that somehow affected Nigeria and, by implication, its politics was the slave trade across the Sahara Desert and the Atlantic Ocean. Particularly, the trans-Atlantic trade accounted for the exportation or forced migration of 3.5 million Nigerians between 1650-1860. At that time, or during the same period, the Sokoto Caliphate had more slaves than any other modern country, except the USA in 1860.⁵

³ D.H. Crozier and R.M. Blench (eds.), *An Index of Nigerian Languages*, 2nd ed., (Dallas, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1972); also see Dietrich Westermann and M.A. Bryan, *The Languages of West Africa*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

⁴ C.K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* (2 vols.) (London: Kegan Paul, 1931).

⁵ See e.g. David C. Tambo, *The Sokoto Caliphate Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century.*” *International Journal of Africa Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (1976): 187-217.

Slaves were also numerous among the Igbo, Yoruba and many other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Thus Islam, Christianity, slavery, economics, and politics were intricately interlaced at that time.

The third aspect is the rapid withdrawal of the colonial power – the British. It unleashed rapid changes in all aspects of Nigerian activities to the extent that the impact is still being felt even in the contemporary period. This is because power was handed, it appears, only to the three major tribes, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, without taking into consideration the collectivities of the minority tribes who inhabit the Middle Belt region of the country.⁶

As a matter of fact, an in-depth historical record appears to confirm that the British handed over Nigeria to the Muslim North and did not include the Eastern and the Western parts of the country in a subtle way in terms of power sharing. For example, the words of Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto clarifies this when he states

The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grandfather, Othman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We must use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the south as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us or have control over their future.⁷

Long before Sir Ahmadu Bello's comment, a similar thought was expressed by Major A.J.N. Treamearne concerning the minorities of the central region of Nigeria, that ... "thus keeping the tribes separate, and avoiding the danger of their combining to expel us."⁸ That is, the minority tribes should not be allowed to unite and to be strong; otherwise, it would have been difficult for the colonial government to subdue these collectivities of ethnic groups.

If the area occupied by the minority ethnic groups or tribes in the central region of Nigeria was considered as one of the regions during the colonial government withdrawal, maybe most of these religious, ethnic, political and economic clashes we are witnessing in the region today might have not been taking place. After all, these minority groups in the central belt are different from the core north both

⁶ Mallam Maigamo Suleman Idris, "Gurza-Mariri Crisis: Who is Hausa in Nigeria?" *National News Enquiry*, 12th September, 2005: 19-30.

⁷ Sir Ahmadu Bello, Northern Premier, In Independence Confidential in *Parot*, Oct. 12, 1960, publicized by *Tribune* of Nov. 13, 2002 and reproduced by *Punch* of Feb. 8, 2010. See also Yusufu Bal Usman, *The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria 1977-1987*; CAN Publicity Committee, *Kaduna Religious Riot '87: A Catalogue of Events*; J. Dogara Gwamna, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*, (Kaduna: Prudent Universal Press and Publishing Company, 2010).

⁸ Major A.J.N. Treamearne. *The Tailed Head Hunters of Nigeria*. (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1973), p. 74.

religiously, linguistically, culturally, economically, socially, politically, etc. They are also different from the southern brothers and sisters, vis-à-vis the brothers and sisters in the western part of the country. Add to these, the post-colonial factors such as lack of uniformity in development between the core north, central region, southern and western parts of the country, bad leadership, corruption, nepotism, neo-colonialism, etc.

So, no matter what, Nigerian politics must be seen in connection with the numerous dominant factors just outlined above, namely the manipulation of religion in politics, slave trade, bad leadership, corruption, nepotism, neo-colonialism, and the manner in which the colonial government handed over power before their withdrawal.

Having briefly reflected on these aspects in this short introduction, let us, therefore, proceed with our discussion on Christians' involvement in Nigerian politics, gaining Christian perspective on politics, creative Christian thinking as well as engagement in politics, and maintaining Christian ethical integrity in politics.

II. A Brief Survey of Christian Involvement in Nigerian Politics

Christianity entered Nigeria from the South and Islam entered through the North.⁹ Since Christian missions brought Western type of education alongside the preaching of the Word of God, such education permeated the Southern and Eastern parts of the country for many years before it was presented to the North.¹⁰

As such, by the time Nigeria became independent, the majority of the highly-placed government leaders at the federal level were Christians. For example, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardaunan Sokoto (Premier of the North) and Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister) both Muslims, were the key figures in the North, except the emirs in the Provinces. But in the West and East, the key figures were Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Premier), Chief Ekoti Ebo (Premier), Michael Okpara (Premier), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Governor General of Nigeria), and a host of others, all Christians. In terms of the Heads of State the Moslems, since 1960 were: Tafawa Balewa, Murtala Ramat Mohammed, Shehu Shagari, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, General Sani Abacha, General Mohamadu Buhari,

⁹ E.O. Babalola, *Christianity in West Africa*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Publications International., 1976).

¹⁰ A. Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974).

General Abdul Salam and Musa Yar'adu'a.¹¹ Similarly, the Christians were: Aguiyi Ironsi, General Yakubu Gowon, General Olusegun Obasanjo (2x), Ernest Shonikan, and now Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.¹²

By the 1960s to the early 1980s, the majority of the workforce in this country and leaders at the federal level were mostly Christians. Majority of the military officers, Air Force, Navy, Customs, etc. were Christians.

But during the administrations of Gen. Babangida and Gen. Abacha, the situation started to change up to this day. Everything now is politicized as mentioned earlier in this work. Recruitment into the Armed Forces is by quota system. Employment at Federal level, admission into universities, etc. are by quota systems and are politicized.¹³

Amazingly enough, God in His providence does what pleases Him at His own time and in His own way. For example, a glance at the Christians that have been Heads of State of Nigeria, even including Dr. Jonathan, have done so through circumstances, either through a military coup or death of a Head of State. The following illustrates that: General Gowon came into power through the coup that was led by Odumegwu Emeka Ojukwu in 1966. This coup led to the death of the key founding fathers of this great country called Nigeria. Shonikan was by emergency; Obasanjo's first time as Head of State was by the circumstance of the coup which was led by Dimka and his colleagues which led to the death of Murtala.

III. Gaining a Christian Perspective on Politics

Far too many Christians have, for too long, approached politics as if it lies outside their primary responsibility as Christians. When the distinction is drawn between "church" and the "world," for example, it usually implies that politics, economics, science, technology and mass media are part of "the world." The Christian life is thus confined to personal piety, to church activities, to family prayer and Bible study. From this point of view, a Christian's engagement in politics or business is seen as a step into the secular world where Christian principles may apply to

¹¹ Note that out of the 8 Muslim heads of state, 5 were military officers and only 3 were civilians.

¹² Note that out of the 5 Christian heads of state, 3 were military officers and 3 (plus Obasanjo's second time) were civilians.

¹³ You cannot bring out the best of your citizens into use when you practice quota system, because you have to bring in the unqualified one to make up some sections' quotas.

one's personal behavior but not to the structures and functions of the political order or the corporation. From a Biblical point of view, this dualistic distinction between church and world, between the sacred and the secular, is mistaken. Christ is Lord of the whole world, over every dimension of creation. Non-Christians' aims and purposes may predominate in politics, business, and the public media, but that does not mean these areas of life exist outside God's standards or outside the domain of Christ's Kingdom. To the contrary, from a Christian point of view, we should see that, in Christ, believers have been called to bring every thought, every activity, and every responsibility, captive to Christ (Philippians 2:10). All of life is God's creation and is claimed by Christ (Colossians 1:16). Or if we want to insist that the word "secular" means what it originally meant in Latin, namely "of or pertaining to this world," then even the church is a secular institution. In either case, our conclusion will be the same: everything in all creation, including everything secular, belongs to God and comes under Christ's sacred authority and claim of ownership. This includes politics.

Christian politics, therefore, must amount to more than the attempt to maintain upright personal behavior in a non-Christian environment. It must mean more than crusading for a few moral causes by political means. Christian politics must be about politics in its entirety. Christians must create awareness, be informed citizens, and raise the conscience of their members through seminars, workshops, publications and the like, to know that whatever happens in politics has some bearing on them. It must be about defining the very nature of government – about the structure, limits, policy and responsibilities of government. Our personal piety and heart-deep dedication to Jesus Christ should work their way out in the way we seek to obey God with all the political responsibilities as public officials and as citizens. (See the books of Esther and Daniel).

When we approach politics this way, we can see that the political arena is neither neutral nor non-religious. Rather, it is a world shaped by the religiously deep drives, commitments and habits of a culture. Politics is organized by the vision of life that controls citizens and governments. Our challenge now is to avoid the easy path of simply going along with democratic, economic and technological changes as they occur. Instead, our challenge is to develop a coherent Christian political perspective that will allow us to make judgments about the justice and injustice of the changes taking place. Even more, we should be seeking, as Christians, to exercise as much leadership as possible – leadership in both our state and national assemblies, in our senate, in all our tiers of government and in

international organizations – to propose principled policies and changes in political structures that advance justice domestically and internationally.

We should not fear that such a bold approach would give the appearance that we are trying to inject Christianity where it does not belong. Other religions, including humanist secularism and Islam, are seeking to lead and direct society and politics. Religions are what constitute and direct people's lives. They encompass and drive different cultures and their institutions. And what we find throughout the world today is that different religions are increasingly competing with one another within the same society. Few places on earth have only one religion that integrates the entire culture.¹⁴ Christians, therefore, must take their faith seriously in political life as most other religions do.

If Christians mistakenly assume that their religion can be confined to private and personal life, they will fail to come to grips with the various religious visions that are competing to shape their society and its politics. In fact, those who operate with a privatized understanding of Christianity will not be sufficiently aware that they themselves are being shaped by religions other than Christianity.¹⁵ In public life they develop the habit of accommodating themselves to other religious visions that take the lead in shaping politics and society. This is what has happened over a long period of time in the United States. Most American Christians hold to some form of civil religion, or liberal progressivism, or economic materialism in public life. They do not realize how their lives have become divided between Christian faith and competing religious visions. They have become double-minded by accepting the division of reality into the sacred and the secular, into private Christianity and public secularity.

We must fight to overcome this dualism in the 21st century. We must encourage one another to build communities of coherent Christian witness, communities of obedience to God in Christ through whom we can work to develop thoroughly Christian approaches to politics, business, science and the media. The body of Christ is a community that cannot survive without wholeheartedly living out of the Spirit of Christ, as branches living in the vine, which is Christ (John 15). If Christians try to follow two spirits or two or more "ways of life," they deny the truth of Christ and they will not bear fruit. They will be cut off as dead branches. Our entire way of life, including political life, must exhibit the religion that binds

¹⁴ This is found mostly in the Arab countries, where Islam is the dominant religion.

¹⁵ See Walter Gottesman, "Egypt and a Coptic Minority" in *Crossroads* (March 1987): 473-483. An issue like that of "sharia" during the Nigerian 1979 Constitutional Conference, if the Christian delegates did not stand their ground during the deliberations, we would have been living under other religions' philosophy or ideology.

us, the lordship of the Christ who owns us, the Creator-Redeemer in and through whom all things exist and by whom all things are being reconciled to God.

Christian citizens and public officials need to think and work together to generate ideas, strategies and reform proposals. Without the full-time labor of Christians dedicated to developing a Christian approach to politics, Christian citizens will be dependent on the thinking, strategies, and reform proposals generated by people with other views of life or faith.

What should characterize Christian politics in this century? When Christians make the commitment to change their approach to politics so that it becomes part of their wholehearted service to God, what should they expect? What kind of politics should they be calling for in the 21st century? On what basis will they be joining together, as Christian citizens, to labor in the political arena of God's world?

Permit me to make this very important point. That is, Christian politics must always be principled and comprehensive. This is because in politics, whether in the legislative chambers or in the executive branch of government, political issues come and go, and they usually require highly-focused attention. One day the issue is defense policy, another day it may be welfare or education; the next it is monetary policy. Issues will often come to public attention in a crisis situation, as a matter of urgency. Even without a crisis, diverse opinions will be voiced and the time for weighing evidence and making decisions will be short. These are not the circumstances in which Christian officials will have time to construct a political philosophy and a comprehensive framework for evaluating specific issues. They will have to rely on what they already know and on the expertise of others. The groundwork of Christian thinking must have already been laid through awareness and Biblical insights through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The principled vision must already control the actors. The ability to relate each issue to the principles of justice involved must already belong to the decision makers.

IV. Time for Creative Christian Thinking and Engagement in Politics

One thing we know for sure about politics in this century is that Jesus Christ is still Lord over all authorities on earth. This is the confession that Christians have made from the beginning of Christianity. Whether living under democratic or authoritarian governments, whether persecuted or free, Christians have trusted that Christ rules the world both for judgment and for blessing. God's kingdom

embraces the whole world, the entire creation. We also believe that because of God's patience, the climax of Christ's kingdom lies in the future and will come by God's decision, not ours. Christian politics in the 21st century must grow from this faith. It will build on this confession: that Christ is Lord over all, and that the full and final revelation of his government is still to come.

What does this confession mean for us in a politicized society today – for Christians in every other corner of the world? The first thing it means is that we need to engage in new and creative thinking about Christian political responsibility. During most of the last 2000 years, Christian thinking about politics took shape in contexts that have either disappeared or are no longer predominant. With few exceptions, open societies with representative and constitutional limited governments are new to the world: less than 100 years old in most places where some form of democracy is now practiced.¹⁶

No longer relevant for us are the arguments developed during the Middle Ages to justify the Roman Church's superior authority over governments. Nor may we allow the idol of nationalism, which still grips the hearts of many Christians in Europe, the United States, and all over the world, to be our guide.¹⁷ Ideologies inspired by the longing for liberation from foreign colonialists or military conquerors are also inadequate to fashion the Christian framework. We are liberated already. Also, many practices that have helped promote economic growth and distributive welfare within countries are insufficient or irrelevant for establishing international practices that will be economically just.

This transition moment in human history offers Christians a tremendous opportunity to pray and work together in new ways for new political understanding, for an understanding that will allow us to become more faithful witnesses in politics to the God who rules the world through Jesus Christ. Nigeria is a young nation. For a long time the church, due to the way the missionaries earlier introduced the Gospel to us, viewed politics as dirty and sinful. Today we are chasing shadows. Sometimes we forget that as Christians, we have dual citizenship. For, although we are citizens of heaven by faith, we should remember that we are also citizens of this terrestrial world. Also, God enthrones and dethrones rulers, and he urges us to obey them (Romans 13). So it means that God Himself is involved in the political arena. Therefore, we too should get

¹⁶ See W. Andrew Hoffercker (ed.), *Revolutions in Worldview*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2007).

¹⁷ See John McKay, et. al., *A History of Western Society (4th ed.)*, vols. 1 & 2. (Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991).

involved. After all, law and justice, the arms of the state, have their roots in the Laws of God.¹⁸

There are three politicized visions that are contending to dominate the world today. They are:

1. The dominant vision appears to be the human-centered one generated by Western secularism: the vision of a world organized for the purpose of achieving perpetual economic and technological growth, governed by enlightened elite who seek to satisfy humanity's common desire for peace and prosperity.
2. A second vision of the world's future is that of Islam – of the world brought to submission before God on Muslim terms. Islam is on the rise all over the world and very vocal.¹⁹ Look at Europe and America. As the Church gets colder, Islam gets hotter. Think of the Arab countries today and the Islamic awakening in the name of democracy.
3. The third vision is the Biblical one. It is the vision of Christ's kingdom which he has fulfilled. As Paul explains to the Corinthians, this will come when Christ has reconciled all things to God and has defeated every evil, including death that stands in the way (I Corinthians 15:24-28). Christ's kingdom, organized for the glory of God, embraces everything that is human, including all technological, economic and political dimensions of life. But it will be achieved not by secular design or by Islamic quest, but by God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our political challenge as Christians is to learn how to exercise our earthly political responsibilities in obedience to Christ. What does this mean? How should we conduct ourselves politically in a politicized society, between the times of Christ's first and second coming? In most countries around the world, Bible-believing Christians are a minority. But whether a minority or a majority, it should make no difference as regards the principles Christians appeal to in exercising the political responsibilities they have. Time has come that we must actively get involved in politics and in a way that we do not compromise our Judeo-Christian ideologies, get actively engaged in politics. In this regard, the words of George Orwell are fundamental and timely. For he said, "In our age, there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics;' all issues are political issues..."²⁰

¹⁸ See C. Shilatyu, *Children of Politics*. (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1970), p. 31.

¹⁹ Samuel M. Zwemer. *Islam and the Cross*, (Roger S.G., ed.). (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002).

²⁰ Seldes, *The Great Quotations*, p. 373.

Thus I want to reiterate that if we accept the fact that now is the time for creative Christian thinking in politics, we should endeavor to encourage and work together with fellow Christians who are already engaged in politics. Finally, Christians engaged in politics should be made by the church to understand that they are being sent to the Senate or House of Representatives or to whatever government position they found themselves in, as ambassadors for Christ and missionaries, for that matter (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

There are, however, various levels of Christians' engagement in politics that I have observed. One, there is a partial engagement. Two, there is a total engagement. There is a bad one; that is, a passive engagement. In this case, our advice will be: Christians who feel called by the Lord to go into total and active politics should do so without fear. Those of us that God has called into full-time ministry in the church should fully support the former, but at the same time engage ourselves to a certain level in politics through active voting, prayers, teaching our children what good citizenship and civility mean. It will be a disaster for us, as Christians, to remain passive, especially when one considers the way politics is being played in our Nigerian society today.

For a coherent Christian approach to politics to become a characteristic of the Christian community, it is essential for those with the gifts and a political vocation to give themselves to the hard work of politics and political writing that can help shape a community of common conviction and understanding. In order for Christians to keep growing as Christian political leaders, they need to have regular opportunities to sit down with Christians who are working full time on the development of policy proposals and political strategy. Mature leadership by those officials will then, in turn, encourage ordinary Christian citizens to take more seriously the exercise of their civic responsibilities in politics and other aspects.

Together, Christian politicians and Christian citizens need to uphold a high, Biblical view of government and seek reforms that will overcome corruption and injustice in government.²¹ This also requires the strengthening of political parties and their accountability over against mere personality politics. The continued growth of a Christian approach to politics can then extend to all fronts as Christian

²¹ See Amos 4:1-13. Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1991). Also see David L. Bender and Bruno Leone (eds.), *Social Justice*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Greenhaven Press, 1958). Delos Miles, *Evangelism and social Involvement*, (Nashville, Tennessee, 1986). Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Robert N. Sanders, *Radical Voices in the Wilderness: The Social Implications of the Prophets*, (London: Word Books, 1970).

parents and teachers do more to help children see politics through Christian eyes, as Christian journalists learn to do a better job of interpreting events from a Christian point of view and as church leaders become more capable of teaching about all of life for a Biblical perspective. To restate this point, I believe that Christian politics must concern itself with political life comprehensively and as a matter of principle from top to bottom, from start to finish.

Christian politics must reflect the fact that we are living in the time of Christ's mercy and patience between his first and second coming.

We are supposed to be like our Father in heaven, and if the Father gives rain and sunshine to all alike, then government should reflect that same practice toward all her citizens. Muslims and Christians – all should enjoy the same civil rights. All should have the same access to public benefits, voting privileges, electoral representation, judicial proceedings, and equal opportunity to express their ways of life in areas such as education, religion and politics. There is, of course, much more to Christian politics than this principle, but until Christ returns, this is an essential component of Christian politics. That is, Christians should be able to enjoy equal religious freedom in public as well as in private life. Our politics must be in accordance with Christ's mandates to us. This is God's will, not our choice. The Bible never asks Christians to lord it over others or to use political power to try to establish privileges for Christians over non-Christians. That is not the way God's kingdom will come, and it does not represent the path to justice. Thus, in every case, the laws, which approve good actions and punish evil actions, should apply to all citizens equally. In the application of these laws there should be no discrimination because of a person's religious commitment.

Christian politics represents the continual quest for justice to be done to the multiple callings and responsibilities God has given human beings – the image of God. The key political aim for Christians is accountability. More important than the accountability of leaders to the people, is the accountability of both leaders and people to God. The reason why people ought to have some say in government is not just so they can exercise a degree of self-government. Rather, it is that they can help government shape laws so justice is done to the full range of their diverse responsibilities before God.

Parents in families; teachers in schools; elders, pastor and deacons in churches; scientists in their laboratories – all of these responsibilities and many more are gifts from God for which accountability is required.²²

My next point is the following: Christian politics in all of our countries must increasingly focus attention on international affairs and seek to engage Christians in cooperation across national borders. If the 20th century witnessed the first world wars, the first worldwide depression, the first globally-encompassing cold war, and the first steps toward a single worldwide technological, economic and communications network, then the 21st century will only continue this trend toward a shrinking globe but will also become the century of worldwide political interdependency. This is not to say that local politics will dry up. This is not to say that the diversification of peoples and cultures will not continue. The world is not only shrinking, it is also expanding in the sense that more and more human beings on earth are engaged in ongoing creative activity, ranging from scientific discoveries and technological inventions to artistic and social achievements. Political life will continue to diversify and become more complex. But all of the diversification and expansion will be taking place in a single world that is common to all of us. But the question remains, how should we as Christians, respond to such a politicized global village?

One of our greatest challenges as Christians in the 21st century will be to learn how to think and work together as citizens of God's kingdom, getting involved in politics nationally for the benefit of all citizens. This will not mean ignoring our domestic responsibilities. Christians will continue to remain citizens with primary responsibility in their own areas. But we must recognize that our citizenship in different locations is subordinate to our service under Christ, whose authority extends over the whole world.

I want to emphasize that the challenge of Christian politics in the 21st century will be to create a truly strong Christian political awareness on issues. To raise a Christian political consciousness through which we can realize our political responsibility as citizens of this country.

Some of the developments to which we have referred make this more possible today than ever before, especially in the areas of communication, transportation and technology. So the question is not whether it is possible for Christians to build stronger interconnected networks as citizens in this country. Instead, the question

²² Richard A. and Wendy Widder. *The Forest and the Trees: Helping Teachers Integrate a Biblical Worldview Across the Curriculum*, (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock, 2008).

is whether we will commit ourselves to do this with a sense of Christian urgency. Do we hear God's call to serve one another and all our neighbours in the political arena as witnesses to Christ's lordship over all? Do we see the urgency of developing a Christian network for creating awareness and coordination of our Christian political ideologies? What might we do together? What ought Christians around the country do together in a politicized society, politically speaking, in the 21st century?

At the very least, we must look for new ways to link up via communications networks: through a website on the internet, through a magazine or journal on Christian politics, and even by means of more informal communications. This will help create awareness and consciousness.

Those who are Christians and are engaged in the political arena should look for opportunities to meet and even hold small conferences when they are drawn together locally for other purposes. When they attend international academic or ecclesiastical conferences or travel internationally for other purposes, they can plan ahead and contact other networks of Christian political friends and colleagues in order to share ideas. Perhaps they can encourage institutions such as Christian colleges, seminaries and churches to initiate the conference on Christian citizenship and awareness.

In addition to all these, they should look for opportunities to participate, as Christians, in major global forums such as those on the human rights, education and others.

Together our response must be that, despite Christian weakness, blindness and deafness, Jesus Christ remains Lord of heaven and earth. His kingdom is coming and His charge to His disciples to give up their lives completely to follow Him remains the charge we must take seriously. In the end, God will fulfill His will. Thus, Christian politics in the 21st century ought to march to the beat of that drum; it ought to dance to the beat of that music.

Having said all this, I will like to add that politics is known for some dubious acts such as: cheating, lies, deception, demonic acts, trading Christ for material gains, elimination of political opponents. But for the Christian politician who wants to submerge himself in politics, he should hold on to three principles as key reasons for his total engagement in politics. 1) that he is going into politics to represent Christ. Representing Christ means talking, acting, thinking, etc., in accordance with Christ's will. Just as He taught us in the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." 2) that the Christian politician, who is going into politics,

is going to represent his people. 3) that he is not engaged in politics to represent himself.

V. Maintaining Christian Ethical Integrity in Politics

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "integrity is that quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is the state of being whole and not divided."²³ There is no way we can talk of integrity apart from connecting it with virtue. Because of a lack of certain virtues in us, as we are witnessing in large measure, failure in our ethical traditions and the breaking down of morality in our daily living and culture. Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee in their book, *Kingdom Ethics*, talk of the virtue of purity of heart. That is, "integrity of inner and outer being and doing."²⁴ The Bible talks of many virtues which, no doubt, if practiced, lead to integrity: Colossians 3: 12-17; Philippians 2:2-3; Ephesians 4:2-3, 32; Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 14:4-5; 2 Corinthians 6:5-10.

The Beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5-7 are keys to how a Christian can maintain his integrity in any circumstance he finds himself and not only in a politicized society. Thus, here I will briefly outline key aspect that, if a Christian can maintain, his integrity will be intact. They are in six components, namely: spiritual, moral, ethical, mental, physical and social. Note, although we are talking here concerning all Christians, yet, permit me in outlining here these key aspects to zero in on the pastor as the leader/shepherd of the local congregation of the believers.

1. Spiritual Aspects:

- a. He is a Bible-believing Christian
- b. His prayer and devotional life.
- c. He is a humble person – not showing off spiritually.
- d. He is not materialistic.

2. Moral Aspects:

- a. He is living a clean life, not involved in sexual immorality.
- b. He can be trusted with money.
- c. He is not greedy – does not try to cut corners.

3. Ethical Aspects:

- a. His character towards himself, family and others.

²³ A.S Hornby. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (6th ed.), (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 623.

²⁴ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), p. 49. Also, see Psalm 7:8, "Judge me, O Lord, ... according to my integrity within me" (NKJV).

- b. His attitudes towards issues and others. Is he a concerned person?
- c. He is a responsible person to his family, the church and people.
- d. He is sensitive to issues.
- e. He feels for others – their sorrows are his sorrows, their joy is his joy.
- f. His choice of words when speaking in private/public.
- g. Be a good counselor.
- h. He should avoid having a questionable character.

4. Mental Aspects:

- a. His way of thinking – open and not skewed/myopic.
- b. He listens more than talks.
- c. He is informed, exposed and conversant with issues/events in the society, the country and the world at large.
- d. He loves knowledge through
 - i. reading books
 - ii. reading papers
 - iii. watching TV and listening to radio with meaning, that is, in the light of Biblical teachings.
 - iv. attending informed seminars, workshops and conferences.
- e. He is creative in planning, thinking, innovation and practice.
- f. He knows his Bible well.

5. Physical Aspects:

- a. He should endeavor to dress well – no matter how old your dresses, wash them clean.
- b. Avoid mouth's odor.
- c. Make sure your clothes are well buttoned up.
- d. Watch the ring around the collar of your clothes.
- e. Try some sort of exercise from time to time.
- f. Do not dress yourself well and forget your wife and children. People see you through them too.
- g. Keep the surroundings of your house and church buildings attractive. That is, do proper landscaping. Make way for cars to your house and church easily accessible.
- h. Be industrious.

6. Social Aspects:

- a. Be in contact with other pastors in your locality, even if they are of other denominations.
- b. Know your members well.

- c. Be a politician for Jesus. That is, let the cause of Christ be your cause.

VI. Biblical Examples of God's People and Politics

1. Moses:

- a. He was Israel's first Head of State as well as High Priest.
- b. Although he did not come to power by popular vote, yet he cared for his people. There were times that Moses offered his life on behalf of his people. He provided them security. He prayed for them often. He was fair in carrying out his functions. He knew the political and spiritual terrains of his day very well. He finally had a smooth transfer of power to Joshua (Deuteronomy 3:28; Joshua 1).

2. The Judges:

- a. Although these men did not come to power by popular votes, yet their people enjoyed their leadership.
- b. They served during military regimes. They were charismatic leaders. They did not try to amass wealth for themselves. Their concern was national security.
- c. When there is security, there will be peace, economic activities and growth, population will increase, there will be education and manpower in the country. There will be unity. Note, you do not expect unity and peace when and where security is lacking, e.g. Plateau state.

3. The Prophets and Kings:

- a. The prophets were not professional politicians; rather they were God's messengers to their people. But in most instances at times they delved into political issues of their time. They warned, rebuked and advised their kings. Any king/ruler who worked/walked closer to the prophet and gave heed to his advice succeeded. But those who refused suffered and the nation too suffered (Elijah and Ahab – Amos).²⁵
- b. The prophets did not amass wealth for themselves. In fact, they were concerned for the commoners, the peasants. This concern led them to performing of miracles to alleviate the commoners' suffering – Elijah and the widow at Zerephath, Elisha and the seminarians on housing and the widow and her deceased husband's debt. Elisha and the Syrians when he blinded them to save the Israelites.

²⁵ See 2 Kings, chapters 1-2; Amos, chapters 1-9.

4. Samuel:

Samuel, like Moses, was both a Head of State and a religious leader. Yet, he played well in the two offices. His testimony remains paramount today in any discussion of leadership (I Samuel 12:3-4).

5. Nehemiah:

- a. Nehemiah was a man of God but in Persia among the captives. Yet he had a great concern for his people and land. Nehemiah, like Moses, although he was in the palace (Senate/House of Representatives) enjoying all the government luxuries in terms of money, housing, prestige, etc. Yet his heart was bent on fearing God, seeking for His leading and helping His people. Before he was made a governor of the little war-torn province of Judea, he decided to do something.
- b. He prayed for 4 months concerning his people, fasting and confessing their sins and his own sins.
- c. When he got the opportunity, that is, when he was made the governor of Judea, he first of all surveyed the needs of his people. Security was paramount. So he built the city walls first. Today, how safe are we in Nigeria, in our towns, villages and cities in the current situation in which the Christian Middle Belt region finds itself (e.g. Plateau state).
- d. In the midst of opposition and threats, he persisted to please God and to serve His people (Nehemiah 6).
- e. He brought economic, social and religious reforms (Nehemiah 5, 8-9, 13). For example, an undisputed census was conducted and proper demography was kept for the purpose of proper planning. Security measures were put in place. Today we need politicians who will be concerned for the security of everyone in this country and not only for themselves.
- f. Nehemiah had the opportunity to spend government money as he would like, but he refused (Nehemiah 5:14-19). How is government money, which is supposed to be for the common good of all citizens, spent in this country today?

6. Mordecai:

- a. He was not a politician in the real sense of the word. However he was in the corridors of power and politics. He was an observer of politics and its interplay with power.
- b. It appears as if he was a passive observer, but in reality he was not. He was a silent politician, working underground, guiding Esther at every

step until there was a great success. As a matter of fact, the way Mordecai, a man of God, played politics, saved Israel from being destroyed throughout the Persian Empire. Mordecai had all the privileges to seek for his own gain, even Esther too, had the same opportunity, but they forfeited them for the sake of their people. God honored them at the end of it all. How are our Christian politicians playing/practicing their politics in this country?

7. Daniel:

- a. He was captured at the age of 13 and taken captive to Babylon in 587 B.C. in company of others.
- b. Daniel lived under imperialism, in a foreign country.
- c. He was close to the political establishment/leaders.
- d. He was chief adviser to many.
- e. He saw leaders rise to power and fall again.
- f. He saw nations change hands.
- g. Behind it all, Daniel saw God at work (Daniel 4:17, 25 & 32).
- h. His name and those of his two friends were changed in accordance to the names of the Babylonian gods.
- i. They were offered food meant for the gods since they were being trained to serve in the idol temples. But Daniel and his friends refused the food.
- j. They remained consistent in their belief in and obedience to God. They remained consistent in prayer. God honored their commitment to him and their lives were spared and Daniel was finally elevated to the position of a Prime Minister. Are your trials in the Senate or in the House of Representatives as crucial as those of Daniel? Can you stand like Daniel, even amidst opposition?

8. Gamaliel:

Gamaliel in the fourth chapter of Acts of the Apostles was a very educated and highly placed government official during the trial of Peter and John. Yet he stood for the truth during the trial. His argument in the trial became the conclusion at the closing remarks of the case.

There were ministers that were involved in politics. For example, Zadok the Priest, was a partisan of David (II Samuel 15:24-29). Nathan the prophet influenced the selection of David's successors (I Kings 1:11-40)

There were women of God who influenced politics in their day. For example, the wise woman of Abel who saved the city through diplomacy (II Samuel 20:16-21).

Bathsheba secured the crown for Solomon (I Kings 1:15-21). Even though Herodias was not a godly woman, yet, she influenced the administration of Herod (Matthew 14:3-11; Mark 6:17-28). Perhaps a godly mother, the mother of Zebedee's children sought favor for her children (Matthew 20:20-23).

In modern times during the English Religious Reformation, for example, preaching and politics became intertwined. Although it was religious, yet underneath it was a political revolution.

In Germany, although the reformation started by Martin Luther was religious in its garbs, it was also political, economic and materialistic. No wonder the state support in the northern part of Germany for the Reformation was strong.

Now, as we see the hungry, unemployed, the sick in our hospitals without care, our dilapidated schools and their fallen academic, moral, ethical and spiritual standards; as we see our roads unrepaired, no electricity to provide light in our homes and power for our businesses, do we not feel like Nehemiah? Is it nothing to you politicians that close your eyes and pretend that you do not see all these? (Lamentations 1:12). As Christians, we should ask God to send some of His wisest and concerned children into the political field to stand for righteousness and truth in high places. We should ask God to give them a heart burden for the masses. We should ask God to give our Christian politicians a heart of holy anger against bribery, nepotism, corruption, misuse of power and to give them hearts of equal justice for all.²⁶

VII. Conclusion

As much as the Nigerian society is becoming more and more mature, so also is the political practice in the country. Nigeria, it appears, is working hard to put in place the infrastructures that will strengthen democracy in the country. This is because history has shown us that in all the governmental system in the world: monarchy, socialism, republic, federalism, etc., the most stable system is democracy.²⁷

Having said this, however, the group that is caught up in this web of a politicized Nigeria is the church. Should the church involve itself in the political process in the

²⁶ See Shilatu, *Children of Politics*, p. 18.

²⁷ Olufemi Olayinka Oluniyi in his book *The Council of Ulama and Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria*, (Lagos: Frontier Press, 2006), p. 155, reminds us that "there is the constant reference to Nigeria's 'nascent' democracy because democracy in Nigeria is yet to mature." However, we all know that democracy can neither be imposed on a people nor imported. It has to be worked for by the society that really wants it.

country or stand by the side and keep on praying. What role should the church really play? Does the Bible and church history say anything concerning God's people and politics?

This short treatise is a very brief reflection at a time like this to awaken the church and its elected members who dared step into politics. Thus, because of time and space, this short and reflective presentation did not spread its tentacles into the New Testament, the Early Church, the Early and Late Middle Ages, in search for patterns and models. Therefore, the reader is referred to D.K. McKim's work.²⁸

In summation, this is a wake-up call. As a Christian, if you feel called by the Lord to go into politics, then you should get involved, gain the right perspective, know that it is time to develop a creative Christian thinking leading to engagement in politics. While doing all these, make sure that you maintain your integrity as a Christian. It is the author's anticipation that Christians, all over Nigeria, through the reading of this short and brief observation, will rethink the way they participate in and play the game of politics in this country. Some of us vote personalities and others vote parties. How many of us voters have seen or read the parties' manifestoes. Why is it that the parties did not publish their manifestoes and make the copies available to the voters? No matter what we do and how we do it, the author's prayer is that Christians in this country should maintain their integrity. I pray that God will guide us to elect the right and not greedy, tribalistic, selfish and unconcerned individuals into positions of leadership in this country, come April 2011. May the shalom of Christ be with us all.

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²⁸ Donald K. McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

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