

CHRISTIANITY & Political LEADERSHIP

by Aiyedogbon



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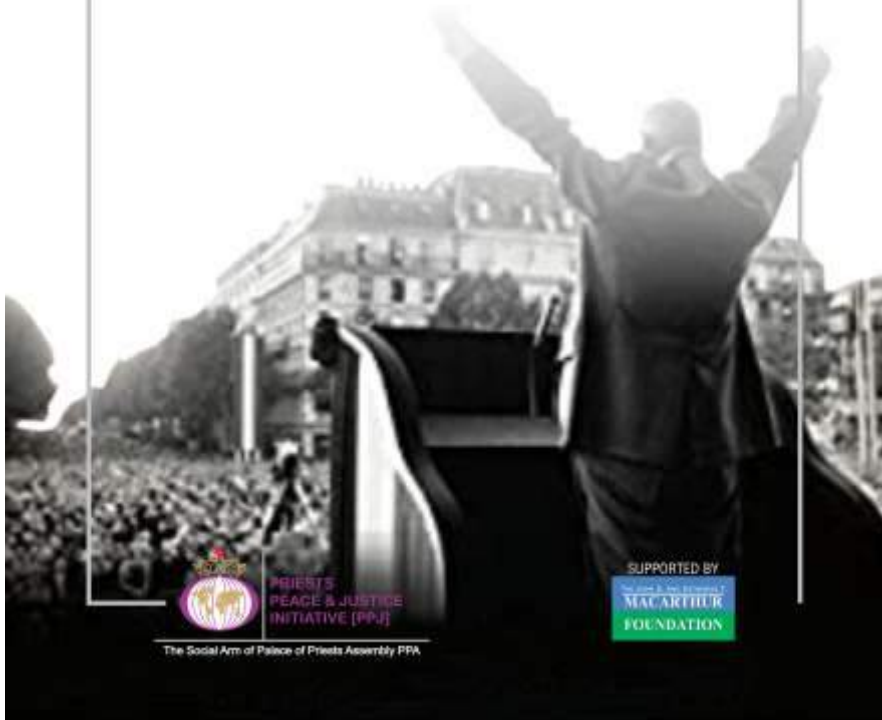
The Social Arm of Palace of Priests Assembly PPA

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PREFACE

There is an urgent call for the rescue of the Nigerian nation from the grip of corruption and the attendant malicious crisis spurned over the years. So much seems to have been done but much more requires to be done because the approaches hitherto used, including several declarations of wars on corruption by different administrations in the country to deal with the scourge of corruption have not created the expected impact. Scholars have written volumes on the causes, costs and consequences of corruption in the country while the anti-corruption war can boast of a few success stories, but victory is still largely a mirage. Those solutions have fallen dismally short in providing relief in the war against corruption.

Apparently, what is missing is the failure to mobilise the people through a language and a system that they can readily understand and relate to in their daily lives. For Christians especially, this language is that of faith and the authority of the Scriptures. Faith is the instrument with which a Christian can have a firm hold on the flow of life and provide an inspirational framework to act with conviction and courage while also acting as a check. This is the background to the publication of this pamphlet. The pamphlet is therefore a tool for mobilizing Christians across Nigeria through the Pentecostal perspective to join in the fight against corruption.

This pamphlet, among others is a creation of an intensive and extensive research by a group of writers who are propelled by their passion to frontally tackle corruption through an evangelical- type approach that takes the content of the Bible and reproduces the instructions, promises, principles and sanctions in a simple manner to reflect God's position in dealing with the challenges of corruption. However, this pamphlet read together with others in the series is not just about corruption, but a

bouquet of other related issues that will help to make the fight against corruption meaningful and effective.

The researches were further validated by another group of Pentecostal Christians scholars and leaders who subjected the work and their content to a rigorous analysis session, vetted it and gave a stamp of approval as a body of literature ready and appropriate for use to mobilise the Pentecostal community in the fight against corruption.

As a result, its content is made simple and easy to read, understand & applied along with others in the series among which are the role of the Church in promoting accountability, the Church and the struggle for social justice, the Church and the Social Dimension of Christianity, the Church and political leadership of nations as well as the role of the Church in elections in Nigeria. The pamphlets serve as the literature for reading along with the Bible for training, instruction & edification on winning the war against corruption. It is good for pastors for whom it is originally intended but it is also a keepsake for t, who must be carried along in the fight against corruption. In this way the message will reach a very large segment of the nation and dwell richly in the heart of all those that will read it and use it for good works.

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Christianity and Political Leadership of Nations

BY ABRAHAM SAM AIYEDOGBON

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter will be looking at Christianity and political leadership of nations. For the avoidance of misconception, I would like to start by clearly defining the key terms as used in this topic.

1. Christianity: - Christianity is the religious belief and practice of the followers of Jesus Christ called Christians. Amazingly, the word Christians was not coined by Jesus Christ neither was it ever used by Him during his earthly ministry, neither did the term Christians originated from the early apostles or disciples of Christ. The term was first used by non-followers of Christ in Antioch after watching the lifestyle, conduct and behavioral pattern of the followers and disciples of Jesus Christ under the tutelage of Barnabas and Paul for a whole year as recorded in the bible.

“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” Acts 11: 25-26

Therefore, we can clearly define Christianity as the religion of those who belief and follow the teaching and ways of life of Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord.

2. Political leadership: - Political leadership can be defined as the sacred responsibility entrusted to a few people selected or elected to represent the citizens of a state or nation in taking decision and managing the affairs of their nation on behalf of the people.

3. Nation: - A nation can be defined as a body of people united by common descent history, culture, language inhabiting a territory. For the purpose of this study, we can refer to a people within the same country or

state under the same political authority or government.

Therefore, the focus of this chapter is to look at the role of Christians in the sacred responsibility of governing their nations. The role of Christians in forming policies, taking decisions that affects their lives both in the now and in the future, and managing the resources of their nation for the common good of all.

The importance of this topic cannot be over emphasized. This is because when Christians show apathy toward the political process and leadership of their nations, they are left with no other option than to be under the leadership and authority of ungodly and wicked people. This confirms the says that; “The price that good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men; the heaviest penalty for declining to rule is to be ruled by someone inferior to yourself” - Plato

Since the bible commands Christians to obey and submit to those in authority over them, they will not have option than to accept and submit to the oppressive and unjust policies impose on them by those in government. This is nothing but a self-imposed punishment by Christians in any nation they find themselves when they show little or no interest in the process of political leadership of their nations.

One of the ways God punishes His people under the Old Testament is to send them into captivity under ungodly nations with wicked rulers. For examples Israel lived under the wicked and oppressive government of pharaoh in Egypt for about 430 years. Israel was sent to Babylonia captivity for over 70 years in the days of Daniel as punishment of their idolatrous practice. Also, Jesus Christ was born when Israel was living under the domination of the Roman authority.

I don't think it is God's will and plan for Christians to ignorantly submit to wicked and ungodly political leadership because of their non-involvement and lack of interest in the political process especially in nation where they have the freedom and opportunity to do so.

Biblical Teaching on Political Leadership.

The Old Testament:

The holy scripture is full of references that underscore the truth that God does not only wants his people to be involved in the political processes of their nations, but He wants them to be at the helm of the socio-political and economic leadership of their nations. From the beginning of creation, God has always entrusted man with the responsibility of rulership and dominion over the earth. The bible says, “Then God said, let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” Genesis 1:26

From the above scriptural verse, God's primary purpose of creating man is for him to have dominion over the earth. Dominion means rulership, authority and influence. Even after the fall of man in the garden of Eden, God eternal plan of redemption is the restoration of man back to Himself and to restore God's man to the place of authority and dominion over the earth where man fell from.

In the declaration of His judgment after the fall of man in the garden, God re-affirmed the governmental position of man when he said to the woman “ your heart shall be towards your husband, and he shall rule over you” Genesis 3:16. The above statement from God shows that even within the institution of marriage, there is a governing structure and God put the man to rule. God never allows leadership vacuum of any level.

The concept of nationhood started as early as the days of Noah when human societies were separated according to their lands (territory) according to their language (commonality) according to their families (historical background) into their nations.

“From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations... These were the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands and in their nations ...These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood” Genesis 10:5,20 & 32

When the early human societies (gentile nations) turned away from God's principle and rulership, God decided to call a man named Abram and made a nation of him as a prototype of how other people should live their lives in obedience to God and how nations should be governed.

“Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Gen12:1-3

Throughout the life of Abraham, God gave him influence over the governing authorities (Kings) wherever he lived or finds himself. In Genesis Chapter 14, we saw Abram fighting oppressive kingdoms to rescue weak people they have taken captive in war. Abraham rebuked king Abimelech because of economic injustice perpetrated against him. He also negotiated with the king of the land he was living:

“Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized. And Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard of it until today.” So, Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant” Genesis 21:25-28

From the above scriptures, we can see Abraham negotiated and made covenant with the gentile king Abimelech when he was living in his land. Abraham actively engaged and influenced the political leadership of his days as a representative of God in the land. I believe that as children of Abraham by faith Christians must be interested in positively engaging, influencing and get involve in the political processes and leadership of wherever we find ourselves.

In Egypt, God used Joseph to positively influence the political power and to shape the economic policy of the nation. Through that, he was strategically positioned to fulfill the prophetic destiny of God's people in Egypt as recorded in Genesis chapter 37-50. God raised Moses to positively engage the oppressive government in Egypt under which his people were held in captivity for over 400 years. Through Moses the Lord delivered His people from bondage of slavery and led out of Egypt on their journey to the promised land. I believe that God still wants to raise godly political leaders among His people (Christians) today that will lead nations out the bondage of economic deprivation, underdevelopment, corruption, violence and bad governance. It is when God cannot find the right person that is prepared for such sacred assignment of leading nations to His desired destiny that He is left with no option that to allow ungodly people to rule over nations.

Throughout the book of Judges in the bible, God raised men and women of godly character and qualities to lead and govern His people. It is

important to note that it is whenever the people of God strayed into ungodliness either due to their rebellious against godly authority or failure of leadership that God allows ungodly wicked rulers to rule over them as a punishment to bring them to repentance. Therefore, ungodly people in political leadership is never God's preferred option in any nation but his last option when godly people fail or outrightly abdicate the responsibility of providing leadership.

We can see also under the Old Testament of the bible, how God raised men like Nehemiah, Ezra, Mordecai and a woman like Esther to position of political influence under gentile kingdoms where they lived. God's plan for his people is not just about raising a godly man among God's people to lead and govern them, but also raising godly leaders among his people to influence and government of even ungodly gentile nations.

This shows that the leadership role of Christians should not just be limited to the religious sphere among God's people but should also be extended to the socio-political and economic sphere of the nations where they find themselves.

Daniel is another sterling example of how God strategically position his people to play leadership role even in gentile nations in the bible. Daniel and other young Hebrews like Shedrach, Meshack and Abednego were all taken as prisoners of war into captivity in Babylon. Daniel and his colleagues distinguished themselves even in their land of captivity because of their godly values and the Spirit of excellence in them. Daniel remained political relevant serving in strategic leadership position under about four different kings for over a period of almost eighty years that he spends in Babylon. Daniel and his Jewish contemporaries greatly influenced the government and the policies of the different kings under which they served that kings were converted by the demonstration of the power of their God.

At different times, kings under which they served were forced to make degrees that everyone should serve the God of Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego when they saw the awesome power of God through the lives of these faithful servants of God.

These are all testimonies to the fact that God wants his people to play leadership role whether among his covenant people or wherever they find themselves among other nations. I believe that God's plan for His people today has not changed.

The New Testament:

The situation in the new testament is slightly different from what we have under the old testament of the bible. Before the birth of Jesus Christ, the people of God were under the dominion and rulership of the Roman government. The Jews people were anxiously waiting for the promised Messiah as prophesied by different old testament Prophets. They thought that the coming Messiah will be a political leader that will come to liberate them from every form of political oppression.

When Jesus Christ started his earthly ministry, their expectations were disappointed. Though Jesus started His ministry by announcing the coming of the kingdom of God, but to the amazement of the Jews people, he said this kingdom was more spiritual than political, His Kingdom was more heavenly than of this world. Again, his method of establishing His Kingdom on earth was at variance with the expectations of the Jews people who were expecting a political messiah that will lead them in a violent resistance and insurrection against the Roman government that has dominated and oppressed them for centuries. To the contrary Jesus Christ came preaching love, peace, forgiveness, submission to the same authority that they were seeking to be free from. Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies, He taught them to bless those who hate them, He

taught them to do good and pray for those who despitely use and persecute them etc.

“You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” Matthew 5:43-45

Instead of leading an insurrection against an oppressive and unjust Roman government as most of the people of His day expected, Jesus decided to lay down his life as a sacrifice through the brutal death of the cross like a common criminal. This was His way of redeeming and saving not just His people (the Jews) from the bondage of the Roman government; but as a means of redeeming and saving the whole world from sins and from the bondage of satanic captivity. During his earthly ministry, Jesus Christ resisted and even ran away from the temptation and attempt by His Jews people to make Him their king. This is because this was not his mission.

After His resurrection from death, the disciples of Jesus Christ asked Him as very crucial question about His political agenda and the answer He gave them was probably far from what they were expecting as captured in the following scriptures:

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Because Jesus Christ did not focus His attention on the establishment of an earthly political Kingdom during his earthly ministry many believers and followers of Jesus Christ today erroneously or ignorantly believe that it means Christians should not be involved or interested in active politics or participate in the political process of their nations. Many Christians will argue that after all, neither Jesus Christ nor any of his early apostles was involved in the politics of their days. I believe nothing can be farther from the truth. I believe Jesus Christ came to redeem the entire God's creation from the dominion of Satan who had hijacked it from Adam in the garden of Eden. Jesus did not come as a political Messiah, because he came to save all that was lost to Satan. Focusing on the political freedom of just the Jews nation would have limited the scope of his redemptive mission. To say that because Jesus did not participate in the political process of his day, therefore Christians should not be involved in politics is the same as saying, because Jesus Christ did not participate in the economic activities of his days, therefore Christians should not do any form of business.

If we look at the followers of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry, we will see that he had followership and influence in every facet of the society of their day. Among the followers of Jesus, we have people in the business world of their day, we have people in political leadership of their nation. For example, we have people like Nicodemus one of the leaders of the Jews as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We have Joseph of Arimathea, a top government officer who was strategically positioned in government to ask for the body of Jesus Christ from Pilate after His crucifixion. He took the body of Jesus and buried him in his private tomb to fulfill prophecy.

In the book of Acts of the Apostles, we saw people in strategic political positions and association responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ and became part of His disciples. The bible mentioned a man named Manaen

who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch as one of the leaders of the church at Antioch. Acts 13:1. We saw Cornelius, a Roman centurion embracing the gospel of Jesus, baptized in the Holy Ghost and speaking in tongues with his entire household. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus a young brilliant lawyer, a leader of the Jews a pharisees and a radical persecutor of the church was one of the most strategic things that happened to the church of Jesus Christ in the first century. Saul, who later became Paul, used his professional expertise as a lawyer and his radical zeal for Judaism to advance the spread of the gospel in the known world of his days. Worthy of mention is the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch through his dramatic encounter with Philip the Evangelist on the road between Jerusalem to Gaza. The bible described him as a man of **“great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury....” Acts 8:27**. The Ethiopian Eunuch was like the Central Bank Governor of a nation. His conversion to the Christian faith no doubt had tremendous impact on the spread of Christianity to Africa, this is probably why Ethiopia has the longest history of Christianity in Africa. All this are testimonies to the fact that the Christian Faith and political leadership are not in any way contradictory to one another. But rather, a good Christian in position of political leadership should bring his godly values and virtues to bare on governance and leadership. Also, a Christian in strategic leadership position is expected to use his God given opportunity to advance the agenda of the Kingdom of God in his domain of influence.

Understanding the Church and Political Leadership

The word church is from the Greek word Ekklesia; which means the called-out people, or an assembly of people. When Jesus said to Peter, **“and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”** He was not talking of an exclusive religious cult

neither was He talking about a physical structure. Rather He was talking of raising a special breed of people that will have the divine nature, imbibe the spiritual values and culture of God's Kingdom on earth. This special breed of people will then go into every nation, every tribe, and every tongue to infuse this Kingdom values and culture to change every facet of the human society in the world. Therefore, Jesus called His disciples the light of the world and the salt of the earth. In other word, Christians are supposed to go into every segment of the society where the forces of darkness have been dominating and shine as light and also act as catalyst like salt to bring change. This off course includes the political terrain of every nation where Christians are found. As the salt of the earth, Christians are expected to infiltrate every segment of the society as change agent by permeating every culture with the values of the kingdom of God. I believe there is no better way to change the socio-economic life of a nation than to get into the position of political leadership and authority where policies and laws that govern and regulate the lives of the people are formulated.

Peter wrote about believers in his first epistle **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” 1 peter2:9**

The above scripture shows that as people of God we are to show forth His praise everywhere on earth. This include in the field of politics, public service and governance.

Paul also admonished believers to become “blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as light in the world “Phil 2:15

Politics is one area of the society where we find the highest level of crookedness and perverseness, therefore Christians should be prepared to

go into politics to show forth their light in the midst of darkness.

Who is a Christian?

Whenever we are discussing the issue of the need for Christians to be actively involved in politics and the government of their nations, the salient question that must be answered is Who is a true Christian? What should be the qualities of Christians that can effectively get involved in politics without compromising their values?

Sometimes we are quick to generalize and mistake everybody that claim to be a Christian, those who bear Christian names or those who go to church as true Christian. When such people who claim to be Christians but have not developed the values and character of a true Christian go into politics or occupy position of leadership or public office they easily fall under the pressure of the corrupt system of their nation.

When we talk about Christians involvement in political leadership we are quick to site the example of how Joseph rose to the position of authority in Egypt, how Daniel rose to political leadership and influence in Babylon and so on, without emphasizing the godly values and principles that these people developed ever before they got to such position of authority and influence.

One of the most disturbing realities of the Nigerian situation today is the unreconcilable high level of corruption in our society and the increasing number of churches and Christian population in Nigeria. Therefore, before we can talk of Christians involvement in politics, we must address the need for Christians to imbibe biblical values and principle of godliness and righteousness as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

Our Lord Jesus Christ clearly stated that **“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the**

will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:21-23 “But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?” Luke 6:46.

From the above scriptures, we can say that not everyone that professes to be Christian is a true Christian according to Jesus' standard, but those who submit to His lordship and adhere to His teachings as the guiding principles and values of their lives. Until we have Christians who can pass the test of godliness, righteousness and integrity in politics and political leadership the change we desire to see in our society may remain an illusion. The problem about Christians participation in politics and political leadership in Nigeria may therefore not just be about lack of enough Christians in politics (quantity) but more about lack of Christians with the right character quality in politics and political leadership.

We need to ask the realistic question of how well has the Christians that have gone into politics in Nigeria fared? There is a need to interrogate why some Christians fail and perform so woefully when they are given opportunity to occupy position of leadership in government. If we don't find realistic answers to these questions, we may keep having a situation where Christians go into politics only to become casualties of the wicked system.

However, every professing Christian should be well informed, educated and mobilized to be actively involved in the political processes of their nation. These processes include registering as a voter, going out to vote for the candidate of their choice on every election day, joining political parties and association. This is so important because politics first and foremost is a game of number.

Biblical Qualities of Political Leaders

When we talk about Christianity and political leadership of nations, there is a need to identify what are the qualities of a good leader from a biblical perspective.

when the Israelites were in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses there was a need to appoint people into position of leadership at different levels. Jethro, a heathen priest and the father in-law of Moses advised Moses to appoint some people that will assist him in leading the children of Israel during their joining in the wilderness. In his recommendations, Jethro highlighted what should be the qualities of such men to be considered for leadership position as follows: **“Moreover, you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” Ex 18:21**

From the above scripture, the qualities of good leaders can be identified as follows:

1. Ability - Able Men
2. Fear of God – Men that fear God
3. Truthfulness- Men of Truth
4. Contentment- Men that hate covetousness

Later in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses seeing that he could not bear the problems and the burden of leadership alone instructed the people to choose many of godly qualities into position of leadership. Moses said; **“And I spoke to you at that time, saying: 'I alone am not able to bear you. The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are and bless you as He has promised you! How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints? Choose wise, understanding, and**

knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you” Deuteronomy 1:9-14

Also, God gave the specification of the requirements for a person to be set over the people of God as a King (Political Leader) in Israel as follows:

When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. Also, it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” Deuteronomy 17:14-20

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples what should be the quality and character of a leader in the gospel in the following words:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matt 20:25-28

From Jesus perspective a good leader must be the servant of the people. This is where we got the concept of a “servant leader” Jesus Christ is the epitome of a true servant leader and should be the role model of every true Christian that desires the position of leadership whether in the church or in the society. We need to begin to teach these leadership principles to in our churches to prepare Christians as godly leaders in the nation.

CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The argument whether Christians should be involved in politics and political leadership in their nations has been an old age debate and has always posed a huge controversial topical debate amongst Christians. It is also obvious that there will not be an end to this debate and that there will never be a consensus amongst Christians on this issue. It is generally believed among some Christians that politics is a dirty game, the truism of this is very obvious when one considers all the scandals and the numerous "gates" that politicians get involved in, no wonder that statement is generally acceptable in every clime of politics and governance. The dirtiness of politics is such that sometimes politicians can do anything in other to win elections. This sometimes includes delving into terrible evil and diabolic practices. But on the other hand, many people have said, politics is dirty because it has been left for dirty people alone. This is the more reason why many believe that it is time for righteous and clean people among Christians to go into politics in other to clean up the game. As long as politics is left for the wicked and ungodly people, it will remain a dirty game. We cannot leave the politics of our nation to thieves, cultists, murderers, drinkers, drug abusers and violent men and women and expect to have decent gentlemen and women in political leadership position.

The question that many may want to ask is: Is it possible for a Christian to engage in the game of politics without the dust of politics settling on him? In politics, we know that the rule of the game is to outwit your opponent by all possible means. Various strategies are adopted by politicians to achieve this, including to smear their opponent. In some political environment opponents and oppositions are eliminated; sometimes they are tagged enemies of the state and are murdered. Now the question is how will a Christian succeed in such terrains? Of course, someone will argue that, that is the more reason why Christians should go into politics. If Christians abandon the public square out of fear and intimidation, what happens to community values, ethics and moral standards? When Christians wash their hands and turn away, who will speak for the poor and powerless? Throughout history we've seen the effect of Christian influence in the government of nations. For example, Christians played major roles in the abolition of slavery; advocating for universal literacy; for improved education; and for laws that protect children, factory workers, and women. That sort of impact does not come from silence or withdrawal, it can only be through active agitation and participation in the process of policy formulation by Christians.

There are many ways by which Christians can be effectively mobilized for political participation in their nations. Some of these ways are highlighted below:

- 1. Political Education:** The greatest hinderance militating against Christians participation in politics and the political leadership of their nations is lack of political education. The level of ignorance amongst Christians when it come to the issues of politics and government of their nation is appalling. Lack of accurate knowledge is one of the major reasons for captivity. The bible says;

“Therefore, my people have gone into captivity, because they have no

knowledge; their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst” Isaiah 5:13.

The starting point of political participation among Christians is to begin to educate them on the need for Christians to be involved in politics at every level. We must begin to educate people on the need to register as an eligible voter, the need to collect their permanent voters card (PVC) and keep it safe; the need to go out and vote for the candidate of their choice during elections. Christians must be educated on why they need to guide their votes jealously during election and why they should not sell their vote for little tokens that some desperate politicians may be offering them. Christians should also be educated on the need to hold the people they have elected to different political offices accountable and the power to reject any politician that has not performed up to expectation through their vote during the next election.

2. Mobilization for political participation: Considering the huge population of Christians in Nigeria, if well mobilized for political participation it could become an unstoppable force of positive change in the nation. This is becoming obvious in the Nigeria politics. Many politicians including non-Christians have realized this fact. Therefore, they always seek for the endorsement of key Christian leaders with huge followership during electioneering campaign. It is time for Christians leaders to put aside their denominational difference and mobilize the Christian population toward a common goal of ensuring that the right people are elect into position of leadership during elections. The Christian population can also be mobilized to demand for good governance, transparency and accountability from those in authority. Christians can also be organized into faith based Civil Society Organization (CSO) and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that can be involved in election

monitoring to ensure free, fair and credible elections. Examples of such organization already in existence in Nigeria include: The Roman Catholic Justice, Development, & Peace Commission (JDPC), Catalyst for Global Peace and Justice Initiative (CPJ Global), Priest Peace and Justice (PPJ) Initiative just to mention a few.

3. Political Party Membership: Freedom of association is a fundamental right of every citizen. Christians should be encouraged to exercise their inalienable right to belong to any political party of their choice. Party membership is not a sin and a Christian will not be committing sin if he/she joins a political party of his/her choice so long as this choice will not devour his Christian values. Political Parties under normal circumstances are formed based on ideologies, some are formed based on Marxist ideology, some based on Capitalist ideology, some based on Christian ideology etc. Anyone who wants to become a member of any political party must firstly study the Party's ideology, doctrine and manifesto and ensure that they are in conformity with his/her personal beliefs and ideologies before joining such political party. Therefore, a Christian who wants to become a member of a political party must ensure that the party's ideologies are not contradictory to his faith and beliefs.

The issue becomes more challenging in a political clime like Nigeria where parties are not built on ideologies but on fluid personal relationship, tribes and some other sub socio-cultural affiliations. Some people who join political parties join based on personal interests, others consider the strength of the political platforms and the possibilities of their chances of success in winning elections based on such platforms. To such people it is about winning elections and not ideologies and they are open to any political party that can offer such opportunities of winning at all cost, by hook or crook. This is virtually true in African countries. Ability to win

elections in Nigeria is the real reason for joining any political party, sometimes in fact almost always elections are won based on brute force, criminality, and diabolism. In the course of our research we encountered a political "foot soldier" who believe that it is almost impossible for a genuine Christian to go into politics of election in Nigeria without been messed up spiritually. At least not now. Unfortunately, the laws of Nigeria do not permit political parties to be formed based on religious ideologies. On the contrary, we believe that good Christians can join political party in Nigeria to make a difference. After all the bible says we are to shine as light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

4. Appointment into Public Offices: Christians that are actively involved in the political process especially by joining political party can be appointed to serve in different public offices. Such appointment can include Ministerial position, special adviser or assistant to presidents or to governors, commissioner, head of different government parastatals and agencies etc. We have a lot of biblical personalities who served out God's purpose while serving heathen leaders. The likes of Joseph in Egypt, Daniel, in Babylon readily come to mind. One underlying factor in the lives of these men was the fact that they were anointed by God and was giving the Spirit for such service. The bible records concerning Joseph; **"And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Gen 41:38-41**

Also concerning Daniel, the bible says; **"The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your**

countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father — your father the king — made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel" Daniel 5:10-12

5. Strategic Interventions: One area of politics and political leadership in nations which virtually every Christian agree upon that Christians should get involved with is speaking truth to the leadership of nations. The reason for this may be because the Bible is replete with instances where Prophets spoke fearless to rebuke or correct leaders with the knowledge that it may lead to loss of their life and their freedom. In the Old Testament, Prophets spoke to leaders and nations. Elijah spoke severally to Ahab and Jezebel at the risk of losing his life. Jeremiah spoke to several Kings who reigned in his time. While in the New Testament, John the Baptist lost his life because he spoke against king Herod's moral ills. It would appear then that the anointing of a Prophet by the Holy Spirit grants aunction for bold confrontation with wicked and satanic Kings.

"The Church must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless, so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the center of all government programs." (Post Synodal Document, no 70). 1994 African Synod, African Church, Pope John Paul 11

Indeed in modern society where it is becoming more and more difficult for the leaders to lead by good moral and righteous standard, the church should become the conscience of the nation, the voice for the oppressed

and the voice of truth to people in authority.

Believers should not just become voices for the oppress or voices of truth speaking to the leadership of nations but also voices for themselves against oppressive enactments that are against the believers and the Church.

In the last few days, an ecumenical group of Christian leaders from across the country issued a statement titled; “Reclaiming Jesus: A confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis” It is a response to the current state of the country and an effort to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness. The group stated that; “When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics.... It is often the duty of Christian leaders, especially elders, to speak the truth in love to our churches and to name and warn against temptations, racial and cultural captivities, also doctrines, and political idolatries – and even our complicity in them.” In October 2016, Andy Crouch, the executive director of Christianity Today Magazine did a write up on “Speak Truth to Trump” during the U.S. elections campaign in 2016.

We also believe that it is not unbiblical for Christians at all necessary times to engage in non-violent protests against the government policies, actions or inactions when dialogue have failed. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa led different protests against the evil and oppressive apartheid regime in South Africa. Late Reverend Martin Luther King (Jnr) the American Civil Right Activist fought against the racial policies of the government of the United State of America and even paid the supreme sacrifice with his life. Pastor Tunde Bakare of Latter Rain Assembly mobilized the civil society organizations through the Save Nigeria Group, a movement that rose against the power vacuum saga when the late President Umoru Musa Yar'adua was sick in 2010. The Save Nigeria group organized protest marches in major cities in Nigeria and across the nations of the world to mount pressure on the government to respect the Nigeria

constitution by installing Goodluck Jonathan the then Vice President as the Acting President of Nigeria. The pressure mounted by the group forced the National Assembly to adopt the doctrine of necessity that help resolve the political crisis.

In the words of Joe Biden “No fundamental social change occurs merely because government acts. It's because civil society, as the conscience of the nation, begins to rise up and demand – demand – demand change”

This is a job for no better than the Christians in the society. In acting as conscience of the nation Christians are called to pray for all leaders.

1Timothy 2:1-4; and for the peace and prosperity of the land in which they dwell. **Jeremiah 29:7.**

The late Archbishop Adetiloye of Anglican Church is one of the men that played the role of conscience of the nation by speaking fearlessly to power in Nigeria. In the dark days of Sanni Abacha dictatorship, Adetiloye was never silent. He kept speaking out loudly and boldly against the oppressive and anti-democratic government of Abacha. He once said that “as long as injustice and hunger stalk the land, his struggle, alongside others, continue” The Catholic Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie is another voice that is always speaking to power in Nigeria. He is never afraid to call those in authority to order whenever are found wanting or failing in their responsibilities.

The current Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, Matthew Kukah is another Christian clergy that has been playing an active role in shaping the political leadership of Nigeria through his different interventions over the years. He was active as a member of the Oputa Panel set up by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration to bring reconciliation and to redress the injustices done under past military regimes in Nigeria. The strategic role played by the Matthew Kukah Center

in ensuring peaceful conduct of the 2015 election cannot be overlooked. Recently, the Roman Catholic community leaders organized a peaceful protest against the government of Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic Congo. This is one of the ways the church can actively participate in the political process and influence the leadership of their nations.

EARLY CHRISTIANS AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Church history indicates that the early Christian of the age of the church fathers did not participate in politics and governance. They rejected appointments to political post and positions. “Early Christianity was little understood and was regarded with little favor by those who ruled the pagan world. . . . Christians refused to share certain duties of Roman citizens. . . . They would not hold political office.” (On the Road to Civilization A World History, A. K. Heckel and J. G. Sigman, 1937, pp. 237-8)

“They (the early Christians) refused to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defence of the empire. . . it was impossible that the Christians, without renouncing a more sacred duty, could assume the character of soldiers, of magistrates, or of princes.” History of Christianity (New York, 1891), Edward Gibbon, pp. 162, 163.

Not just did the earlier Christians refused to participate in politics they even refused to serve the state in some duties, such as becoming soldiers. In his book, E.W. Barnes' careful review of all the information available goes to show that, until the time of Marcus Aurelius [Roman emperor from 161 to 180 C.E.], no Christian became a soldier; and no soldier, after becoming a Christian, remained in military service .The Rise of Christianity (London, 1947), E. W. Barnes, p. 333.

One interesting thing to note in the life of the early Christians is the fact that they believed that after baptism there is no more remission of sin. Most of

the early Christians especially those in the public offices therefore delayed their baptism until the last days of their lives. This was the case of Emperor Constantine. "Constantine waited until death drew near to be baptised as a Christian. His decision was not unusual at a time when many Christians believed one could not be forgiven after baptism. Since the sins of worldly men, especially those with public duties, were considered incompatible with Christian virtues, some church leaders delayed baptising such men u n t i l b e f o r e t h e i r d e a t h .
www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/rulers/constantine.html

This is the position of the early Christians when it comes to Politics and governmental leadership. What may appear to be an exception was the life of Pope Gregory who lived in the 6th century. At "the age of 30, he was the chief administrative official of the city, responsible for finances, police, provisioning, and public works—an experience that helped him hone his administrative skills and, together with his personal wealth, gave him the opportunity to create six monasteries. Yet Gregory remained dissatisfied, and upon his father's death in 574, he converted his house into a monastery and retired to a life of contemplation and prayer. During these years, the happiest in Gregory's life, he began a detailed study of the Scriptures. Here he also ruined his health with fasting, a sacrifice that would precipitate his early death". Gregory later became a Pope, but what is observable in his life was that he probably realized how difficult it is to confess your faith and the public service. He had to quit the public service for the life in monastery. For the early Christians the issue of public office was a resounding 'NO'. But as time progresses though the debate continues, more and more people are beginning to see the need for Christians to get involved and become active in politics and the political leadership of their nations.

The Need for a Christian Political Agenda

A political agenda is a clearly defined objective or purpose for which a person or a group of people are seeking for political power or political leadership position. One of the reasons why most Christians fail in their quest for political power especially in Nigeria is because the Christian body in Nigeria has no uniform agenda which they want to pursue when they get to position of political leadership. Most Christians that have succeeded in getting to position of political leadership end up using such position mostly for personal gain. If Christians in Nigeria wants to make more impact in the arena of politics and political leadership of the nation; there must be a clearly defined kingdom agenda or interest that can become a rallying point for every Christian that is seeking for political office at every level of government.

Sometimes, people talk about Muslim using their position in government to promote Islamic interest, this is because such Muslims see the ultimate purpose of seeking for political power and position as the promotion and advancement of their religious faith. An average Christian does not see the relationship between politics and the advancement of the kingdom of God in his or her society. If we don't have Christians in strategic position of authority in the nation, how will issues related to Christians interest be protect through appropriate legislation or policy formulation? Most christians are quick to separate their religious life from their business, career and political interest. They believe that when it comes to the issues of business, career or politics, we should not bring it religious believe at all. To the contrary, a true Christian supposed to see his entire life and whatever he does as a platform of projecting the godly principles and values of the kingdom of God which he represents, thereby indirectly advancing the course of God's kingdom on earth.

In America, because the Christian community became passive and did not show active interest in politics and the political process of their nation, ungodly policy like the removal of prayer from public schools, abortion and homosexuality were promoted and passed into law. If the Christians were actively involved in the political process of their nation, such ungodly policies and laws would have been stopped and the society will be better for it.

Under the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's government in Nigeria, the bill against same sex marriage was passed by the national assembly and signed into law by the president against opposition and pressure from the international community. I believe the Christian orientation and believe of the president must have contribute to why the bill was easily signed into law against every pressure from the international community.

Under president Olusegun Obasanjo's government between 1999-2007, many state governors especially in northern Nigeria supported and promoted sharia law as one of the cardinal agenda for their government. This became a rallying point for majority of Muslims in those states to support such candidate during election. Recently there was the controversy about the issue of wearing hijab (the Islamic dress code for female) in secondary schools in one of the south western state of Nigeria. There was also the controversial issue of the removal of Christian Religious Studies from the academic syllabus of secondary schools in Nigeria. If Christians are not actively involved in the politics and policy formulation of their nation, such anti-Christian policies could easily be formulated and passed into law any opposition.

I believe that there is a serious need for Christians to be well informed, educated and mobilized to get involved in the politics and political processes of their nations at every level not just for their personal interest, but for the purpose of providing good governance and also to promote

kingdom values and Christian ethics at all level. By so doing, Christians will be able to promote their religious interest and seek for legitimate opportunity to advance their faith and promote kingdom agenda in their society.

Understanding the Structure of Political Power

When we talk about Christianity and political leadership in Nigeria, most Christians focus only on participation in politics and just to win election into elective political offices like president, governor, members of parliaments, local government chairman and councilor. Christians have the tendencies to neglect the need to understand the structure that controls political power in a nation and determines who get to these different political offices on the long run. Without understanding this structure of political power Christians have no deliberate plans to position themselves in strategic offices that control who get elected to political offices during elections. Those who occupy this structure of power therefore finds it very easy to use them to manipulate the electoral process to the disadvantage of real Christians who may want to play according to the rule in their quest to get to political leadership position through free, fair and credible elections. This is why I believe that for Christians to play effective role in the political leadership of their nations we need to look beyond politics of elections into offices and pay attention to the politics of who control the structure of political power in their nations. For the benefit of this discourse, I will like to identify these strategic structure of political power in what I call, the five (5) gates of power in every nation. Those who occupy these gates of power eventual influence who get to position of political leadership in any nation.

The five (5) Gates of power are as follows:

1. Security forces
2. Finance

3. Bureaucracy
4. International Diplomacy.
5. Media.

1. Security Forces: - The security forces which consist of the Military, the police, the Department of State Security service and other para-military agencies constitute a strategic gate of power in any nation. Those who occupy and control the security agencies have a very strong influence in determining the political destiny of a nation. Christians must develop interest in joining these security agencies. Christians that are already in strategic position in any of these security agencies must use their position in a godly way that will advance God's purpose for the nation. It is a common knowledge that the security agencies play a very pivotal role during elections in Nigeria, and most of the times they are often used to promote the interest of one candidate against the other. If we have Christians with godly values in strategic position in such organization, they may be able to stand against such compromises and ensure neutrality during election to ensure free, fair and credible elections that will reflect the wish of the people.

2. Finance: - The financial sector of a nation is another strategic gate of power that influences the political destiny of a nation. We all know the role that money plays in politics and elections in Nigeria. For Christians to be successful in politics we must have people that have the financial resources and willing to deploy their resources to support kingdom minded Christians that may want to go into politics.

The truth is, majority of credible Christians that have godly principles and leadership qualities that we need in position of leadership in Nigeria lack the financial capacity to compete with the money bags in the political arena. When the ungodly people that have the money sponsor such

Christians for election and they get to position of leadership at any level, they come under the corrupt influence and control of these money bags who become political godfathers. It is therefore evidence that those who control the financial gate will continue to use the resource to hijack the political leadership of the nation.

3. Bureaucracy: - The bureaucracy consists of different agencies and departments of government in a nation. This include people in the civil service and strategic government agencies like the electoral commission. This is a strategic gate of power that influences the formulation and execution of governmental policies and programs that affect the everyday life of citizens of any nation. Therefore, Christians should be encouraged to aspire to occupy strategic position in such area of public service. Those who are already serving in such government agencies should be educated to use their God given positions and offices to promote godly values. They must see themselves as strategic kingdom agents to protect God's people from ungodly policies. Like Mordecai and Esther in Babylon, they must know that they are in the kingdom for strategic kingdom purpose. Nehemiah while serving king Cyrus did not forget the desolate state of Jerusalem as he stood before the king to perform his duty.

4. International Diplomacy: - International diplomacy as a gate of power consist of those who represent the nation in the global community. The attitude of the people that occupy this sector of our national life goes a long way to determine how other nations will see us. For example, before the 2015 general Election in Nigeria, the government of Goodluck Jonathan lost a lot of goodwill from America and Britain partly because of how the image of his government was projected before the international community. A lot of Nigerians that were sympathetic to the course of the Boko Haram terrorist group on religious ground rose up to defend the

group in America when the debate of whether to declare them as a terrorist organization was going on. If the people that occupy our foreign missions in some strategic nations are non-Christians, they stand the chances of using such position to advance their religious interest and agenda against the Christians interest.

5. The Media: - The media is another strategic gate of power in any nation. Those who control the media in a nation has the power of information that shape the mindset of the people for or against a government or a political aspirant. Media propaganda is a major weapon in politics. Therefore, Christians should be encouraged to seek career opportunities in media. Those who are already in this sector of our society should seek the opportunity to use their position to advance godly values, principles and kingdom agenda.

Christians in every sector of our society must begin to see themselves as God's change agents that are planted in any position, they find themselves whether in the public or private sector. They are to promote and advance the kingdom agenda in their nations. Most Christians see politics, business or their professional career just as a means of pursuing and achieving their personal interest rather than as an opportunity to advance a kingdom agenda. As long as that attitude remains, it does not matter how many Christians go into politics or get to position of political leadership, their impact either in changing the nation positively or advancing God's Kingdom agenda will remain very insignificant.

Preparing Christians for Political Involvement and Leadership.

Politics can be likened to a sport where there is serious contest between opposing camp. In some cases, it can be likened to a battlefield where people fight for supremacy to gain control of power. Whichever way we may look at it, it is dangerous to go into politics without adequate

preparation. One of the reasons why most Christians sheer away from politics is because they are ill prepared to face the fierce battle in the political arena. Many Christians have become cheap casualties in politics not because they are not good Christians but because they are not prepared or well trained to survive the rough battles in the political terrain.

Many hitherto good and fervent Christians have failed woefully when they have the opportunity to serve in different political offices because they are not well trained or equip to function in such offices. Therefore, it imperative for Christians who may want to play active politics or serve in political offices at all levels to be properly trained and equip before they venture into such engagement. Churches should organize Christian leadership training programs or institutions where believers will be taught biblical leadership principles. Such program or institutions should not just focus on training leaders that will serve in the church but also equip Christians for effective public service and political leadership position in the nation.

Christians that have been successful in politics and public service can embark on mentoring programs for young and upcoming Christians that may want to aspire for such position in the future. People like late Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello were able to raise a generation of followers that imbibe their values, their principles and upheld their legacy years after they were dead. For example, people that were influenced by Chief Obafemi Awolowo are called Awoists. Those who were influenced by Nnamdi Azikiwe are called Zikists, while those who were influenced by the political philosophy of Ahmadu Bello form a socio-political organization in the northern Nigeria called Gamji. These different groups made up of people who believe in the principles of these leaders held on to their political philosophy and ideologies long after the leaders

were gone. Successful Christians politicians and public office holders can build movement of people around godly values, principles of integrity, accountability and transparency in government. Through this, they will be able to mentor and disciple young Christians along their godly political ideology for leadership.

There is a story of how Pastor Tony Rapu the founding Overseer of This Present House (a Church in Lagos Nigeria) trained different groups of Christians as Church workers when he was serving under the Redeemed Christian Church of God popularly known as the Apapa Family. By the leading of the Holy Spirit, he adopted different names for each group of workers that he trained. He raised a group and prophetically name them 'the Government' because he believed that people in that group will one day play major roles in the government of this nation – Nigeria. After more than twenty (20) years, some members of that same group of Church workers he called 'the Government' have risen to strategic position of leadership in government and public office in Nigeria.

From that group, we have Professor Yemi Osinbajo (SAN), who served as the Attorney General of Lagos State for many years and later became the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2015. We also have Dr Oby Ezekwesili who served as a Federal Minister after serving as Director General of Due Process Office under the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo, just to mention a few. These two outstanding examples from the group will always testify that the training they received under Pastor Tony Rapu is part of what God used to shape their value orientation of integrity and to prepare them for their leadership position in the nation. I believe if we have more men like pastor Tony Rapu in the body of Christ in Nigeria, the church will be able to raise, train and release more Christian leaders that will positively impact on the political leadership of our nation.

Pitfalls of Christians Involvement in Political Leadership of Nations.

When we talk about Christians involvement in the political process or leadership of their nation, people have the tendency to go to either of two extremes.

The first extreme is that there are Christians that adopt a nonchalant attitude toward involvement in politics and political processes of their nation. They are completely ignorant and uninformed about the politics of their nation. Many believe that we as christians are to set our mind completely on heavenly things and therefore should not show any interest in politics which they consider as a worldly affair. After all, Jesus said, “we are not of this world” just as the scripture says: **“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” John 15:19.**

“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world....They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” 17:14 & 16

Jesus Christ also said concerning His kingdom: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” John 18:36”

Against the above scriptural background, it is imperative for every Christian to know that as long as we live and operate in the world, we must as a matter of necessity be interested and be actively involved in the politics of our nation. Christians must not only be interested in how they are governed; they must also aspire to be elected to political leadership position at every level in their nations. This is one of the ways the kingdom of God can come, and the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven just as Jesus Christ taught us to pray. When a genuine Christian is in position of leadership, he or she has the opportunity to establish God's kingdom and do God's will within his sphere of influence.

For example; for many years, there was no Christian worship center (a chapel) in the Nigerian presidential villa in Abuja because all the people that occupied the office of the president were Muslim, so they could only build a Mosque as their place of worship. But when Olusegun Obasanjo became president in 1999, he built a Christian worship center in Aso-Rock Presidential villa. He also used his position of influence to mobilize Christian community to complete the National Christian Center in Abuja which was abandoned for many years before then.

On the other extreme, there are Christians that are so engrossed in politics and so obsessed with their ambition for political power and office that they cannot separate the Church, which is a sacred, spiritual institution from worldly political organization. The Church must not be turn to a platform for promoting partisan politics. We must always bear in mind that the church consists of people of diverse political inclinations and affiliations. Therefore, the sacred pulpit and altar in the Church must not be turn to a platform of political campaign in support of any political party or candidate during elections. The Church as an institution must maintain a high degree of neutrality while encouraging individual Christians to exercise their civic responsibility of voting according to their conscience. It is also important for the Church to guide against the pitfall of ordained Church leaders going into partisan politics. I believe that it is more expedient for any ordained minister (such as apostles, prophets and pastors) that occupy leadership position over a Church that may want to go into active partisan politics, especially when it involves contesting for political office, to step down from such a position of leadership. This is to avoid conflict of interest and the tendency to use their sacred position of spiritual responsibility for personal political advantage.

The Church must also avoid the pitfall of focusing so much on the need to mobilize Christians for active politics and participation in political processes of their nation while neglecting or trivializing the importance of the primary spiritual assignment of the church which is the ministry of prayer and the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of the souls of men. Sometimes Christians can go to the extreme of thinking that all that is needed to change a nation is socio-political engagement of citizens while neglecting the strategic place of prayers in shaping the destiny of nations. Recently in the bid to mobilize Christians to obtain their voters card in preparation for the next general election Nigeria, some Christians started circulating statement I considered to be spiritually misguided on the social media. Such statement like “INEC will not count prayers, they will only count votes on the election day” In as much as that statement is a fact, but the truth remains that for God to change a nation, He does not count vote, He counts effective, spirit led, fervent prayers of the saints. Since God rules in the affairs of men, we must not play down on the strategic place of prayers in effecting positive change in our nation.

The word of God is eternally settled and it says: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” 2 Chronicles 7:14.

We must not forget the word of God that says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” Psalm 127:1

CONCLUSION:

Considering the scriptural admonition of Paul, the apostle as recorded in his epistle to the Roman Christians in the following words:

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no

authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil”
Romans 13:1-4

The above scriptures reveal that God is the one that set up every governing authority over human society. God also directly or indirectly appoints those he allows to get to position of leadership. It is therefore not reasonable to believe that God will rather prefer that ungodly men and women that have no relationship with God to occupy position of political leadership in a nation instead of His own sons and daughters. The bible even address those in authority as “God's ministers” Therefore we believe that it is part of the eternal plan and purpose of God for his children to rise up and seek to occupy leadership positions in every country they may find themselves. Through this, Christians can become ministers of righteousness not only in the church but in every facet of the society in their nations.

The days when Christians sheer away from politics and participation in the political processes and leadership of their nations in long gone. We cannot continue to leave the political leadership of our nations in the hand of wicked and ungodly people that only seek power for their personal gain and not for the common good. As Christians, our responsibility towards our nation start with praying for those in authority as the scriptures admonishes us:

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” 1 Timothy 2:1-4

But Christians must also be ready to present themselves as part of the answer to such prayer by getting actively involved in the politics and political leadership of their nations. Praying for peace, justice, development and good governance in our nation without preparing and presenting ourselves to be used by God as answers to such prayers will be hypocritical and unrealistic to say the least.

Christians today must follow the example of Nehemiah in the bible. When Nehemiah heard the bad news that the wall of Jerusalem has broken down, burnt with fire and that the people are in great distress and reproach. **Nehemiah 1:1-3.** Nehemiah began to pray to God and intercede for Jerusalem his city. He carried the burden of the deplorable condition of his city and his people before the king. When the king asked what was his request? Nehemiah did not hesitate to ask the king to send him to go and rebuild Jerusalem the city of his father as recorded in the following scriptures:

“Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So, I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it. Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So, it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.” Nehemiah 2:4-6

We need a Nehemiah company of Christians in every nation today that will not only be ready to pray for their nations but that will also be ready to go and get practically involved in the urgent task of nation building. Until such Christians rise up to take responsibility through their practical involvement in the political process and leadership of our nation; the peace, progress and prosperity we all desire to see in our nation may remain an unrealistic illusion.

About
Priests Peace &
Justice Initiative
(PPJ)

The Priests Peace Justice Initiative (PPJ) is a faith based organisation and social arm of the Palace of Priests Assembly. Palace of Priests Assembly is a duly registered and incorporated Church of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Priests Peace Justice Initiative is set up to anchor the social dimension of the Church and to contribute to the building of a peaceful and orderly society.

It is hinged on the dignity of the human person as created by God and the need to create an enabling environment for evangelism and holistic prosperity. At Palace of Priests Assembly, we believe that the Church should play a significant role in ensuring democratic governance, peace and stability of nations.

We see it as a duty to bring Biblical perspectives to the challenges of democracy, development, insecurity, injustice, service delivery and humanitarian services.

Vision

Our vision is a world of prosperity and social justice.

Mission

Our mission is to act as catalysts to empower citizens to reign as Kings and Priests and work for peace and social justice.

Values

The Priests Peace and Justice Initiative will be guided by the following values:

1. Leadership: requiring us to build leaders because He made us in his own image and called us to lead. We build leaders that will impact this generation and the next generation.
2. Empowerment: requiring us to equip the saints in all aspects of life to live as Kings and Priests that bring honour to God and work for peace and social justice.

3. Royalty: requiring us to live as Kings and Priests in accordance with God's design as a chosen and peculiar people working for peace and social justice.
4. Integrity: requiring us to demonstrate faith and action as Children of the Most High. Our behavior will match our belief. We will trust God and work in integrity (Ps 26:1).
5. Discipleship: requiring us to make disciples in all nations with solid biblical foundations who are then able to disciple and empower others to live in peace and harmony.

Areas of Focus.

PPJ will work in the following five thematic areas:

1. Democracy: Elections, transparency and accountability and stewardship
2. Peace Building: Human Security and Conflict transformation.
3. Social Justice: Poverty, Inequality and Justice.
4. Emergency and Humanitarian services
5. Education and Health

PPJ Management and Governance

Priests Peace and Justice Initiative (PPJ) is managed by an Executive Committee made up of a Co-ordinator and five thematic heads. The secretariat is supported by Programme Officers and Finance Officers. The governance and oversight is provided by the Board of Trustees of Palace of PRIESTS ASSEMBLY (PPA).

Strategic Approach

The approach to work revolves around four key strategies:

- Research
- Capacity Building
- Advocacy and Campaigns
- Services

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