

determine those to stand for elections. In that way, the church will ensure that men and women of integrity are nominated by different political parties to stand election.

### THE CHURCH AS THE BEACON FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

What role can the church play to ensure equitable redistribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within the society as a way of bridging the widening gap between the rich and the poor? Does the church have what it takes to arbitrate in the ongoing class struggles by way of ensuring the restructuring the power relations within the polity, by intentionally empowering the socially and economically disempowered? Has not the mindless plunging of the church into the macabre scramble for material wealth weakened its poise to stand in solidarity with the oppressed masses against the ravenous governments and the ultra-rich who maraud our space?

Poverty is rife in our society, and the church must go beyond providing “mercy drops” to help the poor to keep their soul and body together. The church must find a way of addressing the whole question of crippling poverty among most of its members. We are often wont to encourage the poor to work harder to overcome poverty. The truth of the matter is that poverty is a creature of social injustice. The poor are poor not because he is lazy but because the power structure favour the rich to the detriment of the less privileged. The scripture notes, *“Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless. (Ecclesiastes 4:1, NLT).* This verse hit the nail right on the head, *“The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless!”* This is the beachhead of corruption. You must have heard the popular saying, “power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Only the spiritual can muster the morality to steward power in a way that benefits humanity and glorifies God. The church must show interest in politics to ensure the restructuring of power relations in favour of the poor (Amos 2:6).

As a matter of fact, poverty has a spiritual root and only the church can provide the structures to adequately tackle its menace.

Bryant Myers, in his classic book: *Walking with the Poor*, identified poverty as a spiritual problem that occurred when man fell and which can be solved through the ministry of reconciliation. He proposed an understanding of development in which the physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of life are seamlessly interrelated thus defining poverty as deprivations arising from broken relationships with **God** (Sin), **Self** (Low Esteem), **Others** (Broken Relationships), and **Creation** (Abuse of Resources – Global warming)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MYERS, Bryant, L.: *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. New York: Orbis Books, 2011. 386pp. ISBN 978-1-57075-939-0

In our ministry, we responded to this challenge by establishing the *CRM Enterprises Agency*, which is helping our members establish and run lucrative businesses of their own. It is also helping our members to form cooperatives to help them access government facilities to grow their business. Our future, economically, has never looked brighter.

We also have an annual lecture through one of our platforms – The Change We Need Initiative where topical issues point the Government to the engagements to focus on for the benefit of the populace. There is also, the Rescue Foundation that helps create awareness on health and hygiene-related issues among the populace.

In addition to all the arms we have mentioned above, we also have the *Orphans, Widows, and Destitute Centre (Mercy Home)*, which is adjudged by the government of Imo state as the best managed of such homes in Imo state. There is no doubt that ensuring the emergence of social arms in the church is an imperative necessity that demands attention. The gospel must have a practical impact on the people otherwise it is not the gospel of Christ. Martin Luther was quoted to have said, “If our preaching fails to address the precise point at which the world of our time aches, we are not really preaching the Gospel.”

### CONCLUSION

*For the gospel to have a discernible inroad into the heart of the people and affect their mindset in a positive way, its social edge much be sharp. For the church to represent Christ and His interests on earth fully, she must pay serious attention to her social responsibilities and create structures that will enable her to respond to the growing needs of the society, especially as it concerns the social implications of the Christian ministry. The structure will help members of the church serve God in other spheres of human endeavor beyond the precincts of their denominations.*

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# THE IMPERATIVE OF THE SOCIAL ARM OF THE CHURCH

by  
**Dr. Cosmas Ilechukwu,**  
**PPJ ISSUE BRIEF NO. 1**

*On Tuesday, February 22, 2022*

### INTRODUCTION

The imperative necessity for a social arm in every denomination or local assembly is underscored conspicuously in the gospel narratives. Even a cursory reading of the gospels will confront one with the robust evidence that our Lord consistently prioritized the poor, the needy, and those on the margins of society. Our world surfeits with needy people of different categories, which God demands the church to cater for. The needy would include but not be limited to the following the orphans, the widows, the prisoners, the destitute, the homeless, the sick, etc. Jesus told a parable to emphasize the need for caring for the less privileged among us thus:

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. <sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you,

*inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:31-40).*

God expects Christ's followers to be socially responsible and responsive to the needy around them. It is totally unacceptable to God for the church to ignore the plight of people suffering hunger, thirst, nakedness, homelessness, sickness, or imprisonment. Speaking in defense of the hungry throng that once milled around Him at a late hour in the wilderness, our Lord directed His disciples, *“You give them something to eat” (Luke 9:13)*. The church must follow the example of her Master and step up her game in caring for the needy.

### THE GOSPEL THAT JESUS PREACHED

Jesus preached a full gospel that addressed the whole gamut of human needs – spiritual, moral, mental, and social. **Spiritually**, His gospel addressed human sinfulness and ultimately sacrificed His life to deliver man from sin and its consequences (Mark 10:45). **Morally**, His gospel denounced objectionable behaviors and challenged people to pursue a morally upright lifestyle (Mark 10:18-19). **Mentally**, His gospel bewailed ignorance and labored at imparting the needed knowledge to the people (John 8:32, Proverbs 2:6). **Socially**, His gospel addressed the necessity for social justice and love as the basis for cordial human relationships and harmonious mutual coexistence in human societies (John 15:12-13). The true gospel must therefore address the tripartite dimension of the human person – body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The gospel that focuses exclusively on the spiritual needs of the people to the negligence of other human necessities will certainly fall short of the standard of Christ.

### UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

There are three stages in understanding the social functions of the church, namely:

- The recognition of the divine ideal of human life, individual and social, for itself and all men.
- The initiation of movements and agencies for the realization of that ideal in the human experience.
- The unleashing of the power of the Spirit for social transformation.

To recognize the divine ideal for human life in worship is the primary social function of the churches in their several communities around the world. The divine ideal for human life on earth is to hallow His name and reveal His kingdom by accomplishing His will on earth as it is in heaven. God designed the church to serve as an agent for actualizing His kingdom on earth through discipleship. We discover our true humanity to the extent the character of Christ is formed in us. As individuals tend towards Christ, the human communities tend towards the kingdom of heaven.

The church must act with stark intentionality toward the initiation

of movements and agencies to enable her to promote the vision of helping people experience the kingdom of God on earth. This is where the imperativeness of the social arms of the church becomes most evident. Human needs are many and varied. The church must find a way for systematic engagement with those needs in order to alleviate them. This would invariably involve bringing people with the convergence of interests to work together and to build collaboratives in pursuit of their common interests. As the saying goes, "One man is no man." Humans are designed to work in communities. Hence, Christ's ideal of relationship to God is as a Father and to man as a brother.

For all the above to work and achieve their desired ends, the Holy Spirit must lead the way, and breathe His creative power on human efforts. He designs the roles and assigns them to people to execute with His power.

### DIVERSITY OF SERVICES

*“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).*

The church is composed of different individuals each of which is equipped with the capacity to make valid contributions to the overall progress of the kingdom of God. God's interest on earth is not only limited to what goes on within the church. He cares for all the other sectors of human endeavor such as politics and governance, commerce, and industry, as well as for the social welfare of the people who are called to perform different roles for the progress of the kingdom of God. The job of the church is not limited to helping people develop spiritually, but also to develop all the other spheres of human life on earth. There are those that are called by God to do other things that are necessary for the common good of all people. Paul made this point clearly when he wrote to the Romans, *“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. “So, if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. <sup>7</sup> If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. <sup>8</sup> If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly” (Romans 12:6-8, NLT).*

In addition to the prophecy, Paul listed eight other areas through which people can serve God and humanity, including, serving others, encouraging, giving, leadership, and those who show kindness to others. The church has the responsibility of exposing its members to all these different services and encouraging each of them to find his or her own place in nation-building. All those are legitimate ways of serving God.

### THE CHURCH – POLITICS, AND GOVERNANCE

One key area of service the church has not paid adequate

attention to is the area of politics and governance. This negligence is perhaps, the Church's greatest disservice to God and humanity. The abandonment of politics as an unholy sphere is in every way distasteful. Hardly can anybody argue the truism that next to God's power on earth is political power. The church made a great mistake by labeling politics dirty and shunning it. This gave room for the enemy to move in and take over the government of many nations. When we examine the prevailing attitude of the church in the light of the teaching of the Bible, it becomes obvious that we got it wrong.

For example, the Bible makes it very clear that God wants Christ to have pre-eminence in every sphere of life on earth (Colossians 1:15-18), which certainly includes politics and governance. There is a clear statement of scripture that the government will be upon the shoulder of Christ and that the increase of His government and peace shall have no end (Isaiah 9:6-7). This makes God a principal stakeholder in the politics and governance of nations. The resting of government upon the shoulders of Christ is indicative of the responsibility the believers are expected to shoulder by their participation in the political process. Later in Isaiah we have this revealing scripture: *“For the LORD is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king. He will care for us and save us” (Isaiah 33:22)*. You can see the three arms of government mentioned in the verse defining the scope of God's interest in human government:

- God as Judge (judiciary) – He is interested in the administration of justice and honest interpretation of our law by the courts.
- God as Lawgiver (legislature) – He wants to see that just and righteous laws are made that guarantees fairness to all irrespective of status.
- God as King (the executive) – He desires to see effective stewardship and equitable distribution of our commonwealth in a secure and tranquil atmosphere.

The church must see it as a duty to represent God's interest in these departments of government by becoming proactively involved in raising the spiritual, moral, and emotional qualities of politicians. Whereas it is inadvisable for the core leadership of the church to leave their core duty of preaching, they should intentionally make provision for their members to engage in the political processes. The most convenient way of achieving this is to establish an arm that will take care of this. In my own denomination, we have such an arm which we call *“CRM Political Academy,”* otherwise known as the *Initiative for Development of Future Accountable Leaders*.

The church's involvement in the political process should go beyond encouraging her members to register and vote in elections. She must go further to encourage them to become party members and push to become among the delegates that will