

THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

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Abstract

Considering the ambiguities that pervade the perception and use of the words – ‘Church’ and ‘Politics’, we should plunge this discussion into the perennial conceptual and theological controversies that characterize conceptual discourse in the social sciences and humanities. The study depended on library documentations and other secondary sources of information and the study findings influenced the study conclusions and recommendations.

Keywords; Church, Politics, Perception, Christians and Society.

Introduction

‘Politics’ is a concept some Christians would want to obliterate from their public life. History, however, shows that the more people detest, or try to escape from whatever they perceive as politics, the more they are directly or indirectly, involved in the web of politics. In that light, this topic ‘The Church in Politics’, is thoughtful and germane.

Considering the ambiguities that pervade the perception and use of the words – ‘Church’ and ‘Politics’, I will provide some working definitions that would guide in this paper. In doing that, we should plunge this discussion into the perennial conceptual and theological controversies that characterize conceptual discourse in the social sciences and humanities. This remark notwithstanding, the working definitions will satisfy the epistemological imports of the two concepts in this paper.

In Christian literature and discussion in Christian fellowships, the word, ‘Church’, bears various connotations. However, its biblical imports appear explicitly in the following passages:

- (i) ‘And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16.18);and
- (ii) ‘if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector’ (Matthew 18.17).

In the two passages, the church is a body of believers founded by Jesus Christ and who, by implication, have accepted him as their Lord and Savior. As far as they live under his Lordship, the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. In that broad sense, Holman (2006) aptly states that ‘the Greek word, *ekklesia*, refers to any assembly (Acts 7.38), a local body of believes (Matthew. 16.18; 1 Cor.15.9)’. Of the diverse definitions of the church, reference to it as the ‘body of Christ’ (Col 1.18 and 24) brings into focus the fact that Christ is the all in all the life of the Church.

With Jesus Christ at the core of the definition of the Church, some of the definitions have necessarily incorporated some historical and doctrinal elements, thereby highlighting the presence of Jesus Christ in the *ekklesia*. In that context, David Gitari (in Nicholas (ed), 1978) states:

... the Body of Christ, or rather the organ of the presence of Christ on earth, is a community of those who have been called by God to be followers of Jesus Christ and who follow ‘with many a stumble and frequent uncertainty, often mistaking their own concerns and convictions for those of their master’,

Similarly, Allan Boesak (1988) asserts that the Church is the people of God, those who confess not only their belief that God exists but also that in his Son Jesus Christ they have found a new life, new meaning, and indeed, have become a new creation. ‘With regard to her identity and the context of her mission and ministry, Boesak states:

They live for a kingdom which is not of this world. And yet, the church is the church in the world, and cannot escape it: it is in this world that the church must witness to God’s Kingdom and it is in this World that the signs of God’s kingdom must be erected.

It is always of interest to biblical students addressing questions on the church in the world, but not of the world; a community of believers which God... ‘Obtained with the blood of His Own

Son (Acts 20.28) by that unfathomable divine act, God set the Church apart in the midst of the rest of the world, thereby giving the faithful the grace to be enlisted among God's chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, in the expectation that they should declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

It is not the intention of Jesus Christ that the Church would disengage from the rest of the world. If that had been the case, it would have been senseless engaging the Church in the mission in the world. It is rather his intention that Church as 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' (Matthew 5:13 & 14) should enable all those who have not availed themselves of the salvation in Jesus Christ to be transformed accordingly.

As the body of Christ on earth engages in mission for the risen Lord, the Church must be alive to its calling, relentlessly contending for the faith once delivered. Unlike the concept of the Church, politics refers to some forms of human activities. As a result, it bears all the colours of human strengths and weaknesses. The manifestations of the deficits of human conduct in those forms of social activities recognized as politics has endangered a widespread pejorative interpretation of the essence of politics. In that context, Isaac D'Israeli is cited (in Crick, 1983) to have stated that 'politics, ill understood, has been defined as 'that art of governing mankind by deceiving them'.

In spite of its pejorative interpretation resulting from the pedigree of many politicians and the dastardly behavior that characterize politicking, politics remain indispensable in society. Thus, it is poignantly stated in the Vision of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion): 'it is common knowledge that many Christians alienate themselves from whatever they regard to as politics because of their perception of it as 'a dirty game'.

The way out of that misperception is to seek an objective understanding of the essence politics. That would enable us to appreciate the fact its detestable features which give it a negative connotation are social pathologies characteristic of society. This implies that anybody who would opt to reject politics because of its prevalent negative connotation would also be ready to reject the society whose political culture drives the sordid forms of politicking. Leslie Lipson (1965) rightly posits that 'understanding is the beginning of freedom'.

Politics is the age-long socially defined system of regulating the interplay of power and interest in society. Thus, those who opine that society can do without politics are inadvertently of the opinion that society can do with anarchy. Furthermore, the fact that social pathologies associated with politics vary from society to society incontrovertibly underscores the fact that each society critically search inwards for the factors that translate politics into a hydra-headed social burden.

As noted earlier, politics is indispensable in society. On that premise, Burnell and Randall (2008) aptly state that 'political scientists understand the politics to refer to activities surrounding the process and institutions of government or the state'. Similarly, the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics defines it as the 'practice of the art or science of directing and administering states or other political units'. It further elucidates that it is concerned: '(1) with civil government, the state, and public affairs; (2) with human conflict and its resolution; or, (3) with the sources and exercise of power.

In the light of the above, we define politics as all those social activities which specifically lead to the recruitment of leaders of government, the competition/bargaining for the determination

of public policies, authoritative allocation of resources, and the monitoring and control of the uses of state power by the leaders of government. These are social activities no reasonable component of society can afford to alienate itself from.

Imperatives for the church's Engagement in Politics

Our concern with the church's engagement in politics must be differentiated from the engagement of individual Christians in politics. We are here concerned with the role of the body of Christ in politics. It is therefore necessary to state that the mode of engagement of the church qua church must reflect her identity and intentions, bearing in mind her divine mandate.

For example, while individual Christians are free to exercise their civic right to belong to political parties of their choice, and to contest for elective offices, the church is not expected to be partisan. A Church that is partisan in politics supervises her polarization and likely disintegration, contrary to the will of the risen Lord. Such a congregation denies herself the promise of Jesus Christ by making the gates of hell to prevail against her.

A critical point in our discussion of the imperatives for the church's engagement in politics is our recognition that the church is the physical presence of Jesus Christ in the world, and is blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide her in all her ways (John 16.13). Consequently, she is expected to demonstrate in her actions, that she is truly light of the world and the salt of the earth; and not the harbinger of darkness and facilitator of brazen turpitude in society.

As the church in the world (although not of the world), the church's mission is to the whole world. Archbishop George Fisher (1971) asserts that 'for the Christian, the world means primarily and ultimately the men and women in it'. In other words, the church must be concerned with their relationship with God and their fellow human beings, always being mindful of the fact that '... God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3.16).

The responsibility placed upon the church as Jesus Christ's physical presence in the world becomes more explicit each time we cogitate on psalm 24.1: 'the earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein'. From creation, God intended that the earth and all persons dwelling in it should serve him and, also, enjoy his unfathomable blessings. The disobedience by Eve and Adam at the Garden of Eden did not only distance the earliest human family from God, but also opened the gate of man's assumption of possessing the wherewithal to survive without God's enablement.

The church is in a rescue mission. The challenge of that mission is becoming more complex as the factors that derailed the world from God's glorious agenda for mankind are becoming complex and infiltrating even into the body of Christ. The demand for a king by the elders of Israel as narrated in 1 Samuel 8 is an exemplary episode.

Samuel's sons-Joel and Abiah, who were appointed judges in Beersheba (1 Samuel 8.2) proved that they were not fit and proper persons to exercise authority over the people. We read in 1 Samuel 8.3: '...his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice'. Their moral depravity sparked off a major tide in God's scheme for the people.

The church of today should always be mindful of the fact that there has never been a time in history when human beings were robots. This fact must be borne in mind as we discuss the role of the church in politics. Following the abysmal abuse of office by the sons of Samuel, the

elders of Israel approached Samuel and said to him: 'Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations' (1 Samuel 8:5). Their request 'displeased Samuel' and he placed their request before God in prayer (v 6, 7). God responded: 'Hearken to the voice of the people in all they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them' (v 7). Although God was displeased with the fact that the Israelites did not hesitate in protesting against the moral depravity and abuse of office by their leader while they themselves had forsaken him by serving other gods (v 8), he directed Samuel: '... hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them' (v 9).

Samuel's address to the elders of Israel is fraught with thought-provoking questions. His sons that emerged through him as judges over the people disappointed God, and made the people they were called to serve casualties of their abysmal misconduct. Samuel's response to the people's request for their replacement did not elicit any promise of a brighter future for them. No doubt, the request by the elders of Israel did not acknowledge God as the source of their salvation. They simply requested for 'a king to govern us like all the nations' (v 5). The choice of a king that would govern them 'like all the nation' did not in any way indicate that they were moving in the direction God had intended for them. This is true of most of the present day polities, including those of them with an overwhelming population of individuals who profess to be Christians.

1 Samuel 8.11-17 present Samuel's vision of the king they would have, as follows:

These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take over your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be performers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your men-servants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves.

In the light of the above, Samuel cautioned as recorded in verse 18:

And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.

Samuel's proclamation of a bleak future under the king that would emerge did not change the resolve of the people for a king. Perhaps, their disconnection from God who delivered them from bondage and traumatic experience under the leadership of Samuel's sons, set their minds toward being like 'other nations'. They wanted a king that would satisfy their expectations. Thus, they discountenanced Samuel's caution and insisted: 'No' but we will have a king over us, that we may also be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles' (verses 19-20).

Samuel's warning on the gamut of the negative consequences of the leadership the elders of Israel were asking for did not deter them from insisting on their request. No doubt, Samuel himself would not be shielded from that evil wind. We may also recall that the problem was triggered by Samuel's sons appointed by him to preside over the affairs of the people.

Has it ever occurred to us to examine the role of the church in the socio-economic and political problems traumatizing society? It is a primary task of the church to seek solutions to the problems of society. However, in doing that, the church must avoid being instrumental to the problems. The leadership episode in 1 Samuel 8 also draws the attention of the church to the need to be proactive in dealing with social problems. The church cannot afford to be alienated from governmental institutions and the processes of recruiting / appointing leaders of government and be morally defensible in criticizing their actions. Archbishop George Fisher (1971) cautions that ‘...There is one ‘world’ of our nation to which we belong’. Archbishop Robert Runcie (1988) also asserts that ‘the church’s task is more than that of providing a sacred canopy overarching the social order’.

Perhaps, a brief reflection on the functions of the three major arms of government will be enable us to understand further why the church should leave no stone unturned in ensuring that she would never close her eyes to political processes and practices in society. It is not surprising that the functions of the three arms of government – Executive, legislature, and Judiciary were derived from the Judeo-Christian \classification of the three broad interventions of God in the governance of society. Isaiah 33.22 explicitly states: ‘for the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

The judiciary is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the rule of law is respected by every person, at all times, and in places; and that justice prevails in all situations. The Legislature is expected to make Laws for good governance, while the Executive is expected to administer the affairs of the people. This includes facilitating sustainable development, responding to people’s needs by providing adequate facilities such as hospitals, pipe-borne water, etc; ensuring that equity prevails in the distribution of them resources of the commonwealth, mobilizing and rewarding people for exceptional performance, maintaining peace and order, establishing and sustaining qualitative education system and facilities, providing a conducive environment for economic activities, etc.

It is, therefore, incontrovertible that people’s welfare depends largely on how those elected or appointed to manage our affairs perform their obligations. Thus, John W. De Gruchy (1986) asserts that ‘...insofar as the church is a vitally interested partner in the life of people, there must inevitably be some kind of relationship between church and state. ‘He argues that ‘this means that the church is involved in politics, whether it wants to be or not’. He, however, states that the important consideration is the nature of that relationship’. We have opined earlier that the relationship should not be partisan.

As far as the church *qua* church is not partisan in politics, her critics cannot successfully fault her engagement in ensuring that the will of God is done in the world created by him. Akwah Nana (nd) has also rightly stated that ‘participation in politics does not take the edge off from spirituality’. He asserts that ‘as a matter of fact, a spirituality that is not linked to politics is open to discussion’. The church cannot abdicate her prophetic ministry in season and out of season. As rightly observed by Akwah Nana (nd), ‘the church needs to continue engaging with government on justice, corruption, leadership, economic debt, housing, education, healthcare, safety and security’.

The prophetic ministry seeks to rescue individuals and those in authority and/or the led from the ways they have gone astray. In terms of politics, inspired proclamations are made on the state of justice, equity, economic wellbeing, security, widowhood, faithfulness to God, etc.

Suffice it to take an example from prophet Jeremiah. In his message to the king of Judah as recorded in Jeremiah 22:3, he states:

Thus says the LORD; Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

Obedience or otherwise to such proclamations are not without effects. Thus, it is recorded in verses 4-9:

For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. But if you will heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD that this house shall become a desolation. For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah: You are as Gilead to me, as the summit of Lebanon, yet surely I will make you a desert, an uninhabited city. I will prepare destroyers against you, each with his weapons; and they shall cut down your choicest cedars, and cast them into fire.

And many nations shall pass by this city, and everyman will say to his neighbor, 'Why has the LORD dealt thus with this great city?' and they will answer, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods and served them.'

It is obvious that any group in society that alienates itself from the process of: (a) electing/appointing its leaders, (b) public policy-making, (c) conflict resolution, (d) mobilizing and developing its economic resources (e) distributing public resources, etc., does so at its own peril. As rightly stated by Allan Boesak (1988), politics 'determines to a large extent the presence of justice in society, ... the measure of peace in the world, ... measure of human-beingness of people...' Boesak, therefore, asserts:

...because politics has to do with people who are created in the image of God – people for whom He has in mind a life of full meaning, abundance, joy, people for whom Jesus Christ has given his life – therefore politics is also, very much so, the business of the church.

Posturing the Church and the Church's Postures

The role of the Church in politics has been dictated by several factors relating to the identity and mission of the church on the one hand, and factors driven individuals and organizations that are committed to keeping the church out of politics.

Within the body of Christ, there is a sharp division on whether the church should participate in politics or not. A further issue is, if the church should participate in politics, what is the mode of her participation?

A school of thought within the body of Christ out rightly rejects any idea in favor of the church's involvement in politics. In that light, the Preamble of Section 3.7 of The New Vision of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), 2010, partly states: 'it is common knowledge that many Christians alienate themselves from whatever they regard as politics because of their perception of it as a dirty game'.

Against that background, some Christians perceive politics as a 'worldly affair'. This stance has been partly discussed in the course of our discussion of the imperatives for the church's participation in politics without being partisan. Suffice it, therefore, to state that since politics is indispensable in society, the church cannot alienate herself from it because of some of its perverse characteristics. For the church to be consistent with that stance, she should also alienate herself from government, markets, etc. in that context, the church should not engage in any

transaction whatsoever with the government at its various levels. That posture is anti-mission and, in fact, suicidal.

The proper posture of the church is that Jesus Christ shall reign in all sectors of society. Archbishop George Carey (1991) aptly states:

It is easy to forget that Christ's battle against sin, the world and the devil still continues, and that we are on the front line fighting with him in the power of the cross.

Any condemnation of the participation of the church qua church in politics that is not linked to partisanship simply underscores a misconception of politics and a misperception of the mission and ministry of the church. What is worrisome is that while some Christians, including some church leaders, are turning their eyes away from the process of recruiting those that would authoritatively preside over their affairs; or are aloof to the interplay of power and interests through which public policies are made and public resources distributed, often skewed to satisfy parochial interests, several other individuals and organizations who are doggedly committed to restricting the presence and social influence of the church are systematically advancing their agenda.

Under the guise of secularism, the church has been 'ideologically' separated from the rest of the world. In countries dominated by Muslims, Islam is often constitutionally recognized as the official religion. In countries with overwhelming Christian population, recognition of any official religion is prohibited. In fact, the United States of America and some other advanced countries that have overwhelming population of Christians are systematically eliminating Christian symbols and practices in their public places. Writing on the American experience, Roger Anghis (nd) recalls that:

There was a point in time in this nation when you couldn't get elected unless you confessed Jesus as lord, and had a record of attending church regularly! Religion was very important during the days of our Founding Fathers.

As noted by James Huston (nd), Thomas Jefferson's reply on January 1, 1802 to an address from the Danbury Baptist Association, congratulating him on his election as President of the United States of America, contains a phrase: 'a wall of separation between church and state'. Linked to the 'religious clause' of the First Amendment which reads: 'congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...' Huston avers the clause has raised a lot of dispute in the past fifty years.

Following some court judgments such as *McCullum V. Board of Education* (1948) and *Reynolds V. United States* (1987), Huston states that the Jefferson's 'wall' metaphor has been severally used 'as a sword to sever religion from public life'.

The American scenario has added another barricade to the church's participation in politics. In that regard, Matthew Staver (2007) states that up till 1954, 'churches and other nonprofit organizations were permitted to expressly endorse or oppose candidates for political office'. The church's opposition to the United States' senatorial election of Lyndon Baines Johnson sparked off the denial of the right of the church and other nonprofit organizations to participate in electoral politics. Staver remarks that after the electoral success of Johnson, 'he proposed legislation to amend the Internal Revenue Code to prohibit nonprofit organizations, including churches, from endorsing or opposing political candidates'. Staver states that 'the code was amended in 1954' without any debate regarding the impact of the bill'.

Staver also recalls that up till 1934, churches and other nonprofit organizations were permitted to lobby in support of a legislation or otherwise. In 1934 it legislated that all organizations that have been granted tax-exemption cannot engage in lobbying for the contents of public policies. Those who felt they had a strong reason to continue to lobby for the contents of public policies were given the option of accepting the withdrawal of their tax exemption. It is grossly erroneous to act on the assumption that the church's active participation in the process of public policy-making converts her to a profit-making organization.

The 1934 and 1954 legislations raise a fundamental question: Were there no Christians in the Legislature when those bills were passed? No doubt, there is no provision in the American constitution or tax law that would encourage the church and other nonprofit organizations to challenge the withdrawal of their tax exemption at any time. In that regard, Austin Cline (nd) remarks that 'tax exemptions are a matter of 'legislative grace', which means that no one is necessarily entitled to tax exemptions and that they are not protected by the constitution'. That 'legislative grace', therefore serves as a ploy for restricting the involvement of the church and other non-profit organizations in public life. Thus, Austin cline poignantly states:

By not taxing churches, the government is directly interfering with how those churches operate. By the same token, those churches are also prevented from directly interfering with how the government operates in that they cannot endorse any political candidates.

The implications are largely antithetical to the mission and ministry of the church. In that context, Cline remarks:

It's fine to speak out against abortion, but not to attack a candidate who supports abortion rights or to tell a congregation to urge a representative to vote for a particular bill which would outlaw abortion.

The structural and legal obstacles being raised against the church's involvement in politics appear not to have caught the attention of many Christians. History shows that each of the barricades are institutionalized often without any meaningful resistance of Christians. This is true of politics with a majority of Christian population.

Nazir-Ali (2006) rightly remarks that 'since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the paradigm which has persisted, in Western Europe and North America at the least, has been that of the practical separation of religion from the affairs of state'. He convincingly asserts that, 'A result of removing the 'sacred canopy' from the affairs of the state has been to empty and strip the public square of values grounded in faith, leaving only formal rules of engagement, a residual but fading sense of public morality'.

Church leaders who challenge the failures of government or policies that are inimical to the collective wellbeing of society are often accused of 'mixing religion with politics'. Matthew 22:21 is often cited to support the claim that religion should be separated from the affairs of the state. That quotation provides Jesus Christ's response to the Pharisees and the Herodians who asked him: 'Teacher, we know that you are true; and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' (Matthew 22:16-17). The Lord knew their 'malice'. Thus, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax'. When they brought the money to him, he asked them, 'whose likeness and inscription is this?', and they said 'Caesar's' (Vs 18-20). Jesus then said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'.

In fact the episode in Matthew 22:15-21 (cf. Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:22-26) narrate the encounter Jesus Christ had with people whose self-perceived 'wisdom' and effrontery were their undoing. Jesus Christ's response to them expanded the coast of their self-imposed burden. Like other peripheral and major issues in history, many theologians and others, Christian and non-Christians, have devoted much time disputing over the proper interpretation of Jesus response in Matthew 22:21. Suffice it to state that nothing belongs to Caesar. The earth and the fullness thereof belong to God. Every leader is simply a steward and is ultimately accountable to God. Consequently, any leader that perceives himself as a leader presiding over a kingdom outside the authority of the creator of the world needs urgent deliverance.

The campaign for the alienation of the church from politics is only embarked upon when the propagators of that stance feel that they would not benefit from the biblical standard of the church. Thus, David Gitari (1986) avers that 'the politicians in their call to church leaders to leave politics to politicians are to a large extent hypocritical'. In support of his assertion, he remarks: 'Recently, church leaders were urged to enroll as members of the Kenya National Union and to encourage other Christians to do the same'. In his reaction to that call, Gitari aptly comments:

It appears that in some people's view, joining a political party is not being involved in politics; but challenging that party for irregularities in the election of its leaders is 'getting involved in politics' which would be left for politicians.

In agreement with David Gitari's remark, Allan Boesak (1988) states that whenever 'the church refuses to accept uncritically the policies laid down by a specific government, the remedy for these governments in each case seems to warn the church to keep out of politics and to stick to its real business, namely, to preach the Gospel'. He, therefore, asserts that 'as long as the church agrees with whatever government policy may be, it can be as political as it likes. The moment the church becomes critical, it is driven into the wilderness of esoteric spirituality'.

The church's discordant theological postures on its engagement in politics are further weakened by the politicization of denominations. Amucheazi (1986), in his erudite work on Church and politics in Eastern Nigeria from 1945-1966 remarks that, 'it was not the case of a united church reacting to the strains caused by governmental policy changes; rather it was a question of each denomination reacting differently as he change affected its interests and only occasionally did the denominations unite to pursue a common interest'. In some instances, some churches have unabashedly turned themselves into agents of politicians and political parties in exchange for illicit monetary rewards and prospective distribution of other resources.

In that situation, such churches no more stands upright as the body of Christ. No matter the size of their membership, and the prominence of their leaders, they should properly be seen to have submerged themselves in the filthy mud of pathological politicking.

We need not be deceived by the politicization of churches and denominations and the conversion of any church or denomination into a political unit of a political party. The Bible remains our *magna carta*. It provides God's answers to the Church's questions on its ministry and mission. It is, therefore, our ultimate reference on the role of the church in politics. On that premise, Jim Wallis (2005) poignantly states:

God's politics is therefore never partisan or ideological. But it challenges everything about our politics. God's politics reminds us of the people our politics always neglects – the poor, the vulnerable, the left behind. God's politics challenges narrow national, ethnic, economic, or

cultural self-interest, reminding us of a much wider world and the creative human diversity of all those made in the image of the creator. God's politics reminds us of the creation itself, a rich environment in which we are to be good stewards, not mere ushers, consumers, and exploiters. And God's politics pleads with us to resolve the inevitable conflicts among us, as much as is possible, without the terrible cost and consequence of war.

Only a united church, obedient to the word of God can engage in the politics with the intent to discharge her biblical responsibilities and, thereby, do the will of the Lord of the church.

Whither the Anglican Church in Politics?

In spite of the relationship that had existed between the Anglican Church and the state in the United Kingdom, politics is not often in the front burner of the global Church. Leaders of government are prayed for regularly in the liturgy of the church. However, there appears to be a general slant toward separating the church from whatever is tagged politics.

The fear of being contaminated by politics has kept many Christians alienated from their civic responsibilities. We are sometimes oblivious of the fact that Jesus Christ ministered unto individuals and association that could contaminate the saints. Instead of contaminating him, they rather received salvation through him.

The church cannot deny that the forces that corrupted the wider society are also effectively operating in the body of Christ. That cannot be completely avoided as far as the church remains a being in this perverse transient world. In that regard, John Stott avers that, "As a result of the church's immersion in the life of the World", she has 'wrongly become assimilated to the world's standards and values, and so become contaminated by them".

Although the Anglican Church is known for her sound theology and biblical underpinnings in the life of the Church, her orientation towards politics has for centuries alienated her from a critical aspect of her mission. The implications are obvious and grievous.

After a critical discussion of the prevailing postures of Nigerian Anglican in politics, their general understanding, orientation and engagement in politics were summarized as follows in the New Vision of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), 2010;

- Misunderstanding of what politics is all about by a large number of Anglicans.
- Label of politics as rogue
- Politics as anti-heaven and worldly
- Powerful negative mind-set regarding politics and politicians
- Protracted arguments on whether a Christian should be involved in partisan politics
- Church losing out in religious-related political opportunities
- No formal organ of the church formed or recognized as church political institutions or instruments.
- Few Christians in politics were poor performer, heightening Christians' suspicion of politicians
- More Anglicans becoming knowledgeable about politics.
- More of the Christian politicians are still low rangers in God-fearing politics
- Increase in the awareness of the dangers of the church not involved in politics
- Church leadership making public announcement regarding political issues.

These findings indicate that much work must be done to change the misperception of politics by many Anglican and to encourage them to be actively involved in partisan politics.

The transformation of society which the church prays for can only be achieved when the right leadership is in place. The test of our Christians discipleship must go beyond praise worship, bible study, preaching to others. It must be demonstrated in our public service. As noted by David Gatari (1986), it is a sad commentary that ‘for a government to be run by the church does not necessarily guarantee democracy or justice’.

It is ironical that the church’s criticisms of kleptocracy, ineptitude, greed, nepotism, visionlessness, religious bigotry, ethnic chauvinism, etc. in government are, in fact criticisms against some Christians in leadership positions. The image of government is largely defined by the conduct and performance of people in leadership positions. It is, therefore, expected that Christians in leadership positions would give substance to the prophetic ministry of the church as it concerns politics. Otherwise, the tendency would be that the church would be told: ‘physicians heal yourself’ (Luke 4:23). It is common knowledge that many church members who are active in politics are not deeply rooted in the faith. As a result, they do not perceive themselves as Jesus Christ’s ambassadors in their public offices. Expecting them to demonstrate the Christian faith in the discharge of their duties would appear to be unrealistic.

As far as they are concerned, whatever office they occupy is an opportunity for them to accumulate wealth for themselves. That is what they perceive as God’s blessing. The suffering and, sometimes, dehumanization and death of the people they are expected to serve do not appear to prick their conscience. No doubt, such people do not have the mind of Jesus Christ. St Paul states in Romans 8:7-8:

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and those who are the in flesh cannot please God.

On the other hand, many educated and committed Christians need to be enabled to understand the implications of their failure participate in politics. David Gitari (1986) remarks that the East African Revival Movement in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania ‘has tended to influence Christians to keep away from politics. Indeed any member of the Revival who joined politics was seen as a brother who had become spiritually cold’. This is largely true of the Nigerian situation. However, Christians can only prove themselves as the salt of the earth and the light of the world in the public domain where their discipleship is actually tested.

With regard to the role of the Anglican Church in politics in Nigeria, the annual synod addresses of bishops clearly affirm that the church is alive in prophetic ministry as it concerns politics. In fact, some bishops are not in the ‘good book’ of some politicians and leaders of government because of their frank proclamations in the name of God. Nevertheless, there are also Christians and church leaders that are yet to realize that gifts from corrupt politicians and leaders of government, like gift from other perverse individuals, smear the image of the church and, also drag the image of the recipients to the mud.

The church must continue to battle against the kingdom of darkness in all its ramifications. Stephen Neil rightly asserts that, ‘The church is undoubtedly a divine society, but it is also a society immersed in history, and must live perpetually in action and reaction with the societies by which it is surrounded’. Anglican Church leaders’ interaction with leaders of God for the purpose of drawing their attention to the areas the church is convinced that they have erred in discharging their responsibilities is a step in the right direction. Collaborating with the leaders of other churches on ecumenical platform in commending government and/or politicians when

they deserve it, and urging them to act right when they default, would strengthen the impact of their prophetic ministry.

The failure of the church to raise many faithful ambassadors of Christ in politics and, through them, curb the unwholesome behavior in politics, spells doom for society, including the church. The evils perpetuated by politicians and leaders of government are an evil wind whose repercussions have no bounds.

The murder of Archbishop Luwum in Uganda speaks volumes in that regard. A former primate of the province of the Church of Kenya (Anglican Communion), Archbishop David Gitary, observes that Idi Amin's emergence as the head of the government of Uganda via a coup d'état attracted discordant voices from church leaders in Uganda. While the church leaders remained divided on their opinions on the atrocities being perpetuated by the government, Idi Amin had nobody challenging his dastardly acts. After a while, he consolidated his instruments for atrocities.

By the times a strong united voice of church leaders was raised, the government of Idi Amin felt that the church had overstepped its bounds. Gitary remarks that following the bold action of the Anglican bishops in Uganda in sending a strongly worded memorandum to Idi Amin in early 1971, reminding him 'of his government responsibility to give them security and to kill them', Archbishop Janani Luwum was assassinated by Idi Amin. Gitari, therefore, avers that the madness of Idi Amin's regime must have demonstrated to them that to allow a government to be in the wrong hands is to the disadvantage not only to the state, but also of the church itself. This remark appears true for all times and in all places.

The church should endeavour to advance her prophetic ministry beyond verbal expressions. Efforts must be made to move the wheel of the state toward translating their recommendations into reality. John Stott (1990) rightly remarks:

If travelers on the Jerusalem-Jericho road were habitually beaten up, and habitually cared for by the Good Samaritans, the need for better laws to eliminate armed robbery might well be overlooked... it is always good to feed the hungry; it is better, if possible, to eradicate the causes of hunger. So if we truly love our neighbors, and want to serve them our service may oblige us to take (or solicit) political action on their behalf.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We are living in a time in history when efforts to resist the mission and ministry of the church are taking different formidable forms. This is particularly true of the engagement of the church in politics. Within the Body of Christ, some of the faithful consider politics a 'worldly' exercise. For that reason, they abstain from whatever they perceive as politics. The impacts of that misinterpretation of politics are deficits to the mission and ministry of the church. This situation worsened by the practice of turning the church into political unit of some politicians and, or a political party thereby undermining the mission of the church.

On the other hand, there are factors outside the church that are geared toward restricting the role of the church in society. Several laws, logic and biblical passages have been advanced to justify the efforts to restrict participation of the church in the affairs of the state. As elaborately discussed in this paper, the church's mission is not limited to any aspect of society or social configuration. Psalm 24.1 reminds us that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. It is mandate of the risen Lord that His disciples should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Considering the sordid practices that pervade political activities in countries like Nigeria, and the failure of many governments to provide credible leadership, the church, through her prophetic ministry is expected to prevent society from decay and to redirect its course from the path of darkness. In doing that, however, she is not expected to be partisan, also bearing in mind that she is sharing the same external world with people of other religious persuasions. It is, however, incontrovertible that the church's ministry and mission bear the love of God for all mankind. Therefore, the steps taken by the church in her social and spiritual responsibilities are in the interest of mankind.

The church cannot afford to close her eyes to bad public policies, mis-governance, injustice, inequity, etc. in spite of the efforts of some politicians and their apologies to alienate her from being the voice of the voiceless and bearer of God's message for people in all situations. The church cannot close her ears to the wailings of the impoverished and dehumanized as cited by Scarborough (2008)

We are the disposable people of life, who are moved and removed by the world of big business and finance at its whim. We are often treated as less than human. We are depersonalized. What is essentially human in us is ignored.

As the church responds to such challenges through her prophetic ministry and, also causing the wheel of government to be driven in the direction of servant, credible and accountable leadership, in compliance with Jesus Christ's injunction: 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all' (Mark 9:35), the love and care of Jesus Christ would be robustly felt in society. Furthermore, the faithful should be encouraged to participate in politics, including contesting for elective offices. It is only in that they can bring their Christian values to bear on public policies, public education, administration of justice, provision of social amenities, creation of conducive environment for work and business activities, and the security of life and property. To this end, John Stott (1990) aptly asserts that if Christians were to do any good, 'the salt must soak into the meat, and the light must shine into the darkness'.

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