

# **The Challenges of the Nigerian Church in the 21st Century Socio-political Environment**

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## **Abstract**

Much social responsibility and action is going on within the Church in Nigeria in the form of charity. The situation of poverty, misery, injustice and corruption which seem to be the order of the day in Nigeria pose some quite daunting challenges to the Church. This paper argues that the failure of many of Nigeria's professors of political science, for whom democracy is an article of faith; legal luminaries who hold the title of "Senior Advocate of Nigeria" and have sworn to defend the rule of law; and even some respected religious prelates who are expected to hold truth as sacred, cannot allow the Church to escape from the world or be an innocent by-stander in the politics of her time. She must not just keep quiet, watch, pray and continue to console the victims of the system to humbly accept their suffering with Christian fortitude. Rather, the Church must courageously highlight the evil of society by bringing our community to stand under the judgment of the enduring values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to criticize what is fundamentally inhuman and anti-human in our system of governance.

## **1. Preamble**

The recent communiqué of the CBCN (2011) recalls the fact that “on October 1, 1960, the day Nigeria gained political independence from British rule, our predecessors offered their reflections on 'important religious and social issues' affecting Nigeria then”. Fifty years after that day, the bishops write “to call the attention of all our dear people of Nigeria to the fact that

notwithstanding the lapse of time, many important issues raised in the Pastoral Letter of October 1, 1960 continue to face Nigeria today." Although the land is no doubt rich and the people intelligent, Ehusani (1966) adequately captured our situation when he described us as stripped naked by a corrupt, selfish, greedy and callous elite. While the country can boast of rich cultures as well as vast lands, ours is now:

a trapped economy, decaying social services, a hungry populace, unemployment, insecurity, elite irresponsibility, collapsing infrastructure, deteriorating health care delivery, ubiquity of conspicuous consumption, a dysfunctional reward system, ascendancy of decadence etc.

In Nigeria, the evidences of the effects of the onetime "oil boom" abound here and there. There are also clearly defined signs of material prosperity, and misery on the faces of most people, as they go about the struggle for survival. Poverty seems to be on the increase, unemployment has reached crises proportions, and hunger and starvation are now doing havoc to more and more people. In fact, Nigeria has scored very high on the suffering index now. In such a situation where poverty and misery are on the increase, injustice the order of the day and the corrupt and the greedy seem to be the ones making it, the Church cannot just keep quiet, watch, pray and continue to console the victims of the system to humbly accept their suffering with Christian fortitude as they wait for the eternal kingdom of everlasting happiness. This situation poses some quite daunting challenges to the Church.

## **2. Methodology**

I intend to go about the topic in a number of steps. I propose some introductory considerations as the first step to ensure that we have a common understanding of the terms used. I shall then look at the relationship between the Church and Politics. We shall then examine the Christian involvement in politics and then round up with the task before the Church.

### **3. Clarification of terms**

Firstly, the notion of 'Church' can be understood in many and different senses. The ordinary man on the street may understand by it a big hall where a worshipping community meets once a week for worship, just as Muslims congregate in a mosque and Jews in a synagogue. To some less informed Christians, the church may mean nothing more than the bishops, priests, evangelists or, in short, the clergy and the religious and a few lay people who have key positions in various church councils. The two meanings are not, however, intended here. The first may interest the architects and builders while the second is a distorted idea. The clergy and the religious may be vital members of the Church, they are not, however, the church in its totality.

The most comprehensive and current definition which, to my mind preserves the root or biblical meaning of the term is probably that of the Vatican Document which describes the church as the "People of God". Like the chosen people of God, its Old Testament counterpart, but under Christ, the new People of God has Christ for its head, the Holy Spirit for its soul, Christian love for its law and the promotion of God's reign for its temporal goal. Abbot (1966) in the Documents of Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, describes such a people as a visible community, constituted and structured as a society in this world but primarily on behalf of heavenly values. Her tasks, as the Vatican Document spells out is to: "serve as leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family". While the Council notes that Christ set before this Church a religious and not a political, economic, or social mission, it is clear that:

Out of this religious mission itself comes a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law... she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men [sic.] especially those designed for the needy, such as the work of mercy and similar undertakings.

For this paper, the church refers to the society of the followers of Jesus. It refers to the Christian religion which has much to say to

such a follower about the orientation of his or her whole life.

The word "politics" is also capable of a wide range of definitions. For experts like Denham (1987, p. 2):

Politics is about how people live and work together. It is about cohesion of a complicated technological society. It is concerned with achieving agreed goals, agreeing on the route to realize those goals and from time to time reviewing the objectives.

For anyone who is not a political philosopher or scientist, the understanding of politics could be that of the dictionary which according to Shorter's Oxford Dictionary (Vol 11) is "the science and art of government"; the science dealing with the form, organization and administration of a state or part of one and with the regulations with other states (imperial, parochial, and foreign). Some others understand "politics" as a social phenomenon which pervades all aspects of life in society and see political activities as efforts to determine who should participate in the taking of socio-economic and other decisions which do not only affect other members of the social group but which these members will be required to abide by. Some others still don't understand what is involved in the game. Because of this some people either develop limited interest in politics or are downright apolitical. A British housewife was asked the level of interest people should have for politics. Bill (1971, p. 20) reports her to have replied thus:

Well, not too much. Sufficient interest. You don't want to waste too much time on it. There are many other things of more interest... I think everybody should be interested without being rabid. Everybody must be because it affects your life.

In a similar fashion, he made the following remarks in relation to the attitude of British conservatives towards politics: "The man who puts politics first is not fit to be called a civilized being let alone a Christian" (p. 20).

The display of downright negative or ambivalent attitudes towards politics is very conspicuous even among some Nigerian Christians to whom there is or there should be a great divide

between the political and other realms of life. In the Nigerian context, politics in the limited sense refers to the art of government and the scheming related to it at the federal, state and local levels. Our use of the term, however, goes beyond this restricted sense. Since the church has no basis of any meaningful relationship with party politics, the concept under discussion here is politics generally.

#### **4. The Relationship Between Church and Politics**

It is not a simple task to state precisely the relationship between Church and politics or society. It has, in fact, been one of the difficult and persistent tasks of Christians (Spieker, 1991). Niebuhr (1957, p.2), the American theologian who produced a classic on the subject over thirty years ago, says that "the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries". Difficult as the task may seem, it is absolutely necessary that we recognize the common grounds or values shared by the two.

No one doubts the fact that church and politics have different domains. They both, however, also have a mutual concern or areas of common interest. The two are concerned about the same human being and his/her actions and relationships. There are some matters which belong to politics and government alone while there are affairs which belong to the church or religion alone. There are, however, many subjects on marriage, family, education, respect for life, human rights, and social services which touch and bind both of them. When it is a question of family planning, sale and use of contraceptives, abortion, euthanasia, bribery and corruption, wages, strikes, housing, unemployment, detention without trial, freedom of speech, religion in education, both religion and politics are interested and Church and government find themselves sometimes disagreeing. Pope John Paul II (1982, Address 3, n.2), speaking to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and to government leaders in Lagos during his visit to Nigeria, on "our common concern for humanity", said:

In their own fields the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent, but their common concern for

man [sic.] brings them together and invites them to collaboration for the welfare of all.

The difficulty in defining the relationships did not start when the medieval unity of religion and culture broke down, rendering the spiritual distinct from the temporal, but has existed since the time of the disciples of Jesus who found it hard to purge their faith in the Son of God from all ideas of a political Messiah. In fact, the prophets bear witness again and again to the failure of the people of the Covenant to draw the proper conclusions concerning social relations within a nation and between nations from their belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This already suggests the blind alleys into which Christians can stray, and have often strayed, when defining that relationship: on the one hand faith and politics may be identified as being one and the same, and on the other, they may be kept radically apart and even declared in opposition to one another. To put the one in opposition to the other may easily lead people to shun the world or even to despise it - by looking upon politics as a dirty and deplorable business and reducing faith to the area of individual piety and religious observance. The new political theology, which is at the source of liberation theology, however, rejects this attitude as being tantamount to the privatization of faith, and calls for the renewal of the Gospel's claim to be heard in the public domain.

Some people have attributed the difficulty to Christ's apparent denunciation of any association with politics while standing before Pilate for trial as related in John 18:36, where he said: "My kingdom does not belong to this world". Although He denied any association with politics, the offence which brought Him before Pilate was, to the Jews, political. Again in Matthew 22:21 Christ instructed his questioners thus "pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor and pay God what belongs to God". The interpretation of this could be that Christ was distinguishing between the spiritual and the temporal, between spiritual authority and secular authority.

This distinction between the spiritual and the temporal also finds expression and perhaps, elaboration, in the works of one of the Fathers of the church, St. Augustine of Hippo. The secular state,

according to Augustine, is the state of imperfection where Christians must sojourn for a while as they make their way to the City of God (Sabine C. & Thorson T. 1973). He laid the burden for things not being as they were supposed to be in the political realm (one might say, vis-a-vis the demands of religion) on the doorstep of humanity's sinful condition.

It is perhaps in relation to these passages that most of the teachings of the Church which are opposed to involvement in politics are based. Peschke (1978, p. 301), for example, posits that:

God has given the charge of the human communities to two powers, the ecclesiastical and the civil, the one being set over religious and divine things, the other over earthly things... In their proper spheres, the political community and the church are mutually independent and self-governing.

## **5. The Biblical Dimension**

A critical examination of the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, does not seem to portray or illustrate this divide in the spheres of authority between the religious and the secular. In fact, Old Testament records are replete with illustrations of how God raised leaders who took care of both the spiritual and temporal needs of the people. Thus, kings like David and Solomon were such leaders of the people of Israel. Moses was sent not only to preach God to the people but also to actively lead them out of Egypt. The circumstances of the birth of Moses and how he was raised in the court of Pharaoh prepared him for the political and spiritual functions he was to perform.

Although in the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that certain utterances of Jesus give an impression of this separation between the temporal and the spiritual, an understanding of the background or the "sitz in Leben" against which Christ made the statements, and a correct exegesis of the passages can hardly show Him as an innocent by-stander in the politics of his time. There is, for example, need to understand the situation in which Christ was born into a Palestine that was under the Roman occupation force.

The Romans themselves were then the strongest military force in the world while the Jews were a subject people. Jesus was Himself a Jew and, therefore, like any other Jew in Palestine, a subject of the Romans. It should also be remembered that all military regimes are intolerant of criticisms. So also are occupation forces, more especially if these criticisms come from a conquered subject people. Jesus therefore, had to be careful what He said in the area of politics. His carefulness and caution must be understood in this background. Consider, for example, the Gospel of Luke 6:27-31 particularly v. 29 which says "To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other side...". The greatest enemies of the Jews were the Romans whose army of occupation was prone to mishandling the Jews. To revenge would bring more severe mishandling. Considering the socio-political circumstances under which Christ taught, one tends to believe that Jesus was a careful politician who avoided actions which could result in dire consequences for the people. He therefore trod the political terrain of His time cautiously.

The situation was different in his dealings with his fellow Jews. He revolted against their lack of compassion, the jealousy of workers when generosity was shown to those out of work until the eleventh hour (Mt 20:1-16), the jealousy of the elder brother in the story of the Prodigal son (Lk 15:28). He revolted against the exploitation of those who benefited from political oppression when he offered to share the company at the table of a little man, Zacchaeus, who had to climb a tree to get a glimpse of him (Lk 16:19ff). He criticized the status quo of the high priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the hypocrites and those who absolutized power and He took sides with the poor and the oppressed and became their spokesman (Mt 23:13-29). He chose to re-order the political face of the universe by quoting Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor, liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners and to announce a year of favour from the Lord" (Is 61:1; Lk.4:16-21).

Again, refraining from direct involvement in politics on the basis

of a few related passages from the books of the New Testament does portray an unusual readiness on the part of the Church to run away from the realities of the world and to forget the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. Christ was born at a time that his part of the world was the most politically active. His birth, for example, coincided with a major political event in the world, namely, the Census ordered by Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, during which everybody had to go home to register (Lk 2:1ff). It was perhaps God's design that, though a Saviour of the whole world, Jesus had to be born in his home town perhaps for easy political and spiritual identity. The birth of Christ was also welcomed with political agitation on the part of Herod who thought Him to be a rival king. Because of this, many innocent infants suffered political persecution at the hands of Herod in his bid to eliminate the rival king. Again, just as Christ was born into a well designed setting, his life and works were brought to an end in a political setting. He was accused of causing political insurrection, tried by the Roman governor, Pilate, and condemned to death for an alleged political guilt or offence. Thus, although we might posit a different interpretation for the death of Christ, those who brought Him before Pilate accused Him of a political crime and insisted He should pay for this crime, saying to Pilate: If you set this man free, that means you are not friend of the emperor. Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the emperor (Jn. 19:12)".

## **6. Christian Involvement**

In light of the foregoing, one feels greatly encouraged by the change in the church's stand since the Second Vatican Council. The Council is remarkable especially for its openness to the world of today. It declares, for example (Abbot, 1966, p. 258) that: "There are, indeed, close links between earthly affairs and those aspects of man's [sic.] conditions which transcend this world". Furthermore, it emphasizes that the Christian is a member of both the Church and the State and that she or he must be a relevant member to each. As a citizen of two cities (the heavenly city which is the Church and the earthly city which is the State or country) the Christian must be positively involved in the betterment of the

earthly city by discharging his or her earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. Pope John Paul II (1982, Address 5, n.4) told the young people of Nigeria during his visit:

A good Christian is a good citizen. You must love your country, obey its laws, respect your leaders, and pay your taxes. You are called to take your due part in political, social, economic and cultural affairs. When you are eligible, you should vote and be voted for in political elections.

This clearly declares as unauthentic the Christian who introduces a divorce between his/her religion and his/her profession. It says that:

The split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the most serious errors of our age. Therefore, let there be no false opposition between profession and social activities on the one part, and religion on the other...In the exercise of all their earthly activities, they (Christians) can thereby gather their humane, domestic, professional, social enterprises into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized (n.42).

Some Christian Churches are known to have declared party politics as no-go areas for their officials (priests and religious) and rightly so. However, these Churches are misunderstood when this is extended to the laity. The lay Christian must not be understood merely as a non-cleric with a 'share' in the church's mission resulting from baptism and confirmation. He or she is a fully fledged Christian, living in the world and obeying the Lord's command to make the world subordinate to him or herself through work and full participation in all activities of the wider society. This gives a person ample opportunity to demonstrate his or her Christian values.

A Christian, therefore, obeys the command to follow Christ, i.e. to sanctify the world, in the world and this is done in his/her work as a labourer, housewife, businessman, civil servant, politician or scientist. Hence, a Christian, wishing to follow Christ, must not withdraw from the world, lament its ills, and take refuge in

Sunday observance. He or she must rather, commit him or herself in the world, through education, skills and vocational responsibility to become God's companion in creation. Seclusion from, and contempt of the world do not show the imitation of Christ, instead they erroneously lead lay Christians away from their path of duty. This was not, however, always accepted in the history of Christian lay-piety, as we know. According to Auer (1966, p. 26), for example:

In the first centuries of the Christian era the fundamental mood was overwhelmingly one of escape from the world. The main reason for this may have been that the martyr, the monk and the virgin had become the foremost models of piety...In the early centuries Christians tried to live their worldly lives in such a way as to come as close as possible to monasticism. Though they remained in their worldly occupations, they turned all worldly affairs towards God as rigorously as they could, because they believed that real piety was almost exclusively reserved to God's service.

Even in the Middle Ages escape from temporal affairs was still regarded as the ideal imitation of Christ, though there are numerous genuine indications of a lay spirituality which was open to the world and turned towards it. St. Thomas Aquinas, and later Martin Luther, devised a theology of work and vocation in which the cosmic significance of work and its relevance to salvation were clearly presented. The real image of God is to be found, not in inactivity, but in the creative human being. Through action people attain the fullness of their status as the image of God. Auer (1966) quotes Pope Gregory VII in a letter to Abbot Hugh of Cluny, condemning the Duke of Burgundy's entry into a monastery, which he called an act of desertion: to act in such a way was to be self seeking and to prefer one's own peace of mind to the salvation of one's brethren - whereas love should triumph over all else (Spieker, 1991, p. 333).

It is, therefore, not only a sociological but also a theological proposition to say that the lay Christian can sanctify his or her life in the world and not in seclusion from it, and that in so doing he or she can follow Christ. It is the duty of a Christian to give substance to his or her faith in Christ through their work - in the

world - and to accept the world as their field of commitment and sanctification: just as Christ himself adopted the world through his incarnation. A person's occupation, therefore, is not merely burdensome labour to earn a living: it has to do with creation and salvation. To engage in politics does not mean participation in some frivolous or ambitious competition for power: it is rather taking one's full responsibility because "it is generally the function of the well-informed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city" (n. 43).

The good Christian citizen is challenged to be aware of the problems in the Nigeria of our times. He or she should be aware of bribery and corruption, embezzlement of government and company funds, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, the parade of wealth by many who have it, and many other problems of our contemporary Nigeria. The authentic Christian citizen cannot be a passive onlooker in the unfolding of such events. He or she should not only make sure they do not worsen the situation by joining in promoting any of them but also seek ways, alone and with other citizens, on how these problems can be solved. If a Christian holds outstanding local, state or national office, if he or she is a local councillor, minister or whatever, they must remember it is the duty of every member of the political elite to "wash the feet of their fellow men and women". His or her task in these offices is to serve. They must not exploit this period of special responsibility for him/herself but rather use it for the common good.

It is true that politics abounds with temptations such as power, vanity, privileges. It still remains a form of neighbourly love. To avoid this temptation by turning one's back on politics is not a solution acceptable to Christians as the Christian who neglects his or her temporal duties neglects his or her duties towards their neighbour and even God and jeopardizes his or her eternal salvation (n. 39)

It is not a good Christian who under the pretence of preparing for the Kingdom of heaven neglects to contribute his or her part to the betterment of the kingdom of the world. The genuine Christian is interested in developmental projects and in

initiatives to help the poor and the socially disinherited. He or she is concerned about our educational system and its ability to turn out good Christians and relevant citizens. He or she shows interest in other social services, in art, in culture and in government.

Christians should also address two other issues which play major roles in fomenting political crises in Nigeria. These are apathy by many Christian electorate and lack of political education of the masses. Many Christians do not bother to cast their votes. By that act they reduce the chances of the best candidates. Some members of the electorate also give their votes to the highest bidder. This also reduces the chances of the best candidates. The result is that we have elected representatives who do not owe genuine allegiance to the people. Christians should initiate programs, for example seminars, talks and so on aimed at eliminating these ills, as a sure step to ensuring that the best candidates are elected to represent the people at all levels of government. The programs should be started as soon as possible and should extend to the grassroots of the society before serious party politicking starts. The people should be made to know that they can change their fortunes by voting and voting wisely.

## **7. The Liberation Theology Approach**

Recent trends among Christians have led to the critical study of the scriptures to view the message of Christ within the context of the socio-political setting in which it was given so as to be able to relate it more appropriately to our own time and situation. As a result of this, it is being more and more understood that Christ did not preach a sterile and individualistic gospel, i.e. a gospel aimed at reconciling the individual to God without reference to others and their needs. Rather, he preached a socio-spiritual gospel with practical illustrations on how to cater for the social needs of our neighbours.

This process has led to the development of a new approach to theology i.e. liberation theology. The central focus of this is to use the message of Christ as contained in the four gospels to help provide for the earthly needs of our neighbours who are often the

poor, the weak and the needy and, to fight against all forms of social injustice. As Rev. Arce (Umaru, 1988, p. 20), a liberation theologian has argued:

Jesus Christ who was a real, genuine person, a human being of his time, was not a ghost or superman. As a human being, he took human options in accordance with the human time in which he lived, the circumstances of his life and as part of his calling.

With this understanding of the personality of Christ and of the way He lived and worked, liberation theologians urge even the use of force to ensure a just society. Rev. Fr. Juan Garcia Elorrio (Umaru, 1988 p. 21), as far back as 1968, believed that "only revolution is an effective means of actually making the bond of love of every man and of all men a reality [sic.]". Monsignor German Guzman Campos (Umaru, 1988 p. 21) was more forceful in his suggestions for the use of force to help establish a just social order when he said:

Christian love does not mean that the exploiters should continue to exploit, but that the exploited should rise up against all those who exploit them. It is nonsense to talk of a bond of love, when the established order and a few privileged groups can create a situation involving poverty, the need to beg, the abandonment of children, prostitution, violence, illiteracy, starvation among the people. The Catholic Church is facing a dilemma, either it takes its stand on the side of the oppressed majority or it remains linked on "a bond of love" with the oligarchical structures. Either it is a church of the true Christ or it is simply an institutional Church.

What the liberation Theologians are fighting for exists, perhaps in their worst forms, in our country Nigeria where ethnicity, corruption and other vices have become so rife that it is even doubtful if the church, by its passivity, cannot be said to be condoning such ills. While one might not go as far as the Latin American Liberation Theologians, one definitely expects greater commitment by the Church to politics. The clergy are concerned with such virtues as social justice, uprightness, and so on, in our social life. Christians should be seen to be providing positive and practical leadership in this area - otherwise they will cease to be

the mouth-piece of the poor and the deprived masses. And until they get really involved, they will remain mere sign-post teachers or leaders.

## **8. The Tasks Before The Church**

What is the Nigerian Church to do? Sometimes we hear accusations that the Church is interfering in politics. By this people often mean that the official church spokesmen and personnel, the ordained ministers, are taking political positions or making political statements.

Such accusations are more often than not baseless and unfounded and are usually the ranting of people who are uncomfortable with the statements made on one of those areas of common interest to the church and politics.

While as the father of all, it is indeed not the mission of the church to engage in party politics, sponsor a political party or make political choices for the laity, it remains her duty to identify the moral elements in the way government formulates solutions to such problems and to relate the Gospel to the practical world of today.

The Church is a universal moral authority which exercises her prophetic office in the interest of human promotion and salvation. There is today no quarrel amongst Christians about the need to order social relations so that justice, freedom and peace are promoted and human rights respected. Nyerere (1972, p. 1) has a categorical statement concerning this inescapable duty of the church. He writes:

The church has to help men [sic.] rebel against their slums; it has to help them do this in the most effective way it can be done. But most of all the church must be obviously and openly fighting all those institutions and power groups, which contribute to the existence and maintenance of the physical and spiritual slums, regardless of the consequence to it or its members...the church must work with the people in the positive tasks of building a future based on social justice.

It is also the task of the Church to challenge its members to make faith relevant in action and translate the good news within their own milieu. Mt. 25 will then become not just a bible passage but a 'magna carta' for life: seeing Christ hungry and feeding him; naked and clothing him; thirsty and providing him with clean water supply; sick and lessening the occurrence of disease with preventive health care, good medical service; without shelter and working to provide decent housing for all; seeing him imprisoned and working to make such institutions unnecessary or humanly tolerable.

As far as Cardinal Suenens is concerned it is useless to speak to the world's outcasts about prayer, about heaven and the rest. The world will not listen. Instead, he says, "speak to them of justice, labour with them to obtain indispensable reforms and then Christianity will have some meaning for them".

In the extreme circumstances of social, economic and political inequalities, such as we have in present day Nigeria, pledges and pious admonitions by the church and enunciations of the principles for a more egalitarian society are not enough. We need a more prophetic Church endowed with the wisdom that comes from God the Father, equipped with the vision that comes from Jesus Christ the Son and moved by the passion that comes from the Holy Spirit to make a powerful intervention in God's name on behalf of our distressed people.

In Nigeria, many professors of political science, for whom democracy is an article of faith, legal luminaries who hold the title of "Senior Advocate of Nigeria" and who have sworn to defend the rule of law, and even some respected religious prelates who are expected to hold truth as sacred have failed our people by bowing to our feudal Lords. The Church must be the conscience of the nation by courageously highlighting the evils of society which constitute the obstacles on the way to peace and prosperity. Many of those whom Nigerians look up to for a sense of direction have become sycophants, praise singers and propagandists for the oppressors of their brothers and sisters. The Church, in the face of our nation in distress, must embark on literacy programmes for a more discerning citizenry which can

discriminate between good and bad leadership, and reject bad leadership in the socio-political and economic arena.

When the Church does this, she is not only putting herself at the service of her Lord as the Light of the world and the Salt of the earth, but also promoting the kingdom of God here in Nigeria. This is the kind of kingdom, which will substitute righteousness for iniquity, truth for falsehood, humility for arrogance, love for hatred, unity for division and holiness for vice. Nigeria needs that kind of a church if our crises of governance are not to become a disaster. Such a church will be an agent that will bring our human community to stand under the judgment of the enduring values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to criticize what is fundamentally inhuman and anti-human in our system of governance. Without such criticism, freedom will continue to yield to totalitarianism, justice give way to exploitation, charity recede into ruthlessness, peace dissolve into hostility. The church must be a place where all those forces, personal and political, which challenge and undermine these values are themselves effectively exposed, prophetically denounced, courageously disarmed, and dismantled.

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