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WORKSHOP

**2 STRATEGIC PARTICIPATION OF
CHRISTIAN YOUTHS IN POLITICS**

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CRITICAL NATURE OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN SOCIETY

A political system consists primarily of institutions which are governmental bodies - Political Parties, Legislatures, and Executives (Heads of State or President), that make up the whole mechanism of modern governments. On a more general level, there are other such institutions like the Media, Security agencies, Electoral bodies, the complete range of the Public Services, etc, which although may not often be considered as partisan, they are nonetheless political. These are the institutions that enact, enforce, and apply laws for the peaceful co-existence and development of the society.

By their fundamental objectives, they are to provide representation for the different sections and segments of the population; to formulate public policy (whether in or out of government) for the harmony and wellbeing of the society; to ensure the security of lives and property; and to engender the effective integration of the entire social system of a nation. In every political system also, there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities for citizens, within which a broad continuum of partisanship where every citizen in a nation is located, from membership of political parties, to elected and appointed representatives, to the voter.

Indeed, it's a known fact that very society has a political system, through which the appropriate processes for the authoritative allocation of the nation's resources are undertaken. This implies that political institutions have direct impact on almost all aspects of the lives of citizens, whatever is the nature of preoccupation; thus, no person or association within the borders of a nation can ignore their importance, whether they are active or passive participants.

2. UNDERSTANDING KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

A. Who is a Christian?

To lay a solid foundation for this discussion, there is the need for a necessary understanding and an appropriate application of who is a Christian to our lives. In the light of *Gen. 1:27*, *Psalms 51:5* and *Eph.2:4-10*, the identity of the Christian is one who, although was created in the likeness of God, was conceived in sin through human parents BUT who has been born again by grace through faith in Christ, and could NOW, be said to be the bearer of the image of God.

A further dimension is that this identity should be seen as being two-fold: First, as an individual, and secondly, corporately or collectively, in relation to being members of the body of Christ. Hence, we are what the Bible says we are, fundamentally with an identity that is BOTH individual and collective or corporate. As individuals the Bible describes the Christian thus: "I AM" - God's battle axe; a new creation; the salt of the earth; the light of the world; God's workmanship, etc. While, with respect to the corporate identity, "WE ARE" - the children of God; the redeemed of the Lord; a city set on a hill; a chosen people; a holy nation; God's temple; building blocks; God's house; Christ's friends, among other descriptions. For example, God describes us individually as lively stones who are being built-up into the dwelling place of God. Thus, as individuals we remain only at stone level, but when the building has been constructed, then the purpose and contributions of the building blocks would be seen and appreciated. Therefore, no individual Christian can make up the edifice God intends to indwell; for it is only together that we are being built up into a Spiritual House.

This is the whole counsel of the Bible with reference to the identity of the Christian. While our strengths individually are dependent on our relationship to Jesus Christ, our relevance as the body of Christ is wholly dependent upon our corporate existence and functionality. Therefore, as the bearers of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are the instruments for the transformation of our societies; and we are also, the designers and the determinants of the well-being of our nations and of our country at large.

The implication of the foregoing is that being a Christian, as described by the Bible, has serious implications for both personal and collective or corporate life and lifestyle. Therefore, the question of ineffectiveness in bringing godliness in the affairs of the country, is both a matter of personal, as well as corporate failure.

B. What is Politics, and why participate in it?

The second issue worthy of some explanation is the subject of politics, which is concerned with the struggle for power and control in social formations or society in general; while political activity is that aimed at the acquisition, utilization and/or manipulation political power. Formal politics takes place within a defined political entity, and is guided by a grand norm - a Constitution in more organized settings. But political activity actually takes place at every level of human organization, from the family, the clan, the nation, and to other higher and more complex levels of social formation. Politics is a social activity and clearly is practiced in the public domain, so it is not private or personal business. There is a wide spectrum of political involvement that ranges from very partisan participation, like card-carrying members of a political party; to non-partisan activities, which could be civic requirements like voting in an election. Importantly also politics is essentially a secondary profession, whereby it is an all-comers occupation that could be undertaken by persons of all professions; and for which there are limitless opportunities for entry and exit.

Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopaedia summarises the essence of the subject of politics, as follows:

- i. Politics .. is the process of making decisions** applying to all members of each group.
- ii. More narrowly, it refers to **achieving and exercising positions of governance to organize control over a human community**, particularly a state.
- iii. Politics is the study or practice of the distribution of power and resources** within a given community (a usually hierarchically organized population) as well as the interrelationship(s) between communities.
- iv. Politics is exercised on a wide range of social levels**, from clans and tribes of traditional societies, through modern local governments, companies and institutions up to sovereign states, to the international level.
- v. Politics can be formal or informal.** At the Informal level, Politics is understood as forming alliances, exercising power and protecting and advancing particular ideas or goals. Generally, this includes anything affecting one's daily life, such as the way an office or household is managed, or how one person or group exercises influence over another. Informal Politics is typically understood as everyday politics, hence the idea that "politics is everywhere".
- vi. Formal Politics refers to the operation of a constitutional system of government

and publicly defined institutions and procedures. Political parties, public policy or discussions about war and foreign affairs would fall under the category of formal politics. Many people view formal politics as something outside of themselves, but that which can still affect their daily lives.

The foregoing explanation on the concept and practice of politics should imprint on our minds the imperative of Christian participation in politics because the Kingdom of God also depends upon it! While it may be true that politics is the social process for advancing national physical development, but also it has definite impact on ALL aspects of life in society. Whosoever that stays out of it, does so at a great peril! From the cradle to the grave, anyone who doesn't get involved more directly than just indirectly, is far from influencing the critical context that engenders development in all spheres of life: Physical, Spiritual, Mental, Social, Environmental, etc.

Let's make a more graphic presentation of the sphere of influence of politics and politicians in Nigeria. Some Christians may suppose that participation in politics is being too worldly minded, but the modalities and manifestations of most of the issues of life are determined by politics; so also are the other crucial challenges of living, like:

- **The Cost of food and of Essential Provisions;**
- **The School Fees and Upkeep of Children and Wards;**
- **Transportation and Travelling costs;**
- **The cost of staying alive or of dying;**
- **The emigration of Nigerians to Libya with the consequence of their mindless torture and deaths on the Mediterranean Sea;**
- **The problem of insecurity, Boko Haram, or Fulani militia and the countless deaths of innocent people, that now occurs all over Nigeria;**
- **Your incomes as Teacher or Doctor, or Lawyer or Musician or Carpenter;**
- **The Fulani/ Islamic Agenda of the Buhari regime in Nigeria; etc.**

ALL these and many more are determined by what happens in the political arena!

When "wrong" people are in power and the "right" people are only protesting, analysing, criticising and complaining in their comfort zones, the status quo remains the same, until those "right" people who get involved in the political process can be God's answer to the challenges mentioned above.

Politics is the game that is played by ALL people in the society. Though it may be said to be dirty, it's so, when played by dirty people. However, it could also be clean, when played by good people. Kingdom-minded Christians must get involved in political groups or in other political movements, even if not necessarily in Political parties, although the political parties are very critical to every democracy. Anyone who feels too busy or too educated or too clean to get involved in the "dirty game" of politics should be ashamed of complaining about bad governance. When the competent and good people stay away from politics, then EXPECTEDLY, only the mediocres and bad people are left to run the affairs of the Nation or Society!! Is it now clear to you, that it is appropriate for Christians to get involved in politics? Therefore, make up your mind to either Stand Up and Speak Out or Sit Down and Shut Up; and Only Regret the Negative Consequences that would follow!

C. Strategic Participation

To proceed with the implication of the word strategic to our discussion on the participation of Christians in politics, first let's consider its dictionary meaning. Some of definitions are the following:

1. Relating to a general plan that is created to achieve a goal in war, politics, etc., usually over a long period of time, and which is useful or important in achieving a plan or strategy.

2. Relating to the identification of long-term or overall aims and interests and the means of achieving them;

3. Something of great importance especially to the future or outcome of something"; or "relating to or showing the use of a plan or method to achieve a goal;

The synonyms (or words similar in meaning) to strategy are: planned, calculated, deliberate, tactical, politic, judicious, prudent, clever, shrewd, well thought out, decisive, fatal, fateful, all-important, central, critical, crucial, essential, key, pivotal, seminal, vital, big, consequential, earth-shaking, earth-shattering, eventful, historic, important, major, material, meaningful, momentous, monumental, much, significant, substantial, tectonic, weighty, distinctive, exceptional, impressive, outstanding, prominent, remarkable, valuable, worthwhile, and worthy; while the antonyms (or opposites) are: Inconsequential, inconsiderable, insignificant, little, minor, negligible, slight, small, trifling, trivial, unimportant, paltry, petty and worthless.

The implication of the foregoing is that there is the need to for strategic planning for Christian's participation in politics, if the biblical objectives of "the will of God to be done on earth, as it is done in heaven" would be achieved and the methods for achieving them also clearly-forth. The same way that the Church collectively or Christians individually plan for evangelism and membership growth, so also should such energy and efforts be put into the pursuit of God's purpose in enthroning the kingdom of God on the political platform in our land and ensuring the reign of righteousness and justice. These can only be undertaken by Christians who carry the Spirit of God in their hearts and are willing to be guided into God's purpose or their lives and for the Church.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

A starting point to consider the reason for the participation of Christians in politics is to establish the purpose of governments in the first place, which are said to be three (3) main objectives. These are:

A. To maintain social order through providing leadership for every person in society to undertake their activities without any hinderance; Governments are fundamentally about providing leadership, and anybody who occupies any office of government does so to lead the rest of the people into a secured future.

B. To provide public social services, which otherwise cannot be undertaken by private individuals or interests.

C. To secure lives and property, such that there would be orderliness and social justice and equality before the law for both the high and the low in society.

Given the above functions of governments, the question every Christian should be asking is, who is then more capable to undertake these functions other than a Christian? The Bible's instruction about Christians individually and collectively, to provide leadership, is that: *"You are the salt of the world."* And *"You are the light of the world."* And further that: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13,14&16). Where else can these be demonstrated better than in the context of politics and governance? Therefore, Christians should be in politics and governance to Serve God and His Humanity!

4. BIBLICAL MODELS OF "CHRISTIAN" PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

There are several biblical models that demonstrate for us God's way or method of raising men and women who will be used as His instruments to establish His kingdom on earth through the political platform. Two examples from the scriptures will be considered here, because time and space will fail us to examine the stories of others like the several kings of Judah and Israel who brought revival and restoration in their times; Nehemiah the Governor, who rebuilt the broken walls of Jerusalem; Daniel and his friends in Babylon, through several regimes, brought the knowledge and fear of God in a heathen land; Queen Esther and Mordecai, who God used to save the Jews in captivity, etc.

A. The kingship of David, the son of Jesse:

As background to the emergence of David, the son of Jesse, as king over Israel, was first the request by the elders of Israel to prophet Samuel saying, *"Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* (1 Sam 8:5). The dialogue that prophet Samuel had with the elders (1 Sam 8:6-9) was very instructive, and God allowed it, however with severe consequences for the people (see also 1 Sam 10:19):

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, *"Give us a king to judge us."* So, Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, *"Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day – with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behaviour of the king who will reign over them."*

Secondly, when Saul was anointed to be king (1 Sam 10:1), he was *"changed into another man"*, and *"God gave him another heart."* (1 Sam 10:6,9); but sadly, just after two years as king (1 Sam 13:1 f) Saul failed God by acting *"foolishly, in not keeping the commandment of the Lord."* Thus, God said to Samuel to inform king Saul (in 1 Sam 13:13,14) that: *"For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."* Thereafter, God commanded Samuel (in 1 Sam 16:1) to anoint a son from the house of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, (who turned-out to be David); who did not need emergency consecration like his elder brothers who God had rejected, since God had found him - David *"a man after His own heart."*

Samuel, the prophet, was God's instrument for the enthronement of the man after

God's own heart on the political platform. The emergence of David as the king of Israel, then shows that when it pleases God to give to a nation a political leader who shall be dedicated to accomplishing His purpose in the land, such a development does not just happen by wishful thinking or by the manipulations of men or human institutions; but by the conscious devotion of the people of God, who will humble themselves, and pray and seek His face, and God will heal their land. (2 Chron. 7:14). Thus, we note the application that through God's guidance and the humble pleadings of His people, a leader "after the heart of God" would come to the throne; and the land would enjoy a season of peace and godly rule, and an enduring socio-economic and political environment of prosperity, justice and good governance.

In our present day also, there is so much to learn from the processes that led to the kingship of David. The suitable king (a man after God's heart) was chosen to administer God's purpose in the land, along with a cabinet of capable men. But the office of the Prophet (Clergy/Priest) - called and commissioned by God, which was started by Samuel, is that which was charged with executing God's purpose in the selection of a king over the land. Samuel the Prophet was the one who guided the emergence of the king, and who also had oversight over the tenure of the kings, and such continued throughout the reign of the kings of Israel.

B. The emergence of Stephen and the other Deacons, who waited on tables, in Acts 6:1-7:

There arose a certain disturbing situation among the group of disciples which necessitated the Apostles - the leadership of the body of Christ, who discerned this negative development and who brought godly counsel as what was to be done to address the situation that had become a distraction to the expansion of the Kingdom of God. The story of the early church in *Acts 6:1-7*, shows the symbiotic relationship between the leadership of the Church with "*those who waited on tables*": the elected and appointed representatives, on the political platform. After setting out the criteria for the selection of "*those to wait on tables*", the congregation accepted, selected/elected seven and presented them to the Apostles, "*who prayed and laid hands on them*". Then, that disturbing situation died down, the word of God spread, and the number of disciples were multiplied greatly.

From this story, a crucial application is that all the players on the political platform, by whatever name they were called and at whatever level they served: Councillors, Local Government Council Chairmen; State Legislators and Governors at the States' level; including the President and the National Legislators at the National level; are fundamentally performing the function of "*waiting on tables*". Thus, the leadership of the body of Christ needs to listen to God, and be discerning to give guidance and direction on how "select/elect" any of the members onto the political platform, who have the same "qualifications" as Stephen and the other seven in that Acts 6 story. Thereafter, there should be a symbiotic relationship between the leadership of the church and those who wait on tables - who are to be prayed for and "hands laid on them" (commissioned), for them to accomplish the purpose of God on the political platform.

5. SOME PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES AND PROBLEMS OF CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS.

There are certain perceptions about politics (both negative and positive) of among Christians, which have influenced their behaviour either with respect to their

participation or withdrawal from politics, which could be broadly analysed. The following are only general categorizations of these perceptions, with the possibility that there could be wide “opinions” within and between them.

A. Escapism - The first dominant perception among Christians/the Church, is that politics is a dirty game, and Christians should have nothing to do with it, and Christians should avoid it! Thus, as a result of this perception, most Christians in Nigeria, either individually or the body of Christ corporately, have shied away or keep a distance from politics generally or the issues of partisan participation.

B. Conformism - This perception allows some efforts at participation, but the more compelling reasoning is for participants to be “like the joneses”. Whereas it is a healthy perception that Christians should participate in all aspects of the political life, godly counsel however, would be to seek God’s direction as to when, where and how? It would be a wrong sentiment to just participate because others in the society are in it; claiming that “if you can’t beat them, join them”. Thus, some Christians engage in politics like the people of the world - on their terms and dictates, (especially in matters of funding and strategic support).

C. Opportunism - This perception is similar like the sentiment immediately above. However, the wrong sentiment here is the tendency to depend or promote factions and fractions, as the basis for participation, and the primary consideration is that it’s the turn of our “group”, (which could be a denomination, tribe, clan, LGA, State, Region, etc). So, the Christian that plunges into participation, ignores godly principles and counsel, as alluded to above, to seek God’s direction as to when, where and how?

D. Reformism - This we believe is a correct perception, where a Christian gets involved in politics with the correct mindset: the desire to accomplish the purpose of God and to bring down His kingdom; and for His will to be done on earth. However, with this worldview, there are some critical issues in the field of politics that are ignored or the lack of knowledge keeps the Christian participant unable to “*Let [their] your light so shine among men (Matt 5:16).*” The following are some of the missing gaps (which are not in any way exhaustive):

i. Has no Spiritual or Strategic Team - One critical omission of Christians today, whether on the political platform or not is the imperative of discipleship. That is why we consider it absolutely important that the necessary and sufficient definition of a Christians must include a lifestyle of being disciplined and also engaging in discipleship. Any Christian that is called unto the political platform but is not being disciplined is a disaster that is waiting to happen. This was at the heart of the lack of discipleship in the preparation of Moses, who had to run away from Egypt when he was questioned by a fellow Israelite, who said to him “*Who made you a prince and a judge over us?*” (*Exodus 2:14*). Being in discipleship is a necessary preparation to provide resources for the spiritual environment, but not sufficient to provide an accountability platform. There would be need to empower a strategic team, of knowledgeable and matured brethren from different backgrounds and persuasions, as an accountability measure who will serve for planning and for evaluation of developments on the field.

ii. Has no adequate Training or Preparation - As a consequence, when such a person gets to a public office, often becomes adventurist, degenerates into corrupt lifestyle, and compromises on his Christian values and even the fundamental tenets of the political system.

iii. Makes new friends and associates in the political arena who are ungodly - and because of the other foregoing reasons, very soon loses his Christian-ness, and so soon in the manner of a downward spiral, losses his Christian distinctiveness and gradually end up a casualty!

Because of the negative perceptions about politics that condition the participation of Christians, a serious shortcoming is the absence of wholesome Christian lifestyle and Biblical worldview by Christians who get into political leadership positions, so far, in Nigeria. For example, although the 1966 military coup and counter coup produced two Christian military leaders on the two opposing sides, the nation went to war with led by the two Christians. Almost 90% of the soldiers on both sides that fought in the war were Christians, just as almost 90% of the victims that were killed during the war or their properties destroyed, were Christians. Then in 1973, under a most inexplicable policy, the government took over all the hospitals and schools established by Christian Missions or Churches, even in an era when the country was awash with oil money and could have afforded to establish more government schools and hospitals.

Thereafter, from 1975 up to the present, Christians, individually and the Church corporately, has continued to witness systematic absolute and relative deprivations. It was during this period that Nigeria lost its secular status and Islam was given prominence by Constitutional provision, policies and actions of government. One of such actions was the decision to upgrade the observer status of Nigeria into full time membership of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) during one of the military regimes. Since then, Nigeria has been visible in Islamic organisations across the World. Islamic banking appears to have come to stay in the country. Even when Nigeria came under the leadership of the members of the body of Christ, from 1999 and 2010, yet the controversy over the status of Christian Religious Studies in the country's school curriculum had its roots in regime of a Christian President. Is it not noteworthy that a very significant percentage of Christians who held elected or appointed public offices, or played a leading role in the affairs of Nigeria from pre independence to date, were not Kingdom minded? They might have been products of genuine missionary endeavours and sacrifices, but they lacked the understanding of the Biblical principles of governance. They were often guided or propelled by humanism, self-preservation or political correctness. This explains their conformist nature while in government and often times lack the boldness to rise to the occasion where and when the Church comes under attack. At most times, whatever they do is to please the world.

Why did all these happen? Where were we as Christians and Leaders? We certainly slept while the enemy went to work. Our "sleep" is reflected in the following attitudes:

- 1. Ignorance:** This stems from the misconception that Christians are not of this world. And should therefore not be entangled in the affairs of this world.
- 2. Fear of defilement:** Similar to (1) above, some Christians whom God has even placed in places of responsibility shy away from exercising the powers bestowed on them for fear of defilement. Many who feel politics is "dirty" easily seek the escape route because they don't want to be defiled as they are not "cut out" for politics;
- 3. Delayed expectations:** Many Christians get frustrated after several attempts to be relevant or exert influence in the political sphere and conclude that it is not possible

for a Christian to “make it in politics “. Indeed, they take solace in the saying that “hope deferred makes the heart sick.”

4. Lack of institutional support by the Church: Many Christians go into politics with a sense that they are entitled to be supported by Christians and by the Church corporately. So, when support from the institutional Church or fellow brethren is not forth coming, they feel abandoned. Conversely also, fellow believers and the Church corporately do not see the need to strategically support one of their own, who they know that by the grace of God he will work hard to uphold biblical principles of righteousness and justice in Office. Indeed, rarely has there been a “Christian Constituency” that promotes Christians in politics.

5. Lack of financial support: Most Christians cannot afford financial support even for basic logistics, so they look up to other sources that end up tainting their Christian testimony. And given the over emphasis of the use of money in the polity, especially for political activities, a lot of pressure is exerted on the Christian politician both before, while in office or even after. This has been a huge deterrent to participation in politics.

6. THE STRATEGIC PARTICIPATION OF CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS: MODALITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Church in Nigeria, severally and collectively has not hitherto decisively responded in any positive manner to the critical issue of executing God’s promptings in the area of politics and the political platform. Over time, when the church gets interested in some of its members that venture into politics, even for the correct reasons, such interest is so that it can collect “some returns” and other crumps that fall from the ‘masters’ table from them. However, perhaps the time has come for the body of Christ, generally or better still, that the clan of the sons of Issachar (*1 Chronicles 12:32*) – “*who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*”; should respond appropriately to become God’s instrument to cause His will to be manifested in the political arena. The following strategic actions could be undertaken:

A. Pray: Regularly both Corporately and individually, focused on the issue of participation on political platform. (*1Tim. 2:1-4; Rom. 13:1-7*)

B. Plan: The Church (at whatever level: District, LGA, State, Regional or National) could empower a team of knowledgeable disciples (from different political tendencies) to study developments and regularly inform the Church about currents developments. In this way the Church can speak-out from a position of knowledge and wisdom and could then undertake long-term strategic Planning!

C. Provoke: Even when a deep conviction was brought upon the Prophet Isaiah about his sinful condition and of the people, (*Is 6:8*), God still challenged him saying: “*whom will I send and who will go for us?*” We should “*watch and pray*”; and when God brings a prophetic message through a “trustworthy” vessel, we should be obedient - listen to our “*children of Issachar*” (*1 Chron. 12:32*). A further admonition in *Hebrews 10:24-25* would be worth considering:

“Discover creative ways to encourage others and to motivate them towards acts of compassion, doing beautiful works as expressions of love. This not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing. In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate that day dawning.” (The Passion Translation).

D. Be Strategic: When God gives insight about what to do, the Church should do the needful - support and send its “first eleven” into the political platform. (Like it sent its “first eleven” into the Missionary field according to *Acts 13:1-3*). There should also be effective apparatuses or mechanisms for a mutually accountable relationships with all such “Ambassadors” of the Church, that are deployed into the political platform.

Given that the tenure provisions of Nigeria’s constitution is a 4-year electoral cycle, then 2021 maybe an auspicious time to seriously embark on some crucial strategic steps either in a few pilot states or even nationally. Or even if the next general elections in 2023 maybe said to be too close, it would still be needful for Christians individually and the Church corporately, to strategically trust God as to what to do, when and how? The future of Nigeria which is definitely in God’s hand and not in the hands of politicians!

7. THE GLOBAL CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE: “WHOM WILL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?”

We shall end the discussion by recalling that the Body of Christ in Nigeria had contributed immensely to the advancements in Nigeria, even before the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914. Indeed, the Church, as led by the missionaries continued to have a significant impact on the affairs of the country, even when in 1973, a conscious decision was made pursuant to the Indigenisation Decree to handover leadership to the Nigerian people. The Church had made deliberate efforts to train teachers, nurses, scientists, etc; but sadly, there was no such deliberateness in raising Christians to provide leadership in politics and governance! Christians who came into such positions were largely by “accident” or presumed personal “hard work”. That is why it is not surprising that a lot Christians who have served at different Offices and levels of government from 1960 to date, have not appreciated their roles in enthroning Christian values, as well as frustrating the “Islamisation” “and Arabisation” of Nigeria through government policy. In some instances, Christians in leadership were even used to carry out such policies that today threaten the freedom and capacity of the Church to fulfil the Great Commission.

As the crucial issues of politics and governance in Nigeria stand today in 2021, the same forces of evil which have continued to threaten the gains and positive advancements of the gospel, have virtually brought the country to a political precipice and a real danger of reversing these successes. What is worst is the spectre of a pogrom and the dismemberment of the nation. And there is no gainsaying the fact, that the one very effective weapon that has been used by the enemies of the cross of Jesus Christ to unleash this devastation on the country, has been the instrumentality of Politics and Governance.

In a time like this, when political systems of the world are in turmoil, the demand is for men and women to arise, especially young people, who will serve God on the political platform. Nations today are in crises, like in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world, where the economy is in crisis, insecurity has become intractable, violent crimes appear to be the new normal, with pervasive “politically correct” global actions by the new age movement which clearly have adverse effects on the body of Christ, there cannot be a better time for Christians to arise.

Most nations of the world today are practicing the democratic system of government, which comes about through the electoral process. Sadly, Christians often make

dismissive remarks about participating in politics as unfit for those that are serious about following Christ. Unfortunately, this is more prevalent with the elites and the Youth, who belong to the largest electoral demography. This dismissive attitude to politics is not only wrong but a mistake which is unhelpful to the Church in many respects.

It has been noted that politics is a method which nations of the world utilise to run its affairs, but which God also uses to establish His will and purpose in the earth. Therefore, Christians are expected to be in the right locations to be able to fit into the purpose of God to bring transformation to the world. Just as Christians are expected to pay taxes *Rom13: 7* as a civic duty, so are they also expected to partake in politics or political processes.

To underscore the importance of Christian participation in politics, whose central preoccupation is the struggle for power to control governance, it has to be noted that every law or decision in the political system is a product of somebody's judgment about what is good or what is bad. For example, there is a bill already before the National Assembly in Nigeria on the use of hijab in our schools. To the sponsors of this audacious bill, it is a good one as it seeks to impose an Islamic dress code in the country's school system. But to the Christians who are opposed to the bill, it is a bad one. This is the time the Church cannot afford to be complacent.

This brings to mind the story of Esther so that we can further understand why it is imperative for Christians to participate in politics. When a decree was signed to exterminate all the Jews, it was somebody's judgment (the sponsor of the decree) of what was good but which was bad for the Jews who were the targets. We know how Esther and her uncle Mordecai responded. Mordecai warned Esther thus:

Don't think in your heart that you will escape in the King's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relieve and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the Kingdom for such a time like this" *Esth. 4:13-14*.

Esther's response was swift, bold, fearless and decisive. She took steps to shoot down the decree against all odds with a vow: "*if I perish, I perish*". Esther was just at the right location and she effectively used it to accomplish the will of God to save the Jews. The Bible records that the decree was not only rewritten according to the dictates of Jews, and that the main sponsor of the decree, Haman, was hanged. It is therefore not only imperative for Christians to participate in politics, they must also see it as a platform to execute the Kingdom agenda, brought to bear with boldness, fearlessness and decisiveness.

Therefore, can we rise from this Congress with a deep reflection and resolution to respond to God's call, which was first made to the Prophet Isaiah saying: "Whom will I send, And Who will go for Us?" And what do you think should be the implication of this to individual Christians and the Corporate body of Christ in Nigeria?

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+234 703 03636 59

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THE PEACE HOUSE PUBLISHING TEAM
Peace House, Gboko, P.O. Box 971,
19 Gyado Hospital Rd, G.R.A, Gboko, Benue State.