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Appropriating John Stott's Holy-Worldliness Concept to Deficiencies in the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa: Viewpoints from Nigeria

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Abstract

This study applies John Stott's concept of 'holy-worldliness' to God's call upon Christians from the world, and his sending them out to be immersed in the affairs of the world as Christ's ambassadors, by localising Christ's political curriculum to Africa. Accordingly, the study engages examples generated from Nigeria. Two research questions guided this study. Question 1: what are the basic elements of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, in the context of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa? Question 2: how can deliberating on the deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, as currently formulated, be facilitated by an understanding of John's Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, towards reformulating the curriculum in question, using examples from Nigeria? The study concludes by calling on Christians in Africa to start thinking of crafting a 'Christian Political Agenda for Africa', as the Christian political version of the African Union's *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (2013).

Introduction

This study appropriates John Stott's concept of 'holy-worldliness', expressed by God calling Christians from the world to be holy and distinct and also sending them out to be immersed in the affairs of the world as Christ's

ambassadors, which for this study means localising Christ's political curriculum to Africa. The term 'holy-worldliness', as presented in Stott's book *The Contemporary Christian* (1992), expresses this concept. The concept represents Stott's way of looking at the theological imperative for the church. It is an imperative for the church, particularly at the local church evangelism level, to understand itself just as it is necessary for it to organise itself (structurally), express itself (by articulating the gospel message with scriptural fidelity and human sensitivity), and be itself (as the living embodiment of God's kingdom and new society). Stott captures the concept of holy-worldliness in the four component parts of the book concerned: secular challenges to the church, evangelism through the local church, dimensions of church renewal, and the church's pastors. Accordingly, this study draws extracts from these components using an approach relevant to facilitating a working comprehension of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

An immediate question to address as it concerns intermixing Stott's concept of holy-worldliness with the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is whether, indeed, Christ has a political curriculum or any political agendum at all. A quick look into the New Testament is enough to say he does! Moreover, he even reveals this curriculum and/or agendum in a way that has become popular: the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13, NIV). In reciting the Lord's Prayer, Christians everywhere say 'your kingdom come', and 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven', for example. The Lord's Prayer is discussed further elsewhere in this study; however, simply stated, the political curriculum of Christ is to bring about the reality of God's kingdom, even on earth, as it is already in heaven.

The need for relating Christ's political curriculum to Africa hinges itself on the general reason for having a political curriculum of Christianity, irrespective of on which continent of the earth Christians find themselves. There are at least five ways to consider this reason; these are: the contemporaneity of Christianity, consciousness of the contemporary world, setting the agenda for the world, responding to real questions of life, and the exordium for reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity.

Contemporaneity of Christianity

The political curriculum of Christianity necessitates itself, in Christian history, by the fact that followers of Jesus Christ cannot avoid viewing themselves as contemporary Christians, if they really desire to serve God's purpose in the generation they find themselves in. However, what does it mean to be a contemporary Christian? Simply put, it is to live in the present, to move with the times, and at the same time ensuring that the present is enriched to the fullest extent possible by knowledge of the past and an expectation of the future (Stott 1992:11). Surely, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8; NIV). Although Christianity is an ancient faith, it is at the same time contemporary, original, orthodox, biblical, and 'sensitively related to the modern world' (Stott 1992:15). A consequence of Christianity being contemporary, putting into perspective the need to relate the political curriculum of Christianity to Africa, is the fact that African Christians cannot afford to continue to be politically passive or irrelevant. Otherwise, it would be that Christians have implicated themselves in the futile attempts by the questioner on transcendence, which seek to either eliminate God from his own world (Stott 1992:223), or Christians have agreed that their God has been dribbled out of the political game in Africa.

Christian Consciousness of the Contemporary World

One of the greatest prerequisites for implementing the political curriculum of Christianity is for the church to have a sensitive awareness of the groaning world around it. For, indeed, 'the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time' (Romans 8:22). Relating this to Christians as true servants of Jesus Christ, Christians, just like Jesus, must not only keep their eyes open to human needs, and their ears tuned to the cries of anguish; they must respond passionately and constructively to people's pain (Stott 1992:222). The political curriculum of Christianity must be seen as a response that more effectually addresses this pain.

Setting the Agenda for the World

The political curriculum of Christianity necessitates itself via the position of the church as God's agenda, as it were, for the world. The world cannot keep on setting the agenda for the church, as it appears to be doing; allowing this to happen in reality is considerable as amounting to a dereliction of duty by the church. In a situation like this, Apostle Paul would sound this call to order:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 8:2)

Accordingly, we must declare and do what God obligates us to declare and do; 'we are not to pay obsequious homage to the world' (Stott 1992:222). In line with God's directive to the church, Christians are to implement the political curriculum of Christianity from the driver's seat and with full grasp of the steering, until they actively facilitate transformational human development.

Responding to Real Questions of Life

The political curriculum of Christianity necessitates itself by the need for the church to understand and respond to the real existential questions that are emerging continuously. Everywhere in Africa, and globally, the frustration, rage, disorientation, and despondency among the people is so massive that the church, if it possesses the authenticity of a body constituted of Christ's disciples, can only weep with those who weep irrespective of their religious affiliation or non-affiliation. These are also questions of legitimacy. If it is legitimate, the church must develop and implement a political curriculum of Christianity which seeks to address, holistically, these existential questions. Otherwise, as a church,

we would run the risk (as has often been said) of answering questions nobody is asking, scratching where nobody is itching, supplying goods for which there is no demand – in other words, of being totally irrelevant, which in its long history the church has often been. (Stott 1992:222)

Exordium for the Political Curriculum of Christianity

As a further preparation towards discussing the deficiencies, components, and delimiting matters for reformulating the political curriculum of Christianity, a preliminary statement on two sequential steps is necessary. Two research papers represent the steps, with this paper featuring the first step. The paragraph below gives a preview of the steps.

First step, this represents the first paper. It concerns planning to reformulate the political curriculum of Christianity by understanding the deficiencies in the curriculum as it is, although not necessarily articulated. A relevant paper in the study discusses this step using the topic 'Appropriating John Stott's Holy-Worldliness Concept to *Deficiencies* in the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa: Viewpoints from Nigeria'. Second step, this represents the second paper. It concerns identifying components that are necessary to reformulate the political curriculum of Christianity. A relevant paper in the study discusses this step using the topic 'Appropriating John Stott's Concept of Holy-Worldliness towards *Reformulating* the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa: Components from Nigeria'.

Propositional Statement

In consistence with Stott's concept of holy-worldliness as appropriated to politics, this study proposes that, consequent upon God's call upon Christians from the world to be God's holy people distinctively identified as the church, the church in Africa is the primary political structure from which Christians are also sent out to be immersed in the political affairs of Africa, to deliver the political curriculum of Christianity specified to Africa, as Christ's ambassadors, towards moving Africa from the Africa Africans want to the Africa God wants. Encompassed in this proposition is that understanding how the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is currently formulated is necessary to appropriating Stott's concept of holy-worldliness for reformulating, and establishing caveats for, the curriculum in question, using examples from Nigeria.

Purpose of Study

This study has a purpose with two components. Firstly, the study considers the basic elements of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness in the context of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. Secondly, the study considers how deliberating on deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, as currently formulated in null curricular terms, can be facilitated by an understanding of John's Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, towards reformulating the curriculum in question, using examples from Nigeria. The

preceding two components of the purpose of the study form the basis for the research questions below.

Research Questions

Two research questions guide this study:

1. What are the basic elements of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness in the context of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa?
2. How can deliberating on the deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa as currently formulated be facilitated by an understanding of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, with the aim of reformulating the curriculum in question, using examples from Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

This study will benefit politicians, churches, theological schools, and curriculum specialists in Africa. The study will also be profitable to the generality of participants in the democratic processes of Africa. The recommendations emanating from this study present these benefits. Accordingly, beneficiaries of this study, particularly in Africa, will find themselves able to relate with various examples from Nigeria, engaged to drive home fundamental points of the study.

Delimitation of Study

Firstly, the study limits itself to Stott's ideas in the book *The Contemporary Christian*, but with focus on Part Four of the book, within which he discusses the concept of 'holy-worldliness'. This means the study does not necessarily concern itself with other works of Stott. Secondly, the study primarily engages examples from Nigeria, although supplementary examples from other African countries are engaged at random; generating most of the illustrations from Nigeria is simply because it is sometimes presupposed that Nigeria is not only the giant and problem of Africa, but is also the potential solution to the

problems of Africa. Thirdly, while the study advocates for the active engrossment of all Christians in Africa in politics, this advocacy is tied strongly to 'official politics', that is, politics targeted at occupying political positions; more details on this term are given in the operational definition of terms. Fourthly, party politics largely dominates political affairs in Africa; accordingly, this study concentrates almost exclusively on politics that are directly or indirectly connected with party politics. Fifthly, the study locates the term 'political curriculum' in the general perspectives of curriculum, null curriculum, societal curriculum, and rhetorical curriculum, as necessary components in its definition; therefore, these interconnected terms are also defined operationally.

Operational Definition of Terms

Main terms in this study are politics, official politics, curriculum, societal curriculum, rhetorical curriculum, and political curriculum of Christianity. By definition:

Politics: After having analysed the many faces of politics and the difficulties attached to defining it, Stephen D. Tansey and Nigel Jackson have made a summary, which this study adopts to represent its usage of the term *politics*. Accordingly, the term is considered this way:

Thus 'politics' encompasses a broad range of situations in which people's objectives vary, but in which they work together to achieve those aims they have in common as well as competing where aims conflict. Both co-operation and competition may involve bargaining, argument and coercion. Politics may often be more an art than a science, and the art of politics may often be to see the potential for alliances rather than antagonisms amongst differing groups. (Tansey and Jackson 2008:7)

Official Politics: The term *official politics* is engaged at this point to refer to political activities targeted at occupying elective political office. Some examples of elective political offices are president, governor, local government

chairperson, senator, councillor, or party chairman. Some examples of appointive political offices are minister or commissioner.

Curriculum: *Curriculum* refers to the encapsulation of everything considerable as a purposeful learning experience (Onwuka 1996:3). However the learning experience should be justifiable in educational terms based on particular educational criteria set for such justification (Kelly 2010:3).

Null Curriculum: At some points, this study compares the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa with the null curriculum. So, what is the null curriculum? In simple terms, not to teach or emphasise something is the same as teaching or emphasising that it is not significant. This is the null curriculum (Dogara 2018:64-65).

Societal Curriculum: This is generally defined as the massive, ongoing, informal curriculum of family, peer groups, neighbourhoods, church organisations, occupations, mass media, and other agencies of socialisation. These agencies of socialisation play a noteworthy role in educating all of us all through our lives (Dogara 2018:64).

Rhetorical Curriculum: This covers ideas, speeches by public officials, and reports from policy-makers, school officials, administrators, or politicians. It also covers studies of publicised works offering updates in pedagogical knowledge (Dogara 2018:65-66).

Political Curriculum of Christianity: This study constructs a definition of the political curriculum of Christianity from the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. It is a set of all the political activities that God has authorised, empowered, and equipped those who answered Christ's call to heavenly citizenship to perform as ambassadors of his kingdom on earth, while continuously deriving knowledge and guidance primarily from his word, in order to make life on earth superlative in all ramifications until a sublime taste of heaven is experienced on earth, as it is in heaven. Knowledge and guidance to effectively perform these activities are also derived, at a secondary level, from the societal curriculum, the rhetorical curriculum, and in the contemporaneity of Christianity in its interaction with the world.

Methodology of Study

The study engages a qualitative research methodology via an approach that allows mixing documentary analysis with systematic theology when addressing research questions. Foundationally, the researcher studied Stott's *The Contemporary Christian* as a primary document, in synergy with relevant scriptural passages, systematically, to facilitate a theological grasp of the concept of holy-worldliness. The legal material engaged to support this foundation is the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999).

Procedure of Study

This study occurred in four steps. These are, firstly, general introduction, secondly, explanation of methodology and procedure of the study, thirdly, discussion of research questions, fourthly, conclusion with recommendations attached.

Discussion of Research Questions

Basic Elements of John Stott's Concept of Holy-Worldliness in the Context of the Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa

Research question one: what are the basic elements of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, in the context of the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa?

The study responds to this research question by analysing three component parts of the concept of 'holy-worldliness' as used by John Stott. A fuller understanding of the concept necessitates responding to at least three questions. What does it mean to be holy? What does it mean to be worldly? What is holy-worldliness?

Meaning of Being Holy

Stott discusses the term 'holy' in connection to God calling out the church from the world and setting it apart to belong to him, and to worship him. The church is distinct in all dimensions of truth, holiness, mission, and unity (Stott 1992:257-269); Jesus outlined these elements in John 17 when he prayed for himself, his apostles, and the whole church. The Nicene Creed also recognised

these elements as markers of the church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; “catholic” includes the concept of embracing all truth, and “apostolic” includes the vision of being committed to the apostolic mission’ (Stott 1992:269). This concept of ‘holy’ differs from what Stott calls ‘a false understanding of holiness’ (1992:262) or ‘a form of Christian pharisaism or separatism’ (1992:263) in the church which, like the Pharisees, holds that mere contact with sinful and immoral people would bring contamination; therefore, to be holy, withdrawal from the world becomes imperative (Stott 1992:263).

Meaning of Being Worldly

Stott discusses the term ‘worldly’ from an apostolic view of the church. In other words, Christ sends out the church into the world to bear him witness, and it goes out boldly in this mission of witness and service (Stott 1992:269). In accordance with this mission, the church immerses itself in the life of the world, but is not tainted or possessed by the world in the process. This concept of ‘worldly’ contrasts with the way of the Sadducees, which is conformity; for the Pharisees it is total withdrawal. The Sadducees collaborated with the Roman government and sought to maintain the political status quo (Stott 1992:263). While the motive for collaborating with the political system could be good, for example in building bridges of friendship with ‘publicans and sinners, as Jesus’ did (Stott 1992:263), it was clear that Jesus’ values and standards also set him apart from them. Therefore, Stott’s concept of ‘worldly’ considers the church as immersed in the life of the world, without participating in, or facilitating, its agenda.

Meaning of Holy-Worldliness

The question at this point is what does it mean to be holy-worldly. Stott responds to this question, taking into consideration the church, as a body composed of people redeemed in Christ. It is noticeable that in abridging a few points from Stott’s response below the points intersect with each other.

Firstly, to be holy-worldly is to have a double identity. Stott (1992:243-244) rightly notes that the term ‘holy-worldliness’ was captured by Alec Vidler to express the double identity of the church (Vidler 1957:95-112). Stott uses a legal term, ‘summon’, to say that God has subpoenaed the church to be ‘holy’ (distinct from the world) and ‘worldly’ (in the sense of relinquishing other-

worldliness and becoming immersed in the life of the world, instead of assimilating the values of the world) simultaneously (1992:243-244).

Secondly, to be holy-worldly is to make a double refusal. One of the questions Stott raises to give a background to this aspect of holy-worldliness is this:

How can we relate the Word to the world, understanding the world in the light of the Word, and even understanding the Word in the light of the world? (1992:27).

Stott notes that relating the word to the world or vice versa is possible via what he calls a 'double refusal'. On the one hand, Christians cannot become so absorbed in the word to the extent of escaping into it, and preventing it from confronting the world. On the other hand, Christians must also refuse to become so engrossed in the world that they conform to it instead of subjecting it to judgment under the word. Stott calls for 'double listening', listening both to the word and to the world, as the right response to double refusal (1992:27).

Thirdly, to be holy-worldly is to be a double listener. Although Stott discusses listening to God, listening to each other, and listening to the world, his emphasis is on listening to God and listening to the world. This is what he calls double listening. For 'it is only through the discipline of double listening that it is possible to become a "contemporary Christian"' (Stott 1992:27). Accordingly, double listening is the ability to listen to the voice of God through scripture and the voice of the world (all kinds of people around us) at the same time in order to understand their relationship to each other, although the two voices are often contradictory (Stott 1992:29).

The political curriculum of Christianity cannot be implemented if the double listening skills of Christians, as disciples of Christ, are not effectively engaged. Just as 'bad listeners do not make good disciples' (Stott 1992:101), they also cannot make noble Christian politicians. Sequel to this, Stott asks the question: 'To whom then shall we listen?' (1992:103). As already noted, there are two ways of responding to this question (Stott 1992:103-113). Firstly, Christians listen to God, principally through the scripture. By application, Christian politicians need to actively listen to God's word as living, active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating to the soul and spirit, and as judging the

thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12), in recognition that 'through his ancient Word God addresses the modern world' (Stott 1992:105) and that herein lies the ultimate guide to implementing the political curriculum of Christianity. Secondly, Christian disciples listen to the reverberating cries of the contemporary world. There are cries of hunger, anger, frustration, poverty, oppression, social injustice, sickness, insecurity, and all kinds of pains. Christian disciples involved in implementing the political curriculum of Christianity cannot turn a deaf ear to these cries, because their social conscience will keep reminding them of the day of reckoning:

If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered. (Proverbs 21:13)

Therefore, the capacity to commit to genuine listening, and on a sustainable basis, is a quality of democratic governance and statesmanship deficient in most politicians in Africa, whether Christian or non-Christian. However,

If democracy is government with the consent of the governed, then the governed have to be listened to. Otherwise, they cannot be deemed to have given their consent. (Stott 1992:108)

Christians in active politics cannot be said to be implementing the political curriculum of Christianity if this capacity is lacking in them.

Fourthly, to be holy-worldly is to make a double avoidance. The reality of the church as it lives in a world it does not belong to, and as it is sent to a place in which it is hated, best expresses the multi-faceted relationship of the church to the world. This relationship contrasts with the two wrong attitudes of 'withdrawal' and 'conformity', which the church must avoid. Unquestionably, for the church's mission in the world to be possible, it must avoid these two wrong attitudes. Clearly,

If we withdraw from the world, mission is obviously impossible, since we have lost contact. Equally, if we conform to the world, mission is impossible, since we have lost our cutting edge. (Stott 1992:264)

Fifthly, to be holy-worldly is to have a balanced ecclesiology. On the one hand, if the church is compromised and becomes something other than the 'the church', the holy and distinct people of God, then it has nothing to tell the world. On the other hand, if the church is not deeply 'in the world' (in its life and suffering), it has insulated itself and has nobody to serve. The church is called to be concurrently 'holy' and 'worldly'; 'Without this balanced biblical ecclesiology we will never recover or fulfill our mission' (Stott 1992:245).

Sixthly, to be holy-worldly is to be de-caged from Christian religiosity. Stott uses an example relatable to Africa for how religious activities every single day of the week have imprisoned Christians, as it were, in churches, instead of freeing them for witness in the world. He notes: 'Some zealous churches organize an over-full programme of Church-based activities. Something is arranged for every night of the week' (1992:246). Elsewhere, Stott refers to this form of zeal or piety as 'ghetto-like fellowship' which only amounts to a betrayal of Christ, because it effectively cuts Christians from non-Christians (1992:263). The church must exercise Christ's freedom from 'Christian' religiosity; Jesus prayed for his disciples to be protected from the evil one (John 17:15), but at the same time to remain in the world.

Seventhly, to be holy-worldly is to follow the example of Christ. Jesus himself left the sanctimony of his place with the Father, penetrated our world, assumed the full reality of being human, and fraternised with the common people. He did all these things without in any way or at any time compromising his own unique identity. Like Jesus Christ, Christians must penetrate other people's worlds (Stott 1992:244), the world of their thinking (by struggling to understand their misunderstandings of the gospel), the world of their feeling (by trying to empathise with their pain), and the world of their living (by sensing the humiliation of their social situation, whether poverty, homelessness, unemployment, or discrimination).

Understanding John Stott's Concept of Holy-Worldliness to Facilitate Deliberating on the Deficiencies in the Current Political Curriculum of Christianity in Africa

Research question two: how can deliberating on the deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa as currently formulated be facilitated by an

understanding of John Stott's concept of holy-worldliness, to reformulate the curriculum in question, using examples from Nigeria?

In juxtaposing Stott's concept of holy-worldliness with the current political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, various deficiencies are noticeable. Specifically, the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is deficient in the areas below, at a minimum.

Deficient in Definition

A way to define the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is to define it as a term with no definition. Politics just beats its drums and Christians simply participate in the dance, not necessarily as good dancers. But it is generally not possible for Christians, with their various affiliations, to say this is what Christian politics is in Africa. A few church bodies at random may have an articulated, although not necessarily comprehensive, description of politics-related matters for their membership, but even that is not prevalent enough to amount to a common designation of politics in African Christianity.

Deficient in Ownership

The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is not people-oriented. It lacks the general participation of the people at every stage. For example, even when Christian politicians in Nigeria decide to meet with the people, for the few times of meeting they usually concentrate on what politicians in Nigeria call the 'stakeholders' of a community, or they hold a 'town hall' meeting, or meet with elders and 'key stakeholders' in a church.

Generally, African politicians have also so encircled themselves with sycophants, powermongers, bootlickers, and people who will feed these politicians with what their ears are itching to hear that they do not go out of the standard protocol and bureaucracy to meet with the people who actually own them: artisans, market-women, teachers, drivers, mechanics, tailors, labourers, farmers, students, villagers, etcetera. Many times during general or state-level elections, leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria meet with politicians and decide the Christians' position, without grass-roots consultation or the definite consent of the Christians being governed. In summary, ordinary Christians in Africa do not own the political curriculum; it cannot be said to be implemented for them. Even in democratic terms, the

political curriculum of Christians in Africa is lacking; comparatively, Jesus fraternised with the common people.

Deficient in Distinctiveness

Another way of defining the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is to designate it as an indifferent curriculum. It is indifferent in the sense that Christians in politics have generally not acted in ways different from the average African or non-Christian politician. For example, in Nigeria, the way non-Christian politicians put their family members in strategic government positions in contravention of legal provisions and due process is the same way Christian politicians promote nepotism. Many Christian governors, government ministers, commissioners, heads of agencies, and members of federal and state lawmaking bodies in Nigeria are found together with non-Christians corruptly enriching themselves. While Christians need to be worldly (immersed in the world without participating in its agenda), Christian politicians in Nigeria are generally seen even in Christian circles as being worldly in the sense of belonging to the world.

Identifying with the pains of the poor is not their priority. Accordingly, Stott notes that:

the constant tendency of God's people was, and still is, to behave 'like the heathen', until nothing much seems to distinguish the church from the world, the Christian from the non-Christian, in convictions, values or standards. (1992:27)

Deficient in Purpose

It is almost impossible, even if somewhat possible, to clearly identify any specific vision, mission, mandate, or criterion attached to the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. Here are exemplary questions related to this: What are the Christian criteria for measuring political success in Nigeria? What are the criteria for measuring the success of Christian politicians in Nigeria? So even when some Christians in Nigeria complain in 2015, for example, that President Goodluck Jonathan was ineffective, there was no written or unwritten common text basis to support the complaint.

Deficient in Proactivity

Christians in Nigeria largely prefer to react to political events as such events unfold. For example, in 1986, Christians in Nigeria reacted during the regime of Ibrahim Babangida in claiming that Nigeria was being ‘smuggled’ into the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, although certainly that decision by Babangida further divided Nigeria along religious lines (Faluyi, Khan, and Akinola 2019:37). Again Christians in Nigeria reacted during the processes leading to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria (in the Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket, with Bola Tinubu as presidential candidate and Kashim Ibrahim as vice presidential candidate; both are Muslims) that Nigeria was about to be Islamised. In the extremes of these reactions, there were even a few instances of what could be called the ‘demonization of Islam’ (Meer 2010:81), purposed to condemn the Muslim-Muslim ticket. However, even if the supposed Islamising of Nigeria was in the agenda of Muslims in Nigeria, how should that be a problem to someone who does not have an agenda at all? If controlling the economy and key offices in the civil service and possessing political power, constitutional presence, inducement power, and instruments of propaganda are criteria for evaluating which religion possesses Nigeria, then it can be said without doubt that Nigeria has already (and has always) been Islamised. Reacting to Nigeria being an Islamic country (whereas it is already), reactivity, instead of proactivity, is a principal mark of Christian politics in Africa. However, what really matters is not whether Islam, capitalism, communism, democracy, monarchism, or any other ideologies possess the system, but whether the church as an embodiment of God’s kingdom and new society is presenting itself as an alternative political agenda for Africa.

Deficient in Unity

The political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is also marked by tribalism, ethnicity, sectionalism, denominationalism, and other divisive elements. Even Christians do not necessarily seek elective offices or cast votes on the basis of the politician’s competence, although the politician may be a Christian; in the case of Nigeria, any of these divisive elements forms the basis. Again, it is not a difficult thing in Nigeria to, on a regular basis, come across Christian politicians who prioritise some of the divisive elements in their political actions.

Deficient in Strategic Planning

Does the church in Africa have any political plan at all for strategically infiltrating the continent with the kingdom political agenda? What the church has now is a version of the null curriculum; in other words, the inability of the church in Africa to have a strategic political plan is equivalent to strategically planning to fail or communicating that making such a plan is not important.

The church in Africa has so far succeeded in erecting visible structures, establishing units across the nooks and crannies of Africa, and generally competing with the world on the latest trends, fashions, extravagance, opulence, and concentration of resources on a few. On the one hand, the membership of the church in Africa is suffering from all kinds of challenges (lack of food, lack of clean water, lack of good medical facilities or capacities to access such facilities, out-of-school children, insecurity, violations of fundamental rights, and general poverty). On the other hand, many churches in Africa do not care about the suffering of their members; many of these churches are occupied with building projects, physical upgrades, or acquisition of the latest technology. It is time churches in Africa started to concentrate, generally, on establishing businesses everywhere to empower people to live better lives, instead of concentrating finance on church buildings that only help in caging Christians from the outside world. Pending this kind of concentration, the church in Africa is yet to establish a reputation for itself as an alternative model (the kingdom-styled model) of politics.

Deficient in Superiority

It appears as if the church in Africa has destined itself to always remain in an inferior position, in the political scheme of things. A quick example is southern Kaduna State in Nigeria, which is a zone with an overwhelming Christian majority. In every round of politics it seems to be looking to occupy the position of deputy governor, or lacks the unity to strategically influence having a governor from the zone or its kind of governor from another zone, all the time using 'next time' or 'we have been shortchanged' or something similar for its political woes. Sequel to the British colonial legacy in Nigeria, southern Kaduna also seems to be a zone of inducements (for example, in the form of campuses of schools or lower-level schools) so as to create a sense of belonging in the political system for the zone, whereas the 'real deal' is usually in other zones where Christians are in the minority. The political curriculum of

Christianity in Africa is yet to have any definite Christian ideology, even where Christians are in the driver's seat (like in states or local governments where Christians are in the majority).

Deficient in Influence

The importance of influence in the political curriculum of Christianity particularly in Africa cannot be overemphasised. But, by observing the political affairs of some African countries, it is possible to say with confidence that Christians are not influential in politics. Using Nigeria as an exemplar, a question like this must be addressed: do Christians matter in politics in Nigeria? A former governor of Kaduna State, Nasir Elrufai, once declared that he did not need Christians of southern Kaduna to win an election, and he won. A situation like this also prompts the question: if Christians are important in the politics of Nigeria, why is Christianity not represented in the constitution whereas Islam and the Shari'a law are there? Why are there still laws and actions restricting Christian religious freedom, or the freedom of citizens to change religion, particularly in northern Nigeria? Why do schools in northern Nigeria exclude Christian religious studies in schools even when there are Christian students in such schools?

Deficient in Truth

Just like deception appears to be a trademark of politics globally, it has also been engaged, even sanctimoniously, by Christians in Africa, a continent with public displays of religion everywhere. The complaints of Muslims in Nigeria are everywhere on traditional news media as well as social media, specifically that the All Progressives Congress used the idea of a Muslim-Muslim presidential ticket (with Bola Tinubu as presidential candidate and Kashim Ibrahim as vice presidential candidate; both are Muslims) to deceive Muslims, particularly in northern Nigeria, to vote them into power in 2023. Similarly, Christian politicians in Nigeria are seen in churches, are even allowed access to the pulpits by the leadership of the church, to make all kinds of deceptive political campaign promises, including monetary pledges for various church projects, in order to attract votes from Christians. The lack of truth in the current political curriculum of Christianity in Africa is appalling.

Deficient in Critical Thinking

The study concerns itself with collective critical thinking by the church in Africa as an assembly of Christians on the continent. These Christians have been empowered by God to think critically, because they have the ‘mind of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Nigeria still comes to mind as having quick examples of deficient critical thinking politically. Mr Peter Obi, a Christian, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party during the 2023 general election in Nigeria, must be given credit for rolling out facts, figures, convincing analysis, critical reviews, and a well-articulated grasp of Nigeria’s challenges to support his manifesto *Our Pact with Nigerians* (Obi and Baba-Ahmed 2023) and campaign. However, while Obi visited many influential churches during the campaign season, as it were (some analyst said he did so for campaign reasons, just as Bola Tinubu also used the Muslim-Muslim strategy), generally available evidence shows that the church on its part did not actively engage him or the Labour Party (if it did at all) in serious interrogation of his track record, manifesto, and all that he stood for as a politician. This would have generated more critical thinking, to help him more in upgrading his political manifesto. Atiku Abubakar’s manifesto for the 2019 general election in Nigeria (Abubakar 2019:1-186) and All Progressives Congress party’s manifesto for Nigeria’s 2023 general election, *Renewed Hope* (All Progressives Congress 2023), could also have been better developed through more extensive critical engagements. On the other hand, Christian politicians, like others, are usually not seen consulting with people at the grassroots, except for a few dotted ‘stakeholders’ or in ‘town hall’ meetings.

It is rare to find a church in Nigeria studying the official budget of a government, political manifestos of politicians, constitutions of political parties, or the electoral laws (at least in the Sunday school or other specialised meetings). Critical thinking by the church should also mean deliberately checking the veracity of claims and promises by politicians in Africa. Drawing from the example of the church in Berea which ‘examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true’ (Acts 17:11), the church as ‘pillar and foundation of the truth’ (1 Timothy 3:15) also needs to keep examining the word and the world to keep politicians in check.

Deficient in Holy-Worldly Interconnections

While Muslim politicians in Africa must be commended for acting based on their belief of politics as an integral part of the Islamic faith, Christians are still stressed with too much debate as to the relationship between the two. In this stress, Christians need to know that putting a demarcating (which has historically become a debating) line between church and state does not mean extending that line to separate Christianity and politics. However, it means, among other things, that the church should never be identified with the state or be so remote from it that she cannot speak to it (Kore 2013:151).

Meanwhile, the attempt to separate Christianity and politics may not be unconnected to other attempts to demarcate between the sacred and the secular. In certainty,

There has been an essentializing of religion and religious practice as un- or anti-democratic, while secularity is characterized as politically and socially neutral and absolutely compatible with democracy. (Arthur, Gearon, and Sears 2010:4)

However, the principle of holy-worldliness holds that the church, although sacred, is sent out to be strategically immersed in all corners of the secular world, with politics in Africa being one of the most important corners. Stott would say 'It is important that we do not separate what God has joined' (Stott 1992:269).

Deficient in Ideology

At this point Christians in Nigeria do not have an articulated, comprehensible, publicly-accessible, documented or non-documented but describable, close-ended or open-ended, and theologically-supported common political agenda that can be referred to as the Christian political ideology. Likewise, political parties in Nigeria do not have ideologies that clearly distinguish them from each other, if they have ideologies at all, as in the example of American politics where the ideologies of the Republican Party and Democratic Party are openly different, although the 'typical citizen rarely thinks about politics in the systematic, philosophical manner characteristic of ideology' (Ethridge and Handelman 2010:58). Christ's prayer in John 17 for the unity of the church also

implies the necessity of a common political ideology. Although Christianity as a general name representing the practices of Christians is not necessarily an ideology, it has ideological components applicable to politics, as evident in expressing the mind of Christ to confront selfish, corrupt, shortsighted, narrow-minded reasoning and deceptive political eloquence (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Deficient in Structural Understanding

The term *structure* is popular in Nigerian party politics. It generally means having political party offices and leadership/leadership systems nationally and in states, local governments, and wards. It also means ability to hold conferences, conventions, elections, and campaigns, as approved in law, at all levels of a party and supported by the party. However, it is a misunderstanding to consider all these as constituting the primary political structure for the Christian politician.

The church, as God's kingdom on earth, is, consequently, the primary political structure for the Christian. The church is the place where the political curriculum of Christianity is theorised (ideologically), designed, constructed, developed, and delivered by engaging ancillary political structures. These ancillary structures of politics include political parties, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, community-based organisations, traditional leadership institutions, and other corporate bodies. While the church should not allow its primary call to tilt towards political affairs and campaigns, in structuring itself for holy-worldliness it must also structure itself for politics. For example, this means training, equipping, and supporting its members, without partiality but strategically for participation in politics with all its intricacies. Structuring the church for politics also concerns making it active in educating its members on political matters: the constitution, voter education, party politics, civic education, and so on; actually, nothing stops an organised church at any level from exploring the possibility of constituting a standing, non-partisan political affairs committee.

Conclusion: Summary

Listening is a pillar of the political curriculum of Christianity. For the Christian politician listening has an intricate connection with speaking (political

campaigns, declarations, and issuing various messages in texts), emotional intelligence, and political ethics. This connection is established in this appeal:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:19-22)

Just as ‘bad listeners do not make good disciples’ (Stott 1992:101), they also cannot make noble Christian politicians. Therefore, active listening is advantageous to debating, presenting superior arguments, capturing the mind of citizens, and propagating of the Christian political ideology, which are biblically supported elements for capturing the minds of citizens in a manner obedient to Christ. For certainly:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Recommendations and Lessons for Africa

The following recommendations resulted from appropriating John Stott’s concept of holy-worldliness. The study targets the recommendations at those early identified as immediate beneficiaries of this study on the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa.

Recommendations to Politicians

1. In Nigeria: While discussing the deficiencies in the Nigerian version of the political curriculum of Christianity, religion was also noted as one of the divisive factors hindering the unity of Nigeria. To ensure

Nigeria's unity, the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa should be applied, among other things, to expunge religion from all kinds of application forms, administrative papers, and other forms of government documents, thereby ensuring impartiality in allocation of opportunities. Only the National Bureau of Statistics and other research centres should be allowed to reflect religion in their activities.

2. In Africa: To address the deficiency in truth, Christian politicians in Africa are called to live transparent lives. A Christian politician who can *should* employ the services of a 'Special Assistant on Political Auditing' (SAPA). The job of this assistant should be to support the politician concerned to stay within the boundaries of the political curriculum of Christianity, and to issue regular reports to the public on the activities of the politician for the public to crosscheck.
3. Political mentorship to Christians, right from the early stages of life, is a Christian way of addressing deficiencies in the political curriculum of Christianity. This is in line with Paul's final charge to Timothy:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:10-15)

Political mentorship is a way through which the church could keep on producing a continuous stream of credible people as politicians, for

posterity, and who would participate in transforming Africa. For greater effect, let each local church appoint a credible person as the political mentor of the church. The person should be able to relate with people from all political and social backgrounds.

Recommendations to the Church

4. To assist Christian politicians to be people of truth, the church needs to establish a 'Christian Fact-Checker on Politics and Governance' to be monitoring the pronouncements and performance of politicians, particularly those who hold or seek to hold public office. This mechanism can be established by each national church body (for example, the Christian Association of Nigeria), Christian denominations, and other levels of the church.
5. To assist Christian politicians to be honourable, national church bodies (for example, the Christian Association of Nigeria) and their affiliates at all levels need to maintain two updatable books: *Christian Book of Political Fame* and *Christian Book of Political Shame*. Of course, developing the books involves clearly defining criteria for honouring and shaming politicians concerned from a Christian perspective.

Recommendations to Theological Schools

6. The democratic element of governance needs to be fully entrenched in theological schools in Africa, especially in students' governance systems. Some theological schools have student unions that are administered by the schools in a dictatorial manner. There are theological schools that are known to justify dictatorship and dislike for criticisms using the Bible, theology, threats, and written and unwritten laws. A way of addressing this is to allow student unions to exist as fully democratised bodies, allowed to experience politics within the limits of the campus: defining manifestos, campaigning, holding town hall meetings, adopting voting processes as in national elections, and being allowed operating executive and legislative branches (for theological schools with larger numbers of students).
7. Like universities around the world, theological schools in Africa need to understand the interconnection between democracy and education

(Dewey 1966). Critical thinking, which also implies freely thinking and holding opinions outside traditional denominational and interpretive lines, needs to be encouraged. Otherwise, what is there in terms of research and writing will continue to be within the regular instead of the exceptional. Accordingly, it is recommended that theological schools consider establishing a 'Colloquium on Controversial Subjects of Christianity', where well-researched, publishable papers shall be regularly presented for discussion in the academic world.

Recommendation to Curriculum Specialists

8. To encourage effective political understanding at the level of local churches in Nigeria, there is a need to engage relevant curriculum specialists to design, construct, and develop a 'Church-Based Political Education Curriculum'. This is needed primarily for all levels of the Sunday school and other church educational ministries channels of the church.

General Lessons for Africa

9. To encourage critical thinking among Christian politicians in Africa, more research and publishing opportunities need to be created or sponsored. More channels similar to the *African Theological Journal for Church and Society* are needed. As examples, a *West African Theological Journal for Church and Society* or *Nigerian Theological Journal for Church and Society* would serve to equip politicians in Africa with ideas based on research.
10. As part of their contribution to developing the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa, churches need to be more involved in building people of the kingdom than in building gigantic or fancy church worship structures. Let there be lesser involvement of the Church in erecting physical structures for meetings or in programmes that unnecessarily cage Christians from practical presence in the world. Instead, let the churches be seen establishing small-scale or large-scale businesses, hospitals, food stores, mass transport services, and other initiatives; when members have means of livelihood and can generate their own money, they are less likely to be manipulated by selfish politicians.

11. It is time for Christians in Africa to start thinking of crafting a 'Christian Political Agenda for Africa', as the Christian political version of the *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (African Union 2013). Prominent African Christians in the church, academia, politics and governance, and the public square could spearhead processes capable of leading to the development of this agenda, in line with the political curriculum of Christianity in Africa. The coming together of national Christian bodies across Africa to create an 'African Christian Political Action Communion' is recommended as a step in this process.
12. While the political curriculum of Christianity is observed to be deficient in influence in Nigeria, questions of its influence at the African continent are also raised. For example, why are there still laws and actions restricting Christian religious freedom, or the freedom of other citizens to change religion, particularly in northern Nigeria, Somalia, and other places in Africa where Christians face extreme persecution? Leading Christian politicians at the national and continental level should be heard raising their voices on issues like this, in line with the global politics, diplomacy, and leadership components of the political curriculum of Christianity.

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