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## **Understanding the Christian Association of Nigeria's Political Activism in the Light of Matthew 5:14**

**Peter O. O. Ottuh<sup>1\*</sup>, Tom Oghenevwe<sup>2</sup>**  
<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy  
 Delta State University,  
 330105, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.  
 Email: [pottuh@delsu.edu.ng](mailto:pottuh@delsu.edu.ng)\*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Some scholars claim that Nigerian Christians would rather not get involved in politics, but the reality remains that Jesus Christ did not dissuade believers from participating in politics. Other arguments against Christians' involvement in politics are unpersuasive because many Christians still get involved in politics and have earned positions as governors, senators, and other elected officials in Nigeria. The article looked at the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) from a political standpoint and evaluated the biblical foundations of its national politics activism. Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden" is used as a metaphor and motivator for CAN's national political engagement. The paper used historical and evaluative methodologies to attain its aims as a theoretical study. It posited that the Christian Association of Nigeria should define what politics is in the Christian sense, its means of operation, and its political vision for Nigeria as the "light" of Christ.

**Keywords:** CAN; Political; Activism; Matthew 5:14.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of war (Josh. 6:20), economy (Ex. 16), obedience, and moral values in Judaism, which served as a foundation for Christianity (Num. 21:4-8). In Judaic traditional philosophy, religion and politics, Yahweh is everywhere. The Church witnessed an efficient interplay between religion and politics during the apostolic age. Humans, according to political scientists, are political animals. This means that in everyday life, politics and religion are inextricably linked. As a result, when religion and politics are used in everyday life, they tend to politicize religion and religionize politics.

The rise of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on Nigeria's current political landscape is timely, and thus, elicits emotions from the public. This reaction has been stated in various forms by a number of commentators. The most significant achievement of CAN has been in politics. It has gained political credibility in the country and has instilled political awareness in Christians. As a result, the goal of this article is to comprehend and evaluate CAN's involvement in national politics in the light of Matthew 5:14, which states, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden." As a result, the article argues that Matthew 5: 14 serves as a motivator for CAN's political activism.

### **NEXUS BETWEEN POLITICS AND CHRISTIANITY**

Let us define politics first before analyzing the relationship between Christianity and politics. The Greek term *politika* (city affairs) was established by Aristotle in his famous work *Politika*, which gave rise to the English word "politics" (Ryan, 2012). According to Ryan, the singular 'politic' first appeared in English in 1430, deriving from Middle Age French *politique*, which was derived from *politicus*, a Latinization of the Greek (*politikos*) from *polites* (citizen) and *polis* (city). Ulu (2007) defines politics as "who gets what, when, and how?" (p.23). According to David, as stated by Umechukwu (2000), politics is the authoritative distribution of values, which seeks to include phenomena that are fundamentally comparable in all societies, regardless of time or location. However, Nnoli's (2003) definition appears to be comprehensive, stating that politics encompasses all activities that are directly or indirectly related to the seizure of state power, the consolidation of state power, and the use of state power, as well as all other political questions, such as seizing power and authoritatively allocating values and determining who gets what, when, and how. According to Asobie (2007), politics is described as developing a general climate conducive to organizing production, improving productivity, and optimizing human and societal welfare through an increase in the quantum of the social product. Politics, he believes, is ultimately about material and human progress, which begins with creation rather than distribution or sharing. Politics, in a Christian sense, might thus be characterized as elected officials' legitimate and holy endeavors to utilize power responsibly to deliver goods and services for the common good of citizens.

Politics, according to Onyekpe (1999), is a struggle for power, which is defined as the authority to select, develop and implement choices and policies that must be accepted by society, as well as a struggle for power of governance, particularly executive authority. Onyekpe, however, adds a qualifier to the first section of his definition. According to him, the struggle for the acquisition of power, as well as society's reaction to it, is highly dependent on the country's level of political development. He went on to remark that in an undemocratic society, whether or not decisions and policies are accepted by the society is irrelevant. Therefore, politics is concerned with stage governance and how political leaders obtain their mandate. A political system, for its part, is a framework that determines permissible political techniques inside a specific community. With important works like Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, and Confucius' writings, the history of political thought may be traced back to early antiquity. The focus of modern political discourse is on democracy and the people-politics relationship. It is seen as the method by which citizens select government officials and make policy decisions.

The relationship between Christianity and politics is a historically complex topic that has sparked debate among Christians throughout history and in modern politics. According to Musa (2009), intellectuals have conceived of the relationship between Christianity and politics in a number of ways, with many claiming that Christianity directly supports a political ideology or philosophy. Various thinkers have argued for Christian communism, Christian socialism, Christian anarchism, Christian libertarianism, Christian democracy, or Christian communism along these lines. Others feel that Christians should have little interest in politics or government and should not participate in it. The failure of the great Reformers, John Calvin and Martin Luther, to produce a properly reformed and biblical theology of law, politics and the State was one of the great tragedies of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers did not make any radical departures in political science, statecraft, or jurisprudence because, as the German scholar, August Lang, has demonstrated, they were so preoccupied with theological disputes, religious controversy, and the struggle for survival that they simply did not have time to develop a reformed and biblical theory of politics. This, among other factors, has a significant impact on how Christians view politics today.

Many Christians, according to Zamani (2011), have regarded politics as if it were beyond their primary sphere of responsibility. Politics, he claims, is frequently considered as an aspect of the world that we should despise. Our Christian lives are frequently reduced to personal piety, church activities, liturgies, youth groups, and Bible study. A Christian's involvement in politics is considered as a step into the secular world from this perspective. This dualistic divide between church and world, between the holy and the secular, is false from a biblical perspective. According to Adetoyese (2012), the goal of government is to execute the law. Since most people are incapable of being dominated by love, he believes that government is God's servant to execute wrath on the offender (Rom. 13:4). In an imperfect world, this is unavoidable. God has commanded that ruling authority be in place to maintain law and order in society. The Bible depicts government as a God-created institution when he said, let every soul be submissive to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1-2). Because there is no authority other than God, and all authorities are appointed by God.

As a result, anyone who opposes such authority opposes God's ordinance, and those who oppose will bring punishment upon themselves (Rom 13:1-2; cf. Dan. 2:20-21). Christians are enjoined to pray for their government in accordance with biblical injunctions: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence, For this is good and acceptable" (1 Tim. 2:1-3; cf. Tit. 3:1-2; Mt 22:21; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Adetoyese, 2012). The question of whether the church should function as a "spokesperson" for its members highlights the larger problem of denominational religion and politics. The hierarchy of each Church had to navigate between drastically divergent opinions inside their institutions when making political decisions. While some encouraged change, others steadfastly believed that the status quo was the best choice (Fawcett, 2016). The ambiguous nature of many pronouncements published on political issues by both Churches reflects the difficult process of attempting to mediate between two discourses of continuity and change. At the same time, many members used a discourse of separation between religion and politics that looked to match the alienation discourse as a way to avoid taking responsibility for what was going on in the political sphere.

This separation narrative merely obscured an interdependent relationship between religion and politics, demonstrating the futility of establishing a distinct boundary between the religious and political domains. One of the most essential reasons in this connection, from the Churches' perspective, was the need to be part of the cultural mainstream in order to maintain cultural dominance. Political participation is an important tool for the development or underdevelopment of any society today, and as a result, every community requires honest individuals to represent them in the political cycle (Adetoyese, 2012). In practice, this implies that Christian citizens should freely offer themselves as candidates for public office. Individual Christian citizens play a role in this. This researcher is not suggesting that the church should endorse politicians, but rather that church members who are citizens become involved in politics.

Against Jewish tradition, Matthew demonstrates that Jesus did indeed come to reign as King, but on the throne of those who accept him by faith; he came to establish his Kingdom, but one that would be the rule of God in the hearts of his children by faith. Matthew takes great pains to show what kind of king Jesus was and what kind of kingdom he came to build (Talbert, 2010). A quick examination of the Gospel's background will help us better understand the King's and his Kingdom's message. Since then, Nigerian politics has devolved along religious lines. Similarly, it is no longer a secret that national politics today lags behind some Christian denominational divides. Many events since then have pointed to this direction, and ignoring it would be foolish, although confronting the truth may require more than ordinary fortitude. According to Umechukwu (1995), religious politics, defined as the government's use of religion to achieve economic and diplomatic goals, is evident in Nigeria. He considered religion's intrusion into politics, and the evil that comes with it, as the fundamental issue that has always stood in the way of Nigeria's political integration with religion. The Church is thought to be capable of acting as both a maintainer of the status quo and a catalyst for change and revolution.

Scholars have emphasized how the Church's dominance during the Middle Ages was a vivid illustration of how religion can be an excellent tool for maintaining law and order as well as inflicting havoc in society (Blanco, 2003). Blanco used current events to demonstrate the strength of faith and how it can be a powerful tool for social change. Church doctrines and principles have a strong hold on the believer and the social order of everyday life, extending their influence into the political realm when collective judgments about that social order are made (Mayer, 1996). As a result, the religious order determines how an individual interacts with the State and acts in public, and politics is made relative to and justified by religion. Scholars like Muozoba (2010), Madu (1997), and Blanco (2003) have argued that people's most apparent political activities such as voting or protesting may represent their fundamental views, values, and options. The Church also has an impact on public policy through legislation on matters such as education, family (as in polygamy and inheritance), sexuality (as in homosexuality) and capital punishment.

## **NIGERIA AND ITS POLITICAL HISTORY**

People have lived in what is now Nigeria since at least 9000 BC, and evidence suggests that some of them have practised settled agriculture and politics since at least 5000 BC (Ogbeidi, 2012). Kingdoms arose on the drier northern savanna in the early centuries AD, benefiting from trade ties with North Africa (Stock, 2008.). Similarly, the wetter,

southern wooded areas produced city-states and looser federations supported by agriculture and coastal trade. With the advent of Europeans in the late 15th century, the rise of the slave trade from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and formal colonization by Britain at the end of the 19th century, these systems changed dramatically (Stock, 2008; Paden, 2008). Nigeria gained independence in 1960, but since then has struggled with lopsided economic distribution and ineffective, often corrupt administrations and political systems. Military control and democratic government are linked in Nigeria's political history.

Nigeria obtained independence from the United Kingdom on October 1, 1960, and an Executive Council was elected, led by Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the country's first prime minister. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became the Federation's first Governor-General on November 16, 1960. Each of the three regions (Eastern, Northern, and Western) was led by a premier, with a governor serving as the ceremonial head. Nigeria became a Federal Republic on October 1, 1963, and severed ties with the United Kingdom, but it remained a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. On October 1, 1979, a new civilian administration was sworn in, marking the start of the second republic with Alhaji Shehu Shagari sworn in as president. Mashood Kolawole Kasimawo Abiola may have led the third republic, but his election mandate of June 12, 1993, was revoked by the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida. On August 26, 1993, Babangida turned over power to a non-elected military-civilian temporary national government. The interim government, led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, was deposed by the military, led by General Sanni Abacha, on November 17, 1993, returning Nigeria to military control.

Olusegun Obasanjo, the fourth republic's president, was elected on the People's Democratic Party (PDP) platform, which also gained a majority of seats in the National Assembly. As a result, Obasanjo's term came to an end in 2007, and he was succeeded by Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who was also elected under the same party and sworn in on May 29, 2007, marking the first time in Nigeria's political history that the country transitioned from one civilian government to another. Unfortunately, Yar'Adua did not survive long enough to see any real plans for the country implemented. During his second year in office, he became very ill and died on May 5, 2010. Following his death, Goodluck Jonathan, his vice president, was sworn in as president, after which he ran for and was elected on the People's Democratic Party platform in 2011. Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in on May 29, 2015, after defeating the incumbent in the general election. The continuance of the fourth republic was highlighted by Buhari's election after Goodluck Jonathan's four-year administration.

For a long time, Nigeria's political environment has been marked by bitter rivalries among the country's various ethnic groupings. Nigeria has a multi-layered and multi-faceted political structure as a result of its history of contestations. Ethnicity is interlaced throughout Nigerian politics, giving it a common means to rights and ownership (Akanji, 2019). Nigeria's federation remains messy, contentious, and riddled with conflict; since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled to survive not just in administering society, but also in improving the socio-economic conditions of its people. Military meddling and toxic competitions have flooded the country's political environment. These events have affected how people think about the many forms and dynamics of politics in Nigeria today to a considerable extent. They've also had an

impact on Nigeria's democratic and political procedures, as well as the country's peace and serenity and development trajectory.

In Nigerian politics, the transition to the Fourth Republic in 1999 was a watershed moment. So far, it has been Nigeria's longest period of democratic administration, during which the country's political environment has matured from an embryonic state. Most people believe that the many periods of military dictatorship preceding the fourth republic harmed Nigeria's democratic norms, preventing the country from reaping the benefits of democracy even after 1999 (Akanji, 2019). This argument has some merit, as military control not only stifled Nigeria's political progress, but it also impeded the country's organic growth (Dibua, 2017). The 1966 coup d'état and counter-coup that eventually led to the civil war, the uprooting of civil practices, the adoption of ill-suited policies, the annulment of the June 12 general elections in 1993, and many other incidents occurred under military administration in Nigeria. Despite the benefits of criticizing the military, one might also claim that the civilian-led fourth republic has failed to improve the living conditions of ordinary Nigerians. Nigeria is currently one of the world's poorest countries, plagued by unemployment, inflation, and corruption (Akanji, 2019). Terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and violent conflicts are all threats to the country's security. Election fraud and extreme indiscipline are rampant in the political sector. Furthermore, the presence of inept, unpatriotic, and corrupt leaders has hampered Nigeria's political progress (Akanji, 2019; Odeyemi, 2014). It is reasonable to say that the emergence of ethnic peculiarities and religious fundamentalism in the 1980s and 1990s sealed the political trajectory in Nigeria that led to the current regime.

Today, influential Christian and Muslim clergy and leaders are entering into Nigerian politics, most likely to buy votes for their chosen candidates, endangering the country's democracy. Nigeria is divided along ethnic and religious lines, with a population of about 180 million people (Falaye, 2016). The country is largely divided between Muslims and Christians, who live primarily in the north and south of the country, respectively, while adherents of both faiths are found throughout the country (Thurston, 2017). Politicians have often exploited Nigeria's religious diversity to further their own agenda, resulting in electoral squabbles. When former President Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, was declared winner of the presidential elections in 2011, post-election violence cost over 800 lives and displaced over 65,000 people (Falaye, 2016; Ayoade & Akinsanya, 2012). Following protests that a Muslim northerner, Muhammadu Buhari (current President of Nigeria), was expected to win the elections, violence erupted. Because the majority of Nigerians are devoutly religious, priests can play a significant role in both enabling and resolving election issues.

While religion has always played a significant role in Nigerian politics, the magnitude and nature of religious leaders' latest forays into politics is frightening. Nigerian religious leaders, like traditional rulers, are supposed to keep off partisan politics by virtue of their status as members of an honourable and a religious class whose political responsibility, if anything, is to advocate for peaceful elections and encourage politicians to deliver good governance and long-term development for citizens. Political politics may lead to conflicts of interest, thus clerics are supposed to advocate justice and social rights while eschewing partisan politics. In Nigeria, Christian religious leaders are now getting involved in politics. Rev. Jonah Jang (former Governor of Plateau State under the People's Democratic Party), Rev. Jolly Nyame (former

Governor of Taraba State under the People's Democratic Party), Pastor Chris Okotie (Presidential aspirant under the Fresh Democratic Party), and Pastor Tunde Bakare (Vice-Presidential aspirant under the All Nigerian Peoples' Party) are just a few prominent examples.

### **THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 5:14**

The apostle Matthew has always been acknowledged as the author of the first gospel since the time of the early church fathers (Schweizer, 1975). The term "According to Matthew" (*kata maqqaion*) appears in the earliest manuscripts and the gospel of Matthew was the most highly respected and quoted by the church fathers (Argyle, 1963). The question of authorship did not arise until the eighteenth century. Because Matthew mainly relies on Mark's Gospel, several academics have recently discounted the possibility that the author was one of the twelve apostles. Papias, for his part, said that Mark was Peter's interpreter (Eccl. 3:39.15), implying that the apostle Matthew would have no trouble deferring to the church's first leader (Mounce, 1992; Odey 2020).

Matthew was the son of Alphaeus and was also known as Levi (Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27). He was a tax collector, most likely stationed near Capernaum on a major trade route, where he would have collected tolls from commercial traffic for Herod Antipas (Wilkins, 1992). Furthermore, Matthew's experience as a tax collector may have prepared him better for his function as an official recorder of Christ's life and acts (Mounce, 1992). He is not mentioned again in the New Testament after Christ's resurrection. Matthew's composition is thought to have taken place sometime between 50 and 100 AD, according to various estimates (Achtmeier, Green & Thompson, 2001). Others claim it was made between AD 50 and AD 55, or between AD 55 and AD 60 (Bowden, 2005). Matthew's Gospel is notable for its structure. The prologue (1:1-2:23), the body (3:1-28:15), and the epilogue (1:1-2:23) are the three portions of the Gospel (28:16-20). The Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29), the Commissioning of the Apostles (10:1-42), Parables about the Kingdom (13:1-52), Relationships in the Kingdom (18:1-35), and the Olivet Discourse (18:1-35) comprise the Gospel's body (24:1-25:46).

Each speech also has an identifiable conclusion (7:28, 11; 1, 13:53; 19:1, 26:1), such as: "When Jesus had finished stating these things..." The subtle analogies between the first and fifth discourses, as well as the second and fourth discourses, are even more fascinating. The subject of this paper, however, is Matthew 5:14, the fourteenth verse of Matthew's Gospel, which is found in the New Testament. It is one of a set of analogies immediately following the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. The text of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible reads as follows:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (**RSV** - Revised Standard Version)

The World English Bible (**WEB**) translates the passage as:

"You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden".

The metaphor shifts abruptly from "salt of the earth" to "city on a hill" in this line. It could be related to the phrase "salt and light," which was used to characterize the Law at the time. This verse is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, but it appears in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (cited in Rodgers, 2018). The emphasis of the lyric in Thomas is on the city's security and impregnability, not on its symbolism. Gundry

(1982) pointed out that cities would have been built on hills for defensive reasons at the time. Schweizer (1975) theorized that this could be a reference to Mount Zion, which appears at the beginning of Isaiah chapter two. Scholars disagree on whether this is a direct reference to the concept of a New Jerusalem. Albright and Mann (1971) believe that Cicero defined Rome as “light to the globe,” but that this verse is unlikely to be based on his words.

Jesus compared His disciples to salt in the previous verse (Matthew 5:13). He is now comparing them to light. He refers to them as the “light of the world.” Light was a significant symbol in the Jewish worldview. Light was the ultimate standard in Hebrew culture, as it was in Greek, Roman, and modern American society, which promotes liberty. As a result, biblical interpretations of godliness and truth include this concept prominently (Proverbs 4:18-19; Matthew 4:16; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Gamble, 2012). There is no spiritual light in the world other than from Jesus Christ. His light shines through everyone who is a part of him. In this way, Christ’s light shines into the darkness in every corner of the world. It is also significant because this light is intended to be seen in the rest of the world.

Instead of using the concept “universe”, the word κόσμος (world or *cosmos*), γῆ (earth) is used. However, the concept is identical, pertaining to the human world, as verse 16 clearly states: Christians are to shine like lights throughout the entire world. “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be spotless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding firm to the word of life...” Paul continues in Philippians 2:14-16b. Christians are like lights in a dark place, illuminating God to others around them. The phrase οὐδύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι would be literally translated as “not able [a] city to be hidden” *is more smoothly translated*, “it is impossible for a city to be hidden” as the verb δύναμαι communicates the ability, capacity, power or possibility for something to be done or happen (Ezeogamba, 2019).

This emphasizes the disciple’s inability to be without this distinguishing characteristic. The second half of the clause, which describes the city on a hill, could be interpreted to mean that the hiding applies to both cities on hills and those that aren’t, i.e., “a city cannot be hidden especially if it’s on a hill.” However, because the disciples are being compared to this city on a hill, the implication is that they are even less likely to be hidden. So, if one is a Christian but is “hidden,” that is, there is no discernible difference between Christians and nonbelievers, what should one do? Chrysostom (cited in Allen, 2001) comments that Jesus taught the disciples to be severe in their lives by these words, teaching them to be earnest in their endeavours as they compete in the world’s arena in front of all humankind.

Jesus gave these followers the designations of ‘salt and light,’ according to Spurgeon (quoted in Ezeogamba, 2019), not after he had trained them for three years, but nearly immediately after he began his ministry. As a result, it wasn’t because of what they knew or had done, but rather because of who they were. They are the light of the world because, wherever there is trust in Christ, there is light, for no one who believes in him should walk in darkness. This means that genuine faith in Christ transforms a person from darkness to marvelous light, transforming him or her into “light in the Lord.” As a result, the person’s goals and objectives, desires, speech, and actions become filled with divine light which illuminates all the chambers of his or her soul and then pours forth from the windows for all humans to see. Ὑμεῖς (you) is plural here as in verse



14. The use of the metaphor of a city on a hill for visibility is illustrative and emphatic of this argument, which is that the combined impact of the many lights that make up a city at night is illustrative and emphatic of this statement. As disciples to communities, Christians should have a visible impact on the surrounding darkness (Mathisen, 2005; Okafor, 2002). The objective of the metaphor is that, just as a city on a hill cannot be hidden, the Christian community should, by its very nature, bring unequivocal, visible illumination to the world around them.

This analogy fits well with the prior one of tasteless salt becoming useless; similarly, a light that does not shine is useless. Because both of these metaphors refer to a collective group (many grains of salt and many lights in a city), we must consider them in light of the communal nature of the body of Christ. This influence of giving flavor and light to the world is the work of the entire Church working together for the benefit of the Gospel's expansion, not just a few individuals.

### **CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (CAN) AND NATIONAL POLITICS**

Various accounts of CAN's formation exist, based on the informants' geographical and/or theological backgrounds. Overall, though, one thing emerges from all of the accounts: the Churches were psychologically ready for ecumenism by the time CAN was created. D.D. Dodo, once the pro tem Secretary of CAN's Benue State Branch, gives one version of the story of CAN's inception (Enwerem, 1995). According to him, much of what is now known as CAN began in the North by Christians who perceived the Sardauna's mission to Islamize the region and the country as a whole. Therefore Christians and even non-Christians in the region banded together to resist the Sardauna's mission (Enwerem, 1995). Technically, CAN was founded on August 27, 1976, at a gathering of Christian leaders held at the Catholic Secretariat, which, as previously stated, followed the meeting with the government (Kuka, 2000). The sessions that followed, including the meetings of September 7 and 8, 1976, were primarily focused on determining the organizational modalities for the newly created association (Mbachirin, 2006). During these meetings, for example, topics such as the association's name and constitution were resolved, and the organization's first officers were elected. Some have claimed that CAN was created on February 24, 1980.

During its early years, the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations were among the organization's members. However, it gradually grew to include Pentecostal churches. The Christian Council of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa, and the Organization of African Instituted Churches are the five blocs that make up the organization. CAN has divisions with a National Executive Council of 105 members electing the president, Women and Youth Wings electing the president, and a General Assembly of 304 members ratifying the President's election. Between 1976 and now, the organization's membership has grown to include practically every church in Nigeria that professes to follow Christ. The purpose of the drafted provisional constitution for CAN was to define the nature and function of the association, clarify its membership and define the fellowship of Churches working together to promote God's glory through the expansion and unification of the churches, and leading them to salvation and all of its fruits.

The Association's functions include: unifying the Church so that they may all be one (John 17:21); connecting Christians to offer solutions to pressing issues; enabling

churches to consult together and, when necessary, make common statements and take common action; catering for the spiritual and moral welfare of Christians and the nation; propagating the Gospel; and promoting understanding and cooperation among Christians. Christian Association of Nigeria is now active at the zonal, state, and local government levels in Nigeria. It has women's and youth wings in addition to the above-mentioned arms. "That they may be One" (John 17:21) has been its motto. The Association has been active in national politics in Nigeria since its beginnings.

As previously stated, CAN's biggest achievement has been in politics, where it has gained national political respectability and instilled political awareness in Christians. To fully comprehend the significance of these accomplishments, consider the degree of political awareness among Christians prior to the 1980s, when CAN gained national attention. The churches recognized little connection between religion and politics during this time. Give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's, according to their interpretation of the scriptural phrase. At best, the churches considered religion and politics as complementary endeavours with distinct interests in human affairs. It was analogous to the kind of relationship that occurs when water and oil come into contact but do not combine. As a result, Christianity became politically weak. When the necessity arose for churches to send delegates to state or federal governments to discuss issues affecting Christian interests, the churches remained mostly politically inert and on the periphery of national politics. While assessing the amount of churches' involvement in politics prior to 1980, Salifu (Oral interview, November 27, 2020) simply states that the churches at the time did not actually know what was going on; they were sleeping. In the 1980s, the dormancy came to an end. CAN thwarted the government's attempts to weaken the country's constitutional secularity in 1983 and 1987. The best example of CAN's political success came in 1986 when its ultimatum caused Nigeria's military government to reconsider its intention to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Keke, 2003). There is no better proof of CAN's recent political boldness and ascension into the national spotlight than the fact that when CAN talks, even the military government listens. In Nigeria, the group has also resurrected its operations in the fields of peace, justice, and development.

CAN operates in a Nigerian polity in which people are still required to identify themselves and are identified based on their ethnicity rather than their nationality; a polity in which socio-economic provisions such as a national health insurance policy, an old-age pension, and a child support scheme are simply non-existent; and a polity whose governance has been largely militarized (Oyedepo, 2006). As a result, citizens have been generally cowed into apathy toward the degrading realities that surround them, and are rarely willing to engage in any confrontation with authority. This is because they recognize that even if the government did not penalize them, in the event of death or incapacity as a result of the conflict, there would be no social benefits on which families and dependents could rely. We may now pinpoint specific areas of weakness in CAN in the light of these reflections. These are divided into four categories: Ethnicity, denominationalism, gender, and political clarity are all factors to consider. One of CAN's greatest problems stems from the irony that, despite its political actions, it is unable to break free from the apolitical ethos surrounding Nigerian Christianity since European missionaries first introduced it to the country. This viewpoint is shared by many of CAN's member organizations. For example, every religious official interviewed stressed that CAN is not a political organization, such as a political party or even a

political partisanship. CAN's right to strive for the welfare of Christians, however, is defended by the majority of these church leaders, as though "struggle" is not a political or partisan act. This is a conundrum for CAN: how to be political without being political. You can't have your cake and eat it too! This predicament highlights a number of CAN's political flaws.

To begin with, CAN's ambiguity about its political identity and goal is a flaw. We should remember that CAN is being pushed by two forces: one that wants it to remain solely an ecumenical (religious) organization, and another that wants it to get more involved in politics. The underlying reason for CAN's clear lack of agreed-upon strategy can be found in this conundrum. The Association appears to have chosen to be neutral, combining nonviolent militancy with a willingness to engage in conversation.

Given the circumstances, this might be the best alternative for CAN. Worryingly, CAN has not been and may not wish to be intellectually, ideologically or publicly honest in embracing this alternative, because it bases its choice on the reality that neutrality favours a side, in this case, a certain social class in society. The same CAN that cries out against restrictions on people's religious, civil, and human rights also denies, or at the very least, supports restrictions on new religious sects and women's full and unconditional participation in all aspects of church life. This explains CAN's aversion to forming strategic alliances with other human forces in Nigeria, whether non-religious or non-Christian, which are fighting the same atrocities as the CAN leadership. Radical political activists like Bala Usman recognize the Catholic Church's tradition of rigorous intellectual pursuits, particularly in the formation of its clergy, and the intellectual depth it has brought to the country's political discourse in comparison to its CAN counterparts. However, Usman bemoans the Church's refusal to translate its intellectual weight into establishing linkages (Qeko, 2007). Balarabe Musa (quoted in Okereke, 2011), speaking along the same lines and with special reference to CAN in the North, recalls the setback progressive forces in the North have received in their attempts to build strategic alliances with CAN. To offer a concrete example, the same CAN that has been pushing for the restoration of mission schools to the churches now has its members attending schools in the few places where they operate, which are generally out of reach of the common people whose interests the CAN leadership professes to represent.

Next, CAN's political predicament displays its leadership's political naiveté in terms of interpreting happenings in the country. There are some cases worth mentioning here. For example, the bright picture given by the CAN leadership of the administration of Majors-General Buhari and Idiagbon, despite the fact that that government was fascist and dictatorial, as the majority of Nigerians, including the CAN leadership, are well aware (Ulu, 2007). CAN endorsed that government because, according to CAN's leaders, hope was returning to the despondent Nigerians during its reign. It might be argued that this rationale is really a smokescreen, hinting that the actual reason is that, according to CAN leadership, Buhari was the first to acknowledge that the North was not overwhelmingly Muslim, as many had assumed. What is of relevance here is CAN's ignorance in justifying or rationalizing Buhari's totalitarian regime simply because he performed what CAN's leadership suggested he should do. It is as if to make Nigeria operate, you had to be authoritarian or fascist. In other words, CAN is implicitly endorsing the idea of the end justifying the means, which is not only Machiavellian but also incompatible with Christian ethical standards.

Another illustration of CAN's political ignorance can be found in its judgment of Yakubu Gowon's regime which featured a majority of Christian governors. Since the Governors were majority Christians, some Christian concepts of godliness, justice, righteousness and peace were brought to bear (Familusi, 2008). The consequence of this superiority complex is that good government is only conceivable if it is governed by Christians and based on Christian ideals, as opposed to government based on Islamic ones. Rt. Rev. J. Onaiyekan was absolutely correct in countering this Christian mindset by emphasizing unequivocally that Islam, too, offers a paradigm for excellent leadership (Familusi, 2008). However, the CAN leaders' statement above reveals their unanimity in their evaluation of Christian and Muslim leaders. It is as if a person with a Christian or Muslim name is a sincere believer, or that a leader must be anti-Muslim or anti-Christian simply because of a suspected or expressed connection. As a result, there is no room for the concept that some Muslims or Christians are simply nominally Muslim or Christian, or that some believers value justice over politics. The CAN leadership questioned Babangida's December 1989 Cabinet reshuffle because of this tunnel vision.

The CAN challenge was misguided. This is because its outrage sprang mostly from the notion that the Cabinet rearrangement favored Muslims over Christians; the outrage, for example, had nothing to do with the men's competence and certainly little to do with the absence of female representation in the Cabinet. Furthermore, the CAN leadership seldom questioned whether those Christians harmed by the Cabinet upheaval were truly dedicated to their Christian faith or merely nominal Christians in the first place; a worry that any legitimate Christian organization would expect to be a high priority. While Muslims can use political power to further their faith, not because of a firm belief in or love for the religion per se, but because they recognize that their political mobility is tied to their ability to maintain a veneer of religiosity, Christians, for their part, use the same power to further the interests of their ethnic associates or themselves (Familusi, 2008). With ethnic calculations eroding in the drive for political power in the country as a result of the ongoing establishment of states, Christians are increasingly relying on the religious component. However, they are political newcomers or rookies in the game of tying politics to religion and vice versa, an area in which Muslims have mastered over many years of practice and inspiration drawn from the very nature of Islam, which includes religion and politics as noted by Nzuanke and Ogbadu (2018:36) when they highlighted the religious link to the 2012-2014 political crisis that engulfed the Central Africa Republic.

### **MATTHEW 5:14 AS PARADIGM FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM**

Matthew 5:14 serves as a motivator for CAN's activism in politics. The two salt and light parables establish the tone for the Sermon on the Mount. The new Israel (Christ and all who believe in Him) is the salt of the earth; it is a covenant-keeping people who have received all of God's promised blessings. The new Israel (Christ and those who follow him) is a light to the nations, a ray of God's justice shining in a dark world. The pictures of salt and light depicted in the verse have quite distinct meanings, with salt expressing Israel's nature, and light illustrating her destiny (Donaldson, 1985). Both images hold an abstract truth, suggestive in form in the sense that they both describe a truth (Talbert, 2006; 2010); but they do so without rejecting the imperative, that is, what is and what should stand side-by-side. As a result, salt represents the character of the new Israel, while light represents her purpose and function.

The passage clearly demonstrates that every Christian is called by God to have a positive impact on the world. When Jesus informed his followers that he would make them fishers of mankind early in his mission, he was teaching this notion (Matthew 4:19). Then, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used salt and light as illustrations (Matthew 5:13-16). Both salt and light have qualities that have an impact on the environment. Salt is utilized as a flavour enhancer as well as a preservative. To consciously endeavour to affect the people in one's life by demonstrating the unconditional love of Christ via good deeds is to "be salt." Light is a sign of awareness, wisdom and comprehension. To 'be light' is to bear witness to the truth of God's Word, particularly about who Christ is and how he died and rose again for human salvation.

Jesus's audience was made up of Israelites when he gave these teachings. They held the Word of God and were salt and light in the world as God's chosen people. Throughout Jesus's teaching ministry, he gradually polished the idea that each disciple was to have a spiritual impact on people around them. He dispatched them to all of the surrounding towns to preach repentance and the arrival of God's Kingdom. Christ had made it apparent at the end of his earthly ministry that the gospel was to have a worldwide application. He told his disciples to go educate all countries, baptize them and teach them what he had taught (Matthew 28:18-20). This has been correctly interpreted as a command to all Christians to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone. This encompasses both the notions of salt and light. This means that Christians should do as much good as they can in the name of Christ, and they should share the gospel's light with as many people as they can. This is the foundation of the current paper, which argues for the participation of Church leaders in Nigerian politics.

What one generation passes on to the next is a significant problem in the existence of any nation. The Church's challenge, through its leaders, is to ensure that a government based on Christian ideals is established and passed on to future generations of Nigerians. If they fail to fulfill these responsibilities, the country will be destitute and lacking in Christian principles, which will prevent it from becoming a great nation among other nations. Furthermore, the political activity of church leaders can be found within the church's mission (*missio Dei*). Englesviken in his *Missio Dei, kingdom of God and church* (2003), provides a thorough examination of the major concepts used in twentieth-century missiology. On the one hand, there is the evangelical perspective, which sees God as a sending God and the church as God's primary missionary agency. The church was a byproduct of the mission. The alternative viewpoint is more Evangelical in nature, seeing the church as a partner in God's mission of world salvation, peace and justice. The church, together with God's word and every baptized believer, is regarded as one of the most important divine instruments for mission.

The "traditional" form of referring to *missio Dei*, where God's mission is largely carried out through the church, may be found in John 20:21 and Matthew 5:13-16. In the context of this paper, *missio Dei* is understood in terms of the expression "within God's entire mission," where God's mission is considered as broader than yet including the church's mission. The alternative view is that God is engaged in the world's secular political and social events, and that the church's responsibility is to discern what God is doing in the world and then participate in it.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the aforementioned, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has been somewhat successful in its efforts to enthrone inclusive politics in Nigeria, especially countering sectional or religious politics. Jesus adds to the metaphor by mentioning a city perched atop a hill. A city on a hill is not supposed to be concealed; it is meant to be seen and found even in the dead of night. The walls surrounding a city on a hill at the time of Christ were frequently composed of white limestone, which was relatively easy to see even in a dark night. CAN is a city on a hill that is not meant to be veiled as light in the context of this work. Through this way, the light of Christ radiates through CAN in Nigeria's various functions, including political activism.

In the process, it has brought the perils of disregarding tolerance in a religiously diversified society into closer perspective. All of this has been accomplished by CAN as a "light" and a "city" situated on a "hill" (Matt. 5:14). However, CAN's shortcoming in this area is a different story. CAN's inability to fully resolve church-political tensions disqualifies it as a vehicle for genuine social transformation in Nigeria. Indeed, given CAN's lack of autonomy and cohesion, its very existence appears to be predicated on the continued presence of a fictitious Islamic danger. However, CAN's proclaimed claim to speak for the people, even if only for Christians, is merely political rhetoric. As a result, "healers must first heal themselves," as the phrase goes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends as follows:

1. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should define what constitutes politics, as well as its methods of operation and political vision for Nigeria. Until then, despite its political 'militancy', CAN remains at best a pressure group constrained by Nigeria's unique historical background.
2. That a strictly academic discipline of understanding the junction of religion and politics as a dual notion in which one is constantly supported and strengthened by the other should be taught in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
3. That church or religious creeds/teachings should be tailored to and made to encourage some of the most uncivilized kinds of thoughts, emotions and behaviors, as well as severe manifestations of neurosis, borderline personality states and sometimes even psychosis, in order to advance national politics. Religious education is, in this view, a *sine-qua-non*. Religion without knowledge is negative; religion that is properly understood is religion that is well practised.

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