

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETAL POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

Politics has come to stay in the human society. It embraces almost all human activities. However, several people are of the perception that there should be a total separation between the Church and state politics. They claim that individual Christians and Christian leaders should have nothing to do with societal politics. Such people should know that the Church is an organization pregnant with the same people in such society. So, for the Church to establish a holistic impact, it should be interested in all the activities that have sustained the society. Thus, our country's political situation is part of the social context within which our Christian conviction is to be exercised. The Church as a religious body which proclaims hope and empower people must be found making a bold and interrupted move towards sanitizing societal politics.

### INTRODUCTION

In dealing with the topic “The role of the Church in Societal Politics”, it is important that we clearly define the key expressions at the heart of the topic and that may be helpful in understanding the drive of my paper. We will be concerned with two central questions: “What are the biblical teachings on politics?” and “What is the role of the Church in politics?”

### THE CHURCH

The Church involves human beings who have come together from commitment to Christ and of certain beliefs arising out of this commitment; beliefs which are seeing to be important for the concretization of their humanity.<sup>2</sup> It is a community of believers. It comprises all who confessed Jesus Christ as risen Lord, whatever their nationality, race, colour or tongue, were bounded together in a loving, worshipping, servicing, witnessing, caring and expecting fellowship.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Churches are religious organizations that have become institutionalized. They have endured for generations, are supported by society's norms and values, and have become an active part of society.<sup>4</sup> Churches are generally committed to working with society. They may wish to improve it, but they have no wish to abandon it.<sup>5</sup>

According to Asante, the ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which is the one essential ministry of the Church, has a positive bearing upon the transformation of human society not only in the private domain of thought and feeling but also in the public domain.<sup>6</sup> He adds that the involvement of the Church in the social, cultural, political and economic development of society has shown clearly that, while the Church seeks to avoid any kind of political reduction of the Christian faith, the Church is increasingly aware that the Christian faith has a concrete dimension involving certain socio-political attitudes and commitments.

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship*, (Ghana: Wilas Press Limited, 1999), 145

<sup>3</sup> Asante, *Stewardship*, 155

<sup>4</sup> David B. Brinkerhoff and Lyan K. White, *Sociology*, (New York: West Publishing Company, 1988), 448

<sup>5</sup> Brinkerhoff and White, *Sociology*, 449

<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological reflections on the Ghanaian experience*, (Ghana: Challenge Enterprise, 2007), 101

The prophetic role of the Church, for him, is to empower and encourage its members, among other things, to committed action in view of service to the human community. The circumstances of our nation; a nation struggling with democratic categories of injustice, fair-play, human rights, economic and industrial breakthrough should be a matter of concern to us.<sup>7</sup> Thus, our country's socio-economic and political situation constitutes the context within which our Christian conviction is to be exercised. So, for the Church to successfully achieve its aim as a religious body which proclaims the language of hope and empower people to face up to the present situations of social, economic, political injustice and privation in view of the really new characterized with justice, equity and love, then it must be found making a bold and interrupted move towards ensuring peace in the society.

## POLITICS

Etymologically, the word 'politics' can be said to be from the Greek word *politikos* meaning "of, for, or relating to citizens". Politics is the art and science of government and governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs. It includes strategies for influencing governmental policy or winning and holding control and leadership in government over other competing groups encompassing generally the relationship between various groups in society.<sup>8</sup> It is apparent from this definition that politics has to do with government, influencing government policy, leadership in government, political actions and policies on the political party, interest or pressure group level designed to winning and holding control in a ruling government. We are all political since by the above definition, politics involves the complex of relations between persons in society. Politics is about the making of decisions that affect our everyday life.<sup>9</sup> It is about the search for the common good, a commitment to the dignity of every person and reconciling diverse interest for the wellbeing of the whole of society.<sup>10</sup>

From the perspective of Western individualism, Western political philosophers have given a moral justification for the creation of political society. Even though one may not share their common presupposition that the individual is prior to society and that society can be treated at will by individuals, the moral justification they present for the creation of political society must be a matter of interest to Christian theology of politics.<sup>11</sup>

One of such philosophers is Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who assumed that the condition that necessitated political activity is the state of nature which was the state in which humans lived before the development and growth of governments. Hobbes political theory insists that political activity exists for the preservation of human life, for the maintenance of law and order and for the eradication of anarchy. Politics, in that senses is useful for the life of humans. It is practically necessary and morally justified.<sup>12</sup> Another of such philosophers is John Locke (1682-1704). Like Hobbes, Locke justified political activity in the context of a presumed state of nature which he considered as the condition of humans without a state. For Locke, the state comes into existence by social consent in order to protect property, whether in the narrow sense of material possessions, or considered to include life, health and liberty. Again political activity according to this theory is intended to serve the human interest. It exists to hold in check human excesses. Here society was founded to protect one's natural right to liberty and property.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development*, 101

<sup>8</sup> Roberts D. Linder, and Richard V. Pierard, *Politics: A Case for Christian Action*. (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 2

<sup>9</sup> Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development*, 89

<sup>10</sup> Available at <http://uculcpt.blogspot.com/2009/04/should-churchs-involvement-in-politics.html>. Accessed on 1/12/16

<sup>11</sup> Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development*, 89

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 92

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 93

The human person is the foundation and purpose of political life. Endowed with a rational nature, the human person is responsible for his own choices and able to pursue projects that give meaning to life at the individual and social level. Being open both to the Transcendent and to others is his characteristic and distinguishing trait. Only in relation to the Transcendent and to others does the human person reach the total and complete fulfillment of himself. This means that for the human person, a naturally social and political being, “social life is not something added on” but is part of an essential and indelible dimension.<sup>14</sup> The political community originates in the nature of persons, whose conscience “reveals to them and enjoins them to obey” the order which God has imprinted in all his creatures: “a moral and religious order; and it is this order — and not considerations of a purely extraneous, material order — which has the greatest validity in the solution of problems relating to their lives as individuals and as members of society, and problems concerning individual States and their interrelations”.<sup>15</sup>

## THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

In order to make the presentation analytical and intelligible it is appropriate to first look at the biblical teachings on politics. This is mainly because the Church operates centrally from the biblical teachings. Thus, the actions and activities of the Church are mainly dictated by the teachings in the Bible.

## BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON POLITICS

Christian thinking about the relationship between the Church and the state understood as organized political community under political leadership cannot be based solely on individual proof texts. It has to take into account the broad sweep of Christian theology, the contents of both the Old and New Testaments, and the Church’s interpretation of those texts over the centuries.<sup>16</sup> Looking at the concept of the Church and politics, one may ask, can Christians get some guidelines or codes of conduct from the scriptures as regards their involvement in politics? Are there some models or standards that they can follow while doing politics and what is Gods’ expressed teaching regarding the believers’ involvement in politics?

## POLITICS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible states clearly that the true source of authority is God. In the book of Proverbs, we read: “By me Kings reign, and rulers decree what is just” (Proverbs 8:15). In the Old Testament, God had His chosen people who were the Israelites. Looking at the record of their history may help us to answer the question of politics in the Old Testament.

At the beginning of its history, the people of Israel are unlike other peoples in that they have no king, for they recognize the dominion of Yahweh alone. It is God who intervened on Israel's behalf through charismatic individuals.<sup>17</sup> At the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were led out into the desert by strong individuals like Moses and Joshua. With time, this system of individual leadership developed into a tribal league in which tribal leaders assisted national leaders like Moses and Joshua (Joshua 7). After the conquest of the Promised Land, the tribes scattered to settle in towns and cities. There tribal leaders heard criminal cases, administered civil laws and customs and maintained general law and order in the community.<sup>18</sup> These

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<sup>14</sup> Available at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN). Accessed on 07/11/2016

<sup>15</sup> Available at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN). Accessed on 07/11/2013

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, (Nairobi-Kenya, Hippo Books, 2008), 87

<sup>17</sup> Available at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN). Accessed on 07/11/2013

<sup>18</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 90

leaders were known as Judges. These Judges often served as military leaders who responded to external aggression. However, their rule proved unreliable and inconsistent, and led the historians who wrote the book of Judges to complain of anarchy in Israel and lament the lack of a king.<sup>19</sup>

The people approached the last of these individuals, Samuel, prophet and judge, to ask for a king (1Sam 8:5; 10:18-19). Samuel warned the Israelites about the consequences of a despotic exercise of kingship (1Sam 8:11-18). However, the authority of the king can also be experienced as a gift of Yahweh who comes to the assistance of His people (1Sam 9:16). In the end, Saul was anointed king (1Sam 10:1-2). These events show the tension that brought Israel to understand kingship in a different way than it was understood by neighbouring peoples. The king, chosen by Yahweh and consecrated by Him, is seen as God's son and is to make God's dominion and plan of salvation visible. The king, then, is to be the defender of the weak and the guarantor of justice for the people. The condemnation of the prophets focused precisely on the kings' failure to fulfill these functions (1Kg 21; Is 10:1-4; Am 2:6-8, 8:4-8; Mic 3:1-4).

The failure of kingship on the historical level does not lead to the disappearance of the ideal of a king who, in fidelity to Yahweh, will govern with wisdom and act in justice. This hope reappeared time and again in the Psalms (cf. Ps 2, 18, 20, 21, 72). In the messianic oracles, the figure of a king endowed with the Lord's Spirit, full of wisdom and capable of rendering justice to the poor, is awaited in eschatological times (cf. Is 11:2-5; Jer 23:5-6). As true shepherd of the people of Israel, he will bring peace to the nations (cf. Zech 9:9-10). In Wisdom Literature, the king is presented as the one who renders just judgments and abhors iniquity (cf. Prov 16:12), who judges the poor with equity (cf. Prov 29:14) and is a friend to those with a pure heart (cf. Prov 22:11). There is a gradual unfolding of the proclamation of what the Gospels and other New Testament writings see fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the definitive incarnation of what the Old Testament foretold about the figure of the king.<sup>20</sup>

It follows clearly that Israel saw many different forms of government over the centuries, and all of them are described as being endorsed by God. For instance, God was the one who raised up Moses and Joshua, the Judges and several kings who ruled after them. Yahweh was also the one who overthrew the king, and sent the people into exile. It seems that God is prepared to use different forms of government to suit his purpose at different times, and that no one form can claim to be perfect.<sup>21</sup>

## POLITICS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Politics is about power.<sup>22</sup> The New Testament word used to express the idea of power in the sense of authority is *exousia*, usually translated “authority” or “power”. This word, *exousia* denoting “freedom of action” or “right to act” is used in many senses in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the context of the relationship of God's people and the state understood here as organized political community under political leadership was very different from that in the Old Testament. There was no question of believers exercising political power.<sup>23</sup> The Jews or Christians were under Roman rule, and Jesus was thus asked questions about how God's People should live when governed by non-believers.

Jesus refused the oppressive and despotic power wielded by the rulers of the nations (Mk 10:42) and rejects their pretension in having themselves called benefactors (Lk 22:25), but he does not directly oppose the authorities of his time. In his pronouncement on the paying of taxes to Caesar (Mk 12:13-17;

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>20</sup> Available at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN). Accessed on 07/11/2013

<sup>21</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 91

<sup>22</sup> Available at <http://uculcpt.blogspot.com/2009/04/should-churchs-involvement-in-politics.html> Accessed on 1/12/16

<sup>23</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 91

Mt 22:15-22; Lk 20:20-26), he affirms that we must give to God what is God's, implicitly condemning every attempt at making temporal power divine or absolute: God alone can demand everything from man. At the same time, temporal power has the right to its due: Jesus does not consider it unjust to pay taxes to Caesar.

Jesus, the promised Messiah, fought against and overcame the temptation of a political messianism, characterized by the subjection of the nations (Mt 4:8-11; Lk 4:5-8). He is the Son of Man who came "to serve, and to give his life" (Mk 10:45; cf. Mt 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27). As his disciples were discussing with one another who is the greatest, Jesus taught them that they must make themselves least and the servants of all (Mk 9:33-35), showing to the sons of Zebedee, James and John, who wished to sit at His right hand, the path of the cross (Mk 10:35-40; Mt 20:20-23).

Nonetheless, submission, not passive but "for the sake of conscience" (Rom. 13:5), to legitimate authority responds to the order established by God. Paul defines the relationships and duties that a Christian is to have towards the authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). He insists on the civic duty to pay taxes: "Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, fear to whom fear is due, respect to who respect is due" (Rom 13:7). The Apostle certainly does not intend to legitimize every authority so much as to help Christians to "take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Rom 12:17), including their relations with the authorities, insofar as the authorities are at the service of God for the good of the person (cf. Rom 13:4; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Tit 3:1) and "to execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:4). Peter exhorts Christians to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Pet 2:13). The king and his governors have the duty "to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right" (1 Pet 2:14). This authority of theirs must be "honoured" (1 Pet 2:17), that is, recognized, because God demands correct behaviour that will "silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet 2:15). Freedom must not be used as a pretext for evil but to serve God (cf. 1 Pet 2:16). It concerns free and responsible obedience to an authority that causes justice to be respected, ensuring the common good.

Thus, the New Testament provides endless inspiration for Christian reflection on political power, recalling that it comes from God and is an integral part of the order that he created. This order is perceived by the human conscience and, in social life, finds its fulfillment in the truth, justice, freedom and solidarity that bring peace.<sup>24</sup>

## THE CHURCH AND POLITICS IN HISTORY

In the Roman Empire, rulers (Emperors or Caesars) were considered gods. The state, in this context, was a sacred reality. It was worshiped as both an earthly and heavenly power. One of the challenges both Jews and Christians faced in the Roman Empire had to do with the sacred state where the king was worshipped as god or as incarnation of god. Both Jews and early Christians refused to worship the king as they considered him as a false god. And they suffered persecution for their recalcitrance.<sup>25</sup> Church members in the Roman Empire were often forced to light candles and bow down to government officials and if they refused, were put to death. The emperor Nero killed thousands of Christians who refused to worship him.<sup>26</sup> Under Constantine I, Christianity gained legal acceptance. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire (A.D. 330). Under this situation, it became necessary to demarcate the correct relationship between religion and government. Prominent Christian theologians including St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and later on during the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin addressed these

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<sup>24</sup> Available at

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#CHAPTER%20ELEVEN). Accessed on 07/11/2013

<sup>25</sup> An unpublished work on *The Church and State: The Way Forward*. A lecture delivered by Most Rev. Professor Emmanuel Asante, P.1-2

<sup>26</sup> An on-line essay on "Church and State" ([http://www.customtermpapers.org/customessay/politics/essay/church\\_and\\_state/532.html](http://www.customtermpapers.org/customessay/politics/essay/church_and_state/532.html)). Accessed on 1/11/16

problems in their writings. From the writings of Augustine and Aquinas, the Church and state were considered as separate but related entities. Martin Luther also claimed that the government had supreme authority in social matters and that the Church should be primarily concerned with spiritual matters and the individual's inner life. John Calvin also advocated a shared ruler of society by state and religious leaders.

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### THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

As said earlier, very often, one hears people saying "Religion should not mix with politics." Those who make such claim appeal to the separation of Church and state.<sup>28</sup> Such people have the firm conception and conviction that there is a vast difference between religion and politics. The difference between the Church and the state is that Church deals with the eternal order, eternal salvation, and spiritual matters while the state deals with the temporal order and the material well-being of citizens. There has been a big debate on the separation of the two and on the effect of the interference in many countries.<sup>29</sup>

The conception of an interface or correlation between the Church and politics implies active involvement of the Church in politics. The Church as a body cannot remain aloof from political life if it is accepted that the Word is intended not simply for the individual but also for the community.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the Church should not hide under the cloak of neutrality and ignore involvement in delicate socio-political issues. Taylor supports this claim when he states that the Church must be rooted in the society within which it has grown up. Its members are a part of society, sharing its traditional points of view, influenced by its past history, and involved in its strength and its weakness, its rise or fall. A Church which is cut off from the rest of society living a separate enclosed life of its own will become paralyzed or perish altogether.<sup>31</sup>

### THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TO POLITICS

The heart and mainstream of the Christian Church have accepted the need to live with the tension between the need for the state, the gift of God in the ordering of our social life in peace and freedom and the reality of the abuse of human power in human life; the fact that the state is corruptible into the abuse of power by those who control the organs of civic life.<sup>32</sup> That notwithstanding, the Church has adopted different positions in respect of the Church-politics relations. According to Asante, there are three important positions that must be taken notice of.

The first position is termed Separation. It is also termed "hands-off-politics" position. Proponents of this position assert that "Religion should not mix with politics". They claim that religion deals with spiritual matters usually considered in the 'other-worldly' terms, whereas politics is considered as 'this-worldly affairs'. To such extremists, politics is "dirty" involving dishonest deals and filthy compromise of Christian principles. The following biblical texts are usually cited in view of the position in question: "You are not of this world" (John 17:6). "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2). "Come out from them" (2 Corinthians 6:17). So for those who belong to such school of thought, it is inconceivable to have a Christian politician since one can hardly remain true to Christ whose "kingdom is not of this world" while involving oneself with the world swinging and dealing that politics require. There is no doubt that a choice for Christ is a choice for a value system, principles of life and morality that is

<sup>27</sup> An unpublished work on *The Church and State: The Way Forward*. A lecture delivered by Most Rev. Professor Emmanuel Asante, P.2-3

<sup>28</sup> Asante, *Stewardship*, 74-75

<sup>29</sup> Available at <http://www.ask.com/question/difference-between-church-and-state>. Accessed on 1/12/13

<sup>30</sup> Paolo I. Tolvo, *Political engagement as an Ethical and Religious Question*, (Tampere, Research Institute of the Lutheran Church in Finland, 1979), 12

<sup>31</sup> John V. Taylor, *Christianity and Politics in Africa*. (Harmonsworth, Penguin, 1957), 5

<sup>32</sup> An unpublished work on *The Church and State: The Way Forward*. A lecture delivered by Most Rev. Professor Emmanuel Asante, Pg 3

diametrically opposed to that of the secular world.<sup>33</sup> However, in the view of Asante, if the Church fails to give a reforming example that is consistent with its preaching and teaching, it becomes as a salt that has lost its saltiness.<sup>34</sup> Matters of economic and political policies are not just secular or technical matters devoid of spiritual content and perspective. They are also moral and religious. The prophetic role of the Church as Churches cannot be ceded to individual frauds who are in to fulfill their insatiable appetites at the expense of the religious life.

The second position is termed Transformation. According to this position, the Church must transform the values and morality of the state or society. This position does not call for rejection of the world or the state nor does it call for the identification of the Church with the state in respect of values, moral and ethical principles. It calls on the Church to transform the world by being what it is, salt and light of the world. We must take note that while we must avoid any identification of the Church with the state, we must understand that faith in the concrete involves certain social attitudes and commitment; that commitment to the Christian faith should release energies to transform the world in which we live.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the Church is the mission of Christ. The ministry of Christ has a positive bearing upon the transformation of human society not only in the private domain of thought and feeling but also in the public domain of law, government and economics. Thus, Christians' involvement in politics should release energies to transform the way people engage in politics in the society.

The third position is also termed Involvement. This position calls for active and consistent involvement of the Church in the state understood here as organized political community under political leadership. Taylor supports this claim when he states that the Church must be rooted in the society within which it has grown up. Its members are a part of society, sharing its traditional points of view, influenced by its past history, and involved in its strength and its weakness, its rise or fall. A Church which is cut off from the rest of society living a separate enclosed life of its own will become paralyzed or perish altogether.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Church should not hide under the cloak of neutrality and shun involvement in delicate socio-political issues. The involvement of the Church in the social, political and economic development of society has shown clearly that, while the Church seeks to avoid any kind of political reduction of the Christian faith, the Church is increasingly aware that the Christian faith has a concrete dimension involving certain socio-political attitudes and commitments. Hence, the Church is an agent in the sense of a divine representative existing to effect positive change that is in keeping with the will and rule of God in society. All this is to say that the Church is hardly passive when it comes to socio-political changes.

## THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN POLITICS IN THE SOCIETY

Christians would agree that the power of state is not absolute but is derived from God, to whom rulers are answerable. But for Kunhiyop, the Church has had little to say on political issues relating to order, justice and freedom. What has been said has often been hesitant, ambivalent, incoherent and unpersuasive.<sup>37</sup> For him, one reason for this is that African Christians have been very uncertain about the roles of the Church and the state and have questioned whether individual Christians should be involved in politics at all.

According to Asante, the Christian is in this world so the forces of the world influence him. Many factors influence his life. He is earth-bound. He is subject to the socio-cultural and political influences of his community. Like all human beings, the Christian derives his being only in a living relation with others. It follows that the Christian like all human beings is subject to social-political pressure. Since it is in the context of socio-political interaction that we develop the Christian behaviour like that of all human beings the Christian cannot live unaffected by what goes on around him. Neither can the Christian be indifferent

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<sup>33</sup> Asante, *The Church and State: The Way Forward*, 3

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Christianity and Politics in Africa*, 5

<sup>37</sup> Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 82

to such social facts as politics. So the Christian has a stake in the socio-political life of his people.<sup>38</sup> The Ghanaian of the current era is indeed *Homo sapiens politico*<sup>39</sup> meaning 'political beings'. Politics is a mechanism by which society is controlled and managed for the good of all. All human beings always yearn to enjoy or experience something good and ensure goodness in all things. Therefore in our unending quest to enjoy something good and ensure goodness, we tend to become political and hence political beings. Politics, so understood, can hardly be anti-Christian. There is indeed moral justification for Christians' involvement in politics.<sup>40</sup>

In the words of Brian, firstly, the Church needs to recognize that it does have a role. He makes this point because many Christians struggle with the Church's involvement in socio-political issues. Yet Scripture and history clearly support the Church's place in these concerns. Daniel becomes a leader in Babylon, Amos and other prophets speak into political and social matters in Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations. Both John the Baptist and Jesus refer to the political concerns of their day. In both the Old and New Testament God's representatives spoke out against abuse of political power and sought just use of power. This surely, is what being "salt and light" means. Hence participation in politics does not detract from spirituality; in fact a spirituality that is unrelated to politics is questionable.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, for Brian, the key role the Church plays in politics is through its prophetic ministry. "Prophetic" here means speaking into policy, structure, or issues in the name of God and Christ, or on behalf of humanity in general or of a community in particular. The Church has a set of moral norms and it has illustrations in Scripture and in history of how these norms have been used. The prophetic role is seen in the application of relevant moral norms to the current political concerns of the day. Hence the Church needs to continue engaging with government on justice, corruption, leadership, economic debt, housing, education, health care, safety and security, policy, and whatever else is morally important. Like Brian, Asante indicates that to define the prophetic role of the Church in terms of social, political and religious concerns is also to say that the prophetic role of the Church is to encourage acts of justice. In other words, the Church is not called to be simply critical and negative. The Church must give credit where credit is due. Its social and political concern must be constructive. The Church must not see itself as existing simply to give its blessings to the government. It must support the government only when the government does what enhances the dignity of the people. The Church must live in conditions which enhances their humanity as creatures of God.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, according to Brian, the Church's role in politics is an ethical one. He is not concerned here with party politics which is often partisan, though he concedes that individual Christians belonging to parties of their choice will apply ethics within the framework of their party's policies. He considers ethics as an expression of God's compassion for humanity: God's desire for the best for creation. It also reflects the "image of God" in humanity. If all humanity is made in the image of God in some way or other, then humans are surely to seek the best for each other. Public leaders, then, are to work for the betterment of their communities. Considering the role of the Church in this context, Brian indicates strongly that the Church has to speak and act, it has to engage government on moral terms, not on expediency or seeming interference. Christians in the political arena have to commit themselves to honesty and integrity in all areas of their lives to show by example that following Jesus works. The Church, as institution, needs to have competent lobbyists within government structures to inform and be informed about the issues of the day. This must be seen as an investment, not a costly luxury.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Asante, 76

<sup>39</sup> Bernard E. Marbell, *Politics in the Bible and Africa: An Evaluation of the Ghanaian Experience*, (Ghana: Maranatha University College).

<sup>40</sup> Asante. *Culture, Politics and Development*, 96

<sup>41</sup> Brian. *UCU Law and Christian Political Thought*, 4

<sup>42</sup> Asante. *Culture, Politics and Development*, 107

<sup>43</sup> Brian. *UCU Law and Christian Political Thought*, 5

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Christian cannot stay out of politics, since he is already involved in it by virtue of his humanity and citizenship of the community. What the Christian must do is to bring to bear on politics his transcendent loyalty to God in Christ. The Church's role in politics is to be there visibly in the context of political policy formulation. The Church has to be prophetic, speaking for God and signaling the ethical values that enrich a nation. The Church has to be bold and forthright, constructive and innovative. The Church has to be "salt and light" in what is so often a corrupt environment, to bring light and health.

However, based on the above presentation, I would like to make the following suggestions by way of cautioning the Church in its involvement in politics.

First, it is important to remember that the Church is a society organized for purposes other than political action. If it enters the political arena it runs the risk of obscuring or compromising the purpose for which it exists.

Second, the Church must not become arrogant, but rather be prepared to acknowledge that it does not have the specialist knowledge required to solve particular problems. Its function is to tell the politician what ends the social order should promote; but it must leave to the politician the devising of the precise means to those ends.

Finally, in many situations, Christians cannot act in accordance with the principles of their faith without provoking political controversy simply because the ethical witness of the Church includes the prophetic demonstration of evil. It should be at war with everything contrary to the purpose of God and that bid defiance to the true knowledge of God.

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