

POLITICS: THE DIFFICULT AND NOBLE ART.

By +John Cardinal ONAIYEKAN, Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja

SECOND JOHN CARDINAL ONAIYEKAN ANNUAL LECTURE,

LOYOLA JESUIT COLLEGE. 2ND OCTOBER 2022.

INTRODUCTION

“Those with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics, or whose talents in this matter can be developed, should prepare themselves for it, and, forgetting their own convenience and material interests, they should engage in political activity”. Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, no 75.”

First of all, I sincerely thank the authorities of the Loyola Jesuit College for the great honor it has done me of this annual lecture in my honor. I sincerely appreciate it and I do pray and hope that it will indeed be for the great benefit of the Loyola Jesuit College and the many of us who are proud to be associated with her.

I have the privilege and honor of deciding on the topic of the lecture that I am to deliver. Last year, for the maiden edition, I chose the title **“Towards a New World Order”**, treated under five headings as follows: **The Human Community, Climate Change, Science and Technology, War Peace and Weapons, and Religion**. For this Second Edition this year, I have decided to reflect on the issue of **POLITICS IN NIGERIA TODAY**, a theme that could also be captioned as **“Towards a New and Better Nigeria”**. If there is any matter that has grasped the attention of Nigerians, in our days, it is precisely the forthcoming election, 2023. That Nigerians are extremely worried about how the nation is being run seems clear enough. There is a general agreement that we can do much better for ourselves than we have so far seen. The two major parties that have claimed the privilege and monopoly of ruling us since the present democratic dispensation started in 1999 have not justified the trust that they have been demanding from us. Until now, we had no other choice and therefore, we were forced to keep shuttling between one and the other. Faces were changing, but the essence of the political system has remained the same. What we need now is not only a change of faces. Indeed, we don't even need to worry about the faces. What we need now is a completely new game with new rules. The rules, system and practice of politics in our nation in the last 16 years have been anything but satisfactory. We are not condemned to continue in the same way. There is a hope now that there is a different and possibly better way out. There is a possibility of redemption. This is the grave and urgent concern of all Nigerians. The purpose of my lecture is to reflect on this matter, not in professional academic language, but simply discussing in simple terms, what we are talking about.

I will start from a general discussion, and move systematically through our traditional culture to the colonial domination, and the experience of our independent country. I will also spend some time to reflect on our experience of military rule. Then in an effort to find the way out, I will touch on the biblical perspective, then reflect on the church and political power from historical point of view. Finally, we shall come to the situation today. I will indicate, the role of the church as mother and teacher, and end up with drawing attention to the ideas that the church has for a well-managed human society.

1. POLITICS: A HUMAN NECESSITY

The fact that we human beings are not only individuals but also living in society, means that there is always a social dimension to our existence. That is the origin of human groups in all its forms. Even the bible has much to say about this and about the origin of nations. (See Gen. 10) We look back and we have the complex history of different nations spread all over our planet. For most of them, we do not have any records. But there are a few ancient civilizations that have left behind, appreciable remnants to give us an idea of how well developed they were. In fact, the remnants of some of those ancient civilizations are still a surprise to us today. These civilizations generally are along the ancient big rivers.

Without going into details we can think about the civilization along the Nile River, which gave rise to the Egyptian civilization. Ancient Egypt left behind the mighty pyramids still standing today, as evidence of a highly developed culture, whose details have been lost and have not been found even today. The pyramids remain a mystery scientifically, despite our modern scientific discoveries and gadgets.

Along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and the space in between these two rivers called Mesopotamia, was another center of ancient civilization. That too left behind some major archeological evidences of a great civilization. We are quite familiar with these two empires which controlled most of the ancient world as known to us, in the common history of the ancient world. They also are prominent in the biblical history of humanity.

But we must remember that at the same time or even before then, there were other similar great empires. We recall, for example, the Chinese empires dating back to more than 4 millennia, and Indian empires along the Ganges river. Then, if we go across the Atlantic Ocean, in South America, the Aztec empire, left behind very significant and amazing structures. The first Europeans that crossed the Atlantic met them in their strength when they first met the populations of the Southern American continent.

In all these, there is the issue of how human beings managed themselves. It is a question of politics. The lesson we have learnt from all these ancient empires that came and went, is that “no condition is permanent”. More recently, relatively speaking, we also had in Europe the Greek empire, which was overtaken by the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was dominant in the

world throughout the period of the New Testament. These too have left behind evidence of how far they have developed their cultures.

There is an important point that needs to be mentioned in respect of great empires, ancient and modern. They are almost all characterized by violence and military conquests, with massive movements of peoples and populations, either in forced exile and slavery or invasions and colonization of the weak by the powerful. It was clearly a case of the survival of the fittest. The great emperors generally built their monuments on the blood of their captives and slaves. We can only hope that humanity has now made some progress from those atrocious eras.

Today, we have many nations. The modern states are very well known, with the United Nations organization where almost every nation is a member. There is a general agreement that we need to have a minimum standard for political activity in our different nations, although there is still a strong feeling that each nation has autonomy to rule itself however it wills. But the direction that the world is going now is more and more towards a globalized human society, where we all more or less live freely together in a global village. How this will develop without destroying the riches of our diversities is the great challenge that is before us now.

It is in this modern world that our country Nigeria must find its own place too. No nation is an island; we cannot say we do not care what others think about us. We must live up to the expectations of the modern world. We cannot escape this nor can we brag our way through it by telling stories that may not reflect the reality of our situation. Where do we stand? Definitely in today's world, we are not among the most important nations even though we ought to be. We are neither in the G7 nor in the G20. We can be among the front line nations of the world if we manage to organize ourselves better. This is the importance of politics. But, let us go back to our traditional culture.

2. OUR TRADITIONAL CULTURE.

It is not as if we in Africa did not have an effective way of managing our own affairs. Generally, in our traditional culture, the tribes, and the nations were like a huge big family. An important aspect of the political arrangement in our traditional culture was the important place of religion because the whole big family saw itself as being under God. Religion and politics mixed together in a smooth way that did not cause too much problems. Of course, in those days, the societies were monolithic. We did not have differences of religion. There was only one religion in the tribe to which everybody belonged. In that situation, things worked easily. Leadership was very often hereditary, with royal families. The concept of royal family presupposes that the ruler is appointed by God through the accident of birth, an arrangement that the society accepted. Members of the royal family understood this and were aware not only of the dignity they had but also the responsibility that falls to them to be good rulers.

We spoke of empires in the ancient world. Africa too had its own empires. In the Sub-Saharan region all along the river Niger, we had the three great empires of the middle ages namely,

Ghana, Mali and Songhai. They came, grew and passed on. For us here in Nigeria, we have to think of the empires of Benin kingdom, the Idah kingdom, which is also somehow linked with the famous Kwararafa kingdom. Then in the west was the Yoruba Oyo empire. Finally, in the north was the Fulani caliphate which managed to bring together the Hausa states and kingdoms under one rule. These empires have gone but their influence still remains with us. Our efforts at creating a political system for our nation have to take into consideration the repercussions and the remnants of these past empires.

3. THE BRITISH COLONIAL DOMINATION

At a particular time in our history, European nations took over much of Africa. In fact, in 1884, at the infamous Berlin Conference, the entire continent of Africa was partitioned among the major European powers of those days. We are truly surprised today when we look back on that phenomenon. It is for us today unbelievable that an arrogant set of people would decide to actually take over the territory of others against their wish. This was the origin of the colonial era. Our country Nigeria fell under the control of the British Empire. It was a very significant historical experience from around the year 1900 until 1960. Relatively speaking, it was a short period of time. But it made a great impact on our country Nigeria. We must say that it is the colonial era that created what we now call Nigeria. Whether this was good or not is a matter of debate. But, personally, I believe that if we want to be realistic, we just have to accept what we now have on our hands. Nigeria has come to stay, whether we wanted it or not. I also believe that we can also see some positive elements out of the fact that this nation has been put together by others who had their own reasons for doing so. The British empire in Nigeria was characterized by the system of indirect rule. This meant that the colonial administrators knew that they did not have the wherewithal to control the whole nation and all its peoples. They therefore as far as possible adopted the political systems that they met. They made use of the rulers that already had some measure of control and authority. The indirect rule system was particularly successful in the north where the Fulani caliphate was fully adopted by the British under a kind of “gentleman’s agreement”. Thus, the Fulani rulers and the emirates retained most of their powers, while the British colonial rulers supervised matters and made sure that their European rivals, especially the French, did not intrude in the area under their control.

The colonial domination is characterized also by the principle of divide and rule. Even though Nigeria was considered one nation, it was ruled in different ways. This “divide and rule” made it possible for the British to control the nation. However, the colonial phenomenon, not only for Britain but for other European nations was not sustainable indefinitely.

By the middle of the 20th century things fell apart. There was clamor for independence by the peoples in the different colonies. The story of the struggle for independence in Nigeria has been told elsewhere. We know that we did not have to fight the British for our independence. There were no wars, like, for example in Kenya, where the famous and gallant Mau Mau, under Jomo Kenyatta, put up a very stiff opposition and resistance. With us, it was rather peaceful. The British

authorities realized that they could no longer continue to rule over our country. The wind of change blew and they blew with it. Thus, in 1960, we celebrated our independence as a sovereign nation, though we still remained very much attached to our colonial masters, especially at the economic level.

4. NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Thus, we became a sovereign nation. 1st October, 1960 saw a great event in the history of our nation. I was a young boy of 16 years and was in the Race Course, (now Tafawa Balewa Square) in Lagos where the flag of Britain, the union jack was brought down and our green white green flag hoisted for the first time over our nation. As a young boy in form 4, we were told and I believed that were independent and very soon, we would be like the great nations of the world, like Britain, France, America and Germany. And we thought we were on the right track.

Independence meant that we would no longer be under the control of any foreign powers. But that came with challenges, the greatest of which was how do we organize a united nation with the vast diversities that we had among ourselves. There was always the danger to return to the positions we were before the British brought us together. It required all the effort for us to be able to work together as one nation, with all our differences of culture, language, history and also, religion.

Another challenge following from independence is that of building a modern state with all the socio-political parameters that were required. It was not easy. It was a turbulent journey, which did not take too long to fall apart. By 1966 only six years after independence, the Nigerian state as a modern nation had collapsed under the military rule.

5. THE MILITARY ERA.

The soldiers took over control of government, first in January 1966, and soon after that in July, the soldiers took over from themselves in a counter coup. This cycle of violence of coup and counter coup continued for about 30 years in our nation.

The military took over power in Nigeria on the pretext that the politicians were not doing a good job. The complaints of 1966 are still very much with us today, namely, corruption and bad government. The young military officers, most of them in their 30s had rather naive idea on how the country should be ruled. They however had the advantage of force, since they controlled our weapons. That was how the country continued in military rule for about 30 years.

There were, of course, some positive results from the military rule. It can be said that we survived as a nation. There was the Biafra war of secession, which almost broke up the nation, but which was eventually brought together in some kind of unity. The slogan of the civil war from the federal side was “to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done”. Whether that task was done is

quite another matter. On the surface Nigeria was kept one, but up till now this unity has been under great stress.

Economically, the military were lucky, in that their coming into governance coincided with the discovery of oil in our nation. So they were able to ride on the oil boom to achieve a lot of projects which they probably would have failed to do if they did not have so much loose money on hand to use. The military rule was supposed to have ended when General Obasanjo handed over power to President Shehu Shagari in 1979, after a free and fair election. But after one term, the military came back again and swept away the democratically elected government under the pretext that the elections were not free and fair. This coup was led by the well-known Gen. Mohamadu Buhari, (Rtd). It started another period of almost 10 years of military rule. That was anything but smooth; from Buhari to Babangida, from Babangida to Abacha and finally to Abdulsalami who handed over to another soldier namely, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, (Rtd) but this time as a civilian ruler. Looking back now we can better assess, the cost of military rule to Nigeria.

The great negative impact of military rule was that it destroyed the rule of law. One of the first acts of a military government is to suspend the constitution. That meant that the country will now be ruled not by the constitution but by whatever decrees the soldiers decide best to rule the country. It is amazing that the nation tolerated this mode of government for so long. And it has had its lasting impact on our nation and the way we see governance and even leadership. The military rule was characterized by violence. It was like “might is right”. You became a head of state if you succeed in capturing power, by whatever means. It is interesting that when any soldier tries to capture power and fails, he ended up being executed by firing squad for treason. But when they succeed, they become heads of state, with the highest honor in the land as Grand Commanders of the Federal Republic, (GCFR).

Thus there was really no morality as regards how or why a particular group of coup plotters rule and others do not. It was a government by gamble and unfortunately the gambling did not help us much. It all depended on the person who was in power. That has introduced one of the greatest political problems of our nation, namely that our institutions are weak and we are relying on powerful personalities. In our modern world, truly great nations are ruled by strong institutions not by powerful men. If the institutions are strong, then it will not matter too much who is the head of government. The institutions and the rules will move the nation forward. We are still on our way looking for the way out.

This is what has brought us to where we are today. Even though since 1999 we have started once again efforts to have civilian rule, and have been going through the motions of elections, it is obvious that we really have not had a real democratic system, based on free, fair and credible elections. It is significant that in all our elections, there has been massive voter apathy. We never had more than 30 percent of our Nigerian voters going to vote. This is a devastating commentary on how much the people of Nigeria trust and rely on the political system under which they are being ruled.

In a way, much of the idiosyncrasies of the military regime is found in our so called democratic dispensation. Even the language of “capturing power” is still very much in use. When we hear that there is a “flag bearer”, this calls to mind a purely military conquest. Even the pervading concept of “loyalty” is still very much a military idea. It is no wonder that politics soon became a “do or die” affair. Unfortunately, even under civilian rule, Nigerians seem to have generally settled to accept whatever they can get from those who claim to be their rulers. Will this change? Can it change? That is the issue we have with us now. Before we go any further about the way forward, let us now consider these things from a biblical perspective.

6. THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we look at the bible, we have the story of how humanity organizes itself. Of course it started with the story of our parents, Adam and Eve, of a family which grew and became a powerful nation, but a corrupt nation which God destroyed with the flood. (See Gen. 6-9) Then came the story of Noah and his children who started the different races and nations in the world. Nations developed in different ways; the bible also records the civilizations we already referred to before, around the Mesopotamia and around the Nile in Egypt. All these are part and parcel of the biblical story of human development.

What is important is that it seems that humanity failed to rule itself well. This is perhaps why God decided to choose one nation that would be his people and who would recognize him as their God. That is how the chosen people of Israel came about, with the covenant on Mount Sinai after the liberation from Egypt through the great event of the exodus. The nation of Israel was proud to consider itself God’s own people and also believed that God fought their battles for them against other nations. This was how they took over control of the holy land, the land of Canaan which eventually became the kingdom of Israel. That kingdom eventually split into two, and one after the other the two kingdoms of Israel were dragged away into exile.

From a political point of view, the kingdom of Israel was supposed to be God’s own kingdom. The king was to rule in the name of God and according to God’s will. God in his own turn would protect them. But unfortunately it did not work out that way. The people of Israel did not follow the will of God in the way they lived their lives. The prophets did all they could to bring them back to good order but did not succeed. The result was that the kingdom of Israel actually collapsed and was never fully restored. Even the return from the exile was only partially successful. Israel remained a fragile nation that fell under the control first of the Persians, then of the Greeks and finally the Romans, who were the rulers of the Holy Land at the time of Jesus.

It would appear that the promise made by God with the people of Israel was no longer valid. But the New Testament is our answer to this serious spiritual dilemma. Jesus came as the Messiah, as the person whom the scriptures had foretold would come and restore the kingdom of David. Jesus was actually called the Son of David. However, Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world. But he was indeed a King, though his was a kingdom of justice, love and peace.

What was left of the nation of Israel was totally destroyed by the Romans about the same time that Jesus was killed by command of these same Romans. Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70AD. The nation of Israel never revived itself in any serious way until modern day Israel which started in 1948. The story of modern Israel and its link with the biblical ideas and stories is not easy to tackle. It is enough that we simply mention it here.

7.THE CHURCH AND POLITICAL POWER.

What Jesus left behind was not a worldly kingdom but rather a community of followers who believed in Him. They were to make sure that they make disciples of all nations and teach people the things that Jesus himself had taught them during his public life. That group of people he left behind would have been totally incapable of carrying out the mandate given to them, were it not that the Jesus event was not any ordinary human event. Rather the Spirit of God which Jesus breathed upon his apostles made sure that the church survived and even thrived. The first 300 years were under persecution of the Roman Empire.

Jesus died on the cross as a king. This is a tragic anomaly. How can a king die on the cross? This anomaly has continued to be with us. On the one hand Jesus is a king. On the other hand, he did not defend himself when he could well have done so! (See Matthew 26, 51-54). And the apostles he left behind were anything but kings. They were just ordinary people with a message to preach. Those who controlled political powers determined what happened to the apostles and the church left behind. The Roman Empire treated the Christian faith very badly but never succeeded in exterminating it. The more the church was persecuted, the more it grew.

And so it was until about the year 330 AD when a new emperor emerged in the Roman Empire. His name was Constantine. He not only became a Christian, but also made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. From then onwards, started the history of the collaboration between the church and the state. This has come at great cost. On the one hand, it gave freedom for the church and the church spread tremendously. Even the leaders of the church were given high honors and regard, instead of being special targets for persecution and martyrdom. That was the origin of the dignity and powers of the clergy of the church, both locally as seen in the bishops, and on the universal level, with the position of the pope. These were the positive elements,

But it also had negative consequences. It had serious dimensions with regard to church unity. When the church is closely linked with the political power, every political problem negatively affects the church. The stories of great heresies and schisms in the early church are connected with the close links between the church and the state. When we read the story for example of the Christological heresies of the Arians, we could see the important role played by the political rulers in the way the heresies developed and spread. The great schism between the Western and the Eastern Church, between Rome and Constantinople by the year 1054 was because they were two big political centers at that time, Rome as the headquarters of the Western Roman

Empire, and Constantinople as that of the Eastern Empire. That political standoff had its impact on the church, which has remained divided for centuries, even until now.

When the church becomes too closely linked with world powers very often the world powers took upper hand. It is the link between church and state that led to the so called religious wars even within Christianity. The story of Catholics and Protestants fighting and killing each other not only in mainland Europe but also in England, is a very sad story indeed. Also, the history of the holy wars against Muslims presumably to liberate the holy land and make it free for pilgrimage, led to the crusades of European kingdoms against Muslim rulers who also considered themselves as being engaged in a Jihad, a holy war. That people who claim to believe in God should be fighting such terrible battles, with bloody violence, all in the name of God on both sides is a tragedy and very sad indeed. Unfortunately, even now we have not yet fully learnt the lesson. One thing is sure; we cannot claim to be killing one another in the name of God, unless we have made God our servant who would do whatever we want. That is the danger of religion becoming too political.

Now let us come to our modern era today. What has the church got to say about politics and how does it affect us in our country Nigeria?

8. THE CHURCH AND POLITICS TODAY

For quite some time, since about some two or three hundred years ago, there has been much clamour for the separation of church and state. Before then religion and politics went hand in hand. For quite some time the leadership of the church gave directives to political rulers in European countries. All these were challenged especially by the protestant reformation and later by the new philosophy of nation states that insisted on separating religion from the state, and from politics.

However, despite this, the church has never completely abdicated its role as guardians of the people in their political life. It was in the year 1961 that Pope John XXIII wrote an encyclical titled '*Mater et Magistra*' which means 'Mother and Teacher'. Those two words describe exactly how the church sees her role in relation to politics at all times but especially in our days. So the church continues to play the role of a mother who cares for her children with all love and tenderness. The church is also a teacher that gives guidance to her children on how best to organize their life so that everyone may live a full life and so that the common good may be pursued to the greater glory of God. This is why since many years now, the church has issued many guidelines to tackle the modern socio-economic and political issues. The fact therefore is that the church does have a political role to play. This political role can be seen in two ways.

First is the role of the clergy, from the pope right down to the ordained priests. She has the role of guiding the people of God according to the best traditions of the Catholic social doctrines. There is also the purely spiritual role of praying for the rulers and all those involved in political

office. These are not insignificant roles. It is very important and the church has never stopped playing these roles in season and out of season.

The second way the church plays a role in politics is through the activities of its lay faithful for whom political participation is a special duty. It is a duty as well as a right of the catholic faithful as citizens of their nations to enter into the political arena and to do all they can to be witnesses to the gospel of the Lord Jesus in the political field. This is the lesson that we learn very clearly from the Vatican Council II document on the role of the laity in the modern world. This document '*Gaudium et Spes*' clearly states that political participation is a noble even though a difficult task. It is noble because it is participation in God's own care over his people. It is difficult because it has to be carried out with extreme dedication and sacrifice. The Vatican Council document says that the lay faithful in politics should not be pursuing their personal interest but rather should be ready to make sacrifices for the common good in their political engagement.

In Nigeria, we have seen a concept and practice of politics that unfortunately seem to be the complete opposite of what we are now saying. Most Nigerians see politics as an arena to make oneself rich, certainly not to work for the common good. It has almost come to be understood that you should not expect politicians to be honest. Their stock in trade is to try as much as they can to deceive people in the promises that they make and the actions that they take. All this needs to change if our life is to improve, especially in the present situation that we are now in the country.

9. SOME NOTE-WORTHY CHURCH DOCUMENTS

We need to be reminded of the many guidelines and documents which have come from the official sources of our catholic faith. It is the duty of any catholic lay faithful who wants to be in politics to familiarize him/herself with these documents. They are not secret papers. They are open. They are available on the websites of the Vatican and can easily be accessed. The language is also very clear, addressed "to all men and women of good will", not in any esoteric, theological jargon.

I will greatly propose and advice that all those who feel that they are called for this difficult but noble task should familiarize themselves with the Catholic social doctrine. A very effective way to start is from the publication called the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church". It is a very beautiful collection of the major documents of the church in this regard, published in 1991 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, with Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino as President. Cardinal Martino was for many years the Permanent Representative of the Holy See at the United nations in New York. He therefore knows what he is talking about. Of particular interest is the very elaborate "analytical index" at the end of the volume. There one can easily find the different topics that have to do with political awareness and participation and thereby directed to the appropriate documents.

Another document that every adult and serious catholic should possess is the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was published in 1997. It is a document that is quite different from the famous old simple Penny Catechism, with which older Nigerian Catholics are quite familiar.

Rather, this is a very elaborate publication of almost 700 pages, about all that a catholic need to know to be able to defend and witness to his faith in the world of our days. With these two above mentioned documents, the catholic laity is well armed to be able to undertake the great apostolate of political action.

As for the papal documents that are noteworthy the first would be the **“RERUM NOVARUM”** (RN) which was published in 1892 by **POPE LEO XIII**. It is the first document in our modern world to address head on the various issues that have derived from the industrial revolution, the modern world of work and capital and similar matters. It is considered the first publication from the official magisterium of the church on modern, social issues.

Forty years after and in commemoration of RN in the year 1931, **POPE PIUS XI** issued a document, an encyclical, on the same subject, called **“Quadragesimo Anno”** meaning the 40th year. It repeats much of what was in Rerum Novarum but bringing it up to date on the situation of the world in the year 1931, between the two world wars.

Coming closer to our era are the two major documents of **Pope John XXIII**. In 1961 he issued the document **“Mater et Magistra”** to which I have already referred. In this document the Pope confirmed the right and duty of the Church to issue guidelines, not only to Catholics but also to all men and women of goodwill, on how best to manage human affairs in view of the common good for the greater glory of God. Then two years later, in 1963 at the height of the cold war and when the danger of nuclear war was very high between the Soviet Union and the Western World, Pope John XXIII issued the famous document **“Pacem In Terris”** which means “Peace in The World”. In it, he pleaded that nations of the world should draw back from the madness of the nuclear arms race, so that our planet may not be destroyed through mutual attacks.

Then came **Pope Paul VI**. He issued a large number of documents, addresses and letters. But among them, we wish to highlight three major ones. The first one in 1967 was **“Populorum Progressio”**, where the Pope spoke about justice in the world in terms of nations and the right of nations to take full advantage of the progress that we are seeing in the world of our days. Nobody should be left behind in the race for development says the Pope in that encyclical. Then in 1971, 80 years after Rerum Novarum, the same Pope issued the document **“Octogesima Adveniens”** meaning “Towards the 80th years” since Rerum Novarum. Again it was bringing up to date the doctrines of the church as regards the social life of the world, including politics and economics.

There are two documents which derive from the synods under the pontificate of Pope Paul VI. The first one in 1975 is **“Evangelii Nuntiandi”** which seeks to present the duty of evangelisation as a holistic project which is not only with regards to preaching and spiritual welfare but also in the human development of everybody and for all peoples. Thus, the document brought out the fact that evangelisation in the church is not only spiritual but also material. The next year, in 1976, after the synod on Justice in the World, the Pope issued the document 'Justitiam et Pacem'.

In all these new documents, previous teachings of the church were once again recalled and brought up to date.

Of special significance to us Africans is the fact that Pope Paul VI in 1967, immediately after *Populorum Progressio*, issued a small but very important document called “*Africae Terrarum*”. The Pope took the trouble to focus on the people and continent of Africa and remind the rest of the world that they should not forget the continent of Africa and its peoples. I was in Rome as a young student when this document came out and we were very proud and happy that finally the church was thinking about us. After Paul VI came **John Paul I** who reigned for only 33 days, leaving behind little more than fond memories of his captivating smiles.

Then came **Pope John Paul II** who ruled for more than 25 years. In the area of politics and social doctrine of the church, this Pope will be very much remembered for three major documents. “*Laborem Exercens*” (1981), which emphasizes human labour and the relationship between labour and capital, an issue that was already treated by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*. Then in 1987 he brought out the document “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*” which was a comprehensive update on the doctrine of the church on social matters including politics. Finally, in 1991 on the occasion of 100 years since the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, the Pope published the document “*Centesimus Annus*” which literally means ‘The 100th Year’, that is, after *Rerum Novarum*. Anybody who wants to know where the church stands on social matters today, including politics and economics, should take the time to read *Centesimus Annus*, a very well packaged document.

Then came **Benedict XVI**, whom we shall always remember for his very powerful document on justice and charity, “*Caritas in Veritate*” 2009.. There, he brought out clearly the link between justice and charity, that the two go together. You cannot claim to do charity while being unjust, and being just is a part and form of charity. In that document he worked out a very beautiful theology of how the two virtues work hand in hand.

After Benedict XVI is our present **Pope, Francis**. This is the tenth year of his pontificate and he has come up with two major documents that we must pay attention to. The first one called ‘*Laudato Si*’ (2015), has to do with the climate and the environment. He makes a passionate plea; that God has created and given us a beautiful garden to live in. No one has any right to turn our common home into a rubbish dump. Thus, in very clear terms and with a high sense of scientific research, the Pope has a very powerful message to the world of our days on how we should take care of our planet. The impact of this document has been very much felt, well beyond the confines of the church. In any case the document was address to men and women of goodwill and it was drafted with input from other religions and from men and women with different scientific competences. Probably this is why the document received such wide and universal acceptance.

More recently, in the year 2020 Pope Francis came out with the ground breaking document called “*Fratelli Tutti*” meaning “We are all brothers”. Here the emphasis is on the fact that despite

our diversities of nations, tribes and cultures, we must not forget that we are all brothers and sisters. This important theological fact has been presented to the world with all the implications for our living together in a new human environment. In that document, he has a whole chapter on politics, where he uses the expression 'politics of love'. He had some beautiful things to say about how politics is an act of love. Politicians must enter politics because of the love that they have for humanity, for the people whom they represent and for whom they devote their lives.

This is a quick run through the various documents in which the Popes have addressed issues of politics and the social needs of our world. All these documents are by their very nature addressed to all men and women of goodwill. They are documents that come from the Popes, but they are not meant for just Catholics. The Catholic social doctrine is not meant for Catholics alone. It is rather the doctrine about the social life of humanity from a catholic perspective. For us in Nigeria, even though we Catholics are not that many, we should be proud that we have something to offer to our nation, by presenting to our fellow citizens the values of catholic social doctrine.

Apart from the documents written by the Popes, we should take note of some important documents that were results of the **synods of Bishops**. We have already referred to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Justitia et Pacem*, which are both summaries of synods under Pope Paul VI. Under Pope John Paul II in 1994 there was the **first synod of Bishops for Africa**. This is of special interest to us. The document following the 1994 synod is “*Ecclesia in Africa*”, “the Church in Africa”, which was published in 1996. In that document a whole chapter was on justice and peace, with a lot of pleas that African political leaders should do all they can to be of service, honest service, to their people and not allow our nations to continue to rot away and be left behind by the rest of the world.

Pope John Paul II called for a **Second African Synod** but he died before the synod started. His successor Pope Benedict the XVI continued the project and in 2009 the Second African synod was celebrated in Rome, followed by the document “*Africae Munus*”, “the task of Africa”, published by the same Pope Benedict XVI in 2011. The topic of that synod was “Reconciliation and Peace in Africa”. That synod looked seriously at the situation in the continent of Africa; riddled with bad government and conflicts of all sorts. A lot of serious thought went into what the church should do, and how the church can contribute towards ensuring peace and reconciliation in our continent. The message of 2009 is still waiting to be fully harnessed and brought into practice. Thus we can see that the church is really mother and teacher.

CONCLUSION

We opened our discussion with the statement from “*Gaudium Et Spes*” to the effect that politics is a noble even though it is a difficult task. We now conclude on that same note. From point of view of catholic social doctrine, God alone is the owner of all power in the world. He created humanity that we may live in peace according to His will. Politics is supposed to make sure that God’s will is achieved in the lives of men and women. The church of God has devised

powerful and clear messages in this regard. In our situation in Nigeria where politics has acquired a very bad name, it is extremely important that we find ways and means of changing the language and insist that politics is not a game for rogues, thieves and liars. Rather, it is a noble task that honest people, who love their nation and love their people, get involved in. They should be ready to sacrifice a lot of their own personal convenience in order to serve the common good.

This means that those who up till now have been opting out of active politics because they think that it is a dirty game must now have a complete rethink and turn around. Our nation cannot change for the better unless we change our concept of politics. 2023 is approaching. There is hope that we can change our concept of politics, in such a way that good people will come out en masse, not only to present themselves for election but also to make sure that they elect the right kind of person who can deliver on the right kind of politics. This will not happen if we spend our time only in prayers, vigils and novenas, even though these are important. Rather we must also be involved. We must have great awareness about what is happening around us and participate, all of us, each one according to his or her own possibilities and talents. Though the election is just around the corner, we should not despair that it is too late to do anything meaningful. We can still do a lot now to work towards a different Nigeria and a better one too.

We pray that the Queen of Nigeria who is also the Queen of the apostles will intercede for us at the throne of Her Divine Son, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Amen.