

JULIUS NYERERE, THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC POLITICIANS IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

ADOLPHUS EKEDIMMA AMAEFULE, *SDV*

Introduction

In 1995, Pope John Paul II came out with the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*. Therein, he had fervently prayed, following the Synod Fathers, that “there would arise in Africa *holy politicians* - both men and women - and that there would be saintly Heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served.”¹ Eleven years later in 2006, that prayer would appear to have been answered. Reason: The Diocese of Musoma in Tanzania commenced the canonization process of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania. Born in 1922 in Butiama village, he began his primary education in 1934. From there, he moved to Tabora Boys Secondary School. In 1943, he proceeded to Makerere University in Uganda for his diploma in Education. Back home, he became a *Mwalimu*, a teacher, at St Mary’s Catholic Secondary School, Tabora. Three years after, in 1949, he left for the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, where, in 1952, he bagged a Master of Arts. Returning home, he went back to what he had always liked doing: Teaching. This time, he taught at St. Francis’ College, Pugu, near Dar es Salaam. He would be there for only two years before he joined the Tanganyika National Union (TANU) in 1954. Seven years after in 1961, Tanganyika got independence and he became the Prime minister. But following the amalgamation of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form what is known today as Tanzania in 1964, he became the president. He would be there for over the next two decades until he resigned voluntarily in 1985. Fourteen years after the said resignation, he died of Leukemia at a London hospital. But by this time, he had become not only Tanzania’s Baba Ya Taifa – Father of the Nation, but also “one of the most respected – and loved – of all African first presidents”² who endeavoured, in their little ways, to build the Kingdom of God in Africa through good leadership and true patriotism.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Yaoundé, Cameroon, 14 September, 1995), 111.

² R. DOWDEN, *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* (London: Portobello Books, 2009), 66.

The preoccupation of this paper is to look at what politicians in Nigeria, today, can learn from the actions and inactions of this Nyerere. But because the Church in Tanzania helped to make Nyerere what he became and vice versa, the paper equally considers what the Church in Nigeria can learn thereof in her relationship with her own sons and daughters in public office.

On the Choice of Tanzania's Julius Nyerere

As a country, Nigeria has often looked “like a Big Man with the spindly legs of a child.”³ This is because of those who have been at the helm of her affairs ever since she got independence from Britain in 1960. Yes, “the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.”⁴ In saying this, however, we are not oblivious of at least two realities. One, that it takes two to tango. That is, for every leadership, there is always a followership and often, a people gets the kind of leadership it deserves. Two, that there are many factors that aggregate into making a leader, good or bad.⁵ But the attribution of culpability to leadership here is hinged on the head-body analogy. It is generally believed that if the head is good, the body will also be good. But if the body is good, and the head is not, nothing much can positively be achieved. Hence, the OK-ness of the body is dependent on that of the head. No wonder, Achebe says that one shining act of bold, selfless leadership at the top has a way of radiating powerful sensations of well-being and pride through every nerve and artery of national life.⁶ It is along this line, therefore, that one can understand the significance of a Nyerere and what he can say to politicians in Nigeria, today.

Of course, questions like these may come up: What has Tanzania got to do with Nigeria? Or, more particularly, What has a Tanzanian politician got to tell contemporary politicians in Nigeria who, obviously, live in a world, clime and time different from his? Admittedly, Tanzania, with its peculiarities, is different from Nigeria. In the time of Nyerere, for instance, while it ran a one-party system, Nigeria ran a multi-party system. But there are also some things they have in common. One, both of them got their independence from Britain in the 1960s. Two, both can boast of three major religions: African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam, with the last two being the most prominent. Talking about Nyerere here, there will be no attempt to apotheosize him. Nyerere was not perfect. Of course, no one is

3 C.N. ADICHIE, *Purple Hibiscus* (Lagos: Farafina, 2004), 11.

4 C. ACHEBE, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1983), 1.

5 I.I. AZOZU, *Effective Leadership and the Ambivalence of Human Interest: The Nigerian Paradox in Complementary Perspective* (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 2003), 43.

6 C. ACHEBE, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 17.

either. Perfection belongs to God. Man only has a vocation and an invitation to the same perfection (Matt.5:48). He, Nyerere, made mistakes. He recorded failures. Some have come to see him as a possessor of the notorious ITK (I-Too-Know) mentality that made him talk authoritatively as if he was the only person that had all the answers and thus made him pay deaf ears to some of his critics.⁷ Others have accused him of having held many more political prisoners than South Africa did in its apartheid years.⁸ Still, others have simply dismissed him as a tyrant.⁹ It is necessary that all these are pointed out, here. Reason: we so much agree with St. Frances De Sales that, “There is no harm done to the saints if their faults are shown as well as their virtues. But great harm is done to everybody by those hagiographers who slur over the faults, be it for the purpose of honouring the saints...or through fear of diminishing our reverence for their holiness.”¹⁰ But the fact remains that in the midst of all these, or better, in spite of them, he, Nyerere, was able to rise head and shoulder over his contemporaries to become an African colossus.¹¹ This also may have informed our use of him here as an inspiration and motivation for politicians in Nigeria, today.

Julius Nyerere and the Contemporary Politicians in Nigeria

Among many others, the motivation that Nyerere can give to politicians in Nigeria today can be located in the following:

Overcoming of Tribalism

Nigeria is a country of many tribes. This is even recognized by a line in the former national anthem: *Though tribe and tongue may differ*. As a matter of fact, there are well over 250 tribes in Nigeria. Over the years, many politicians in Nigeria have perfected the art of setting one tribe against the other for their selfish interests. When they want power, they demonize other tribes and whip up sentiments among their own people. When they lose elections, they say it is because of the tribe they come from. When they are persecuted for embezzlement and corruption, they say it is for reasons of their tribe. Tribe, then, becomes the refuge to which a majority of

⁷ F.O.C. NJOKU, *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2002), 66.

⁸ D. LAMB, *The Africans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), xiv.

⁹ L.S. MWIJAGE, *Julius K Nyerere: Servant of God Or Untarnished Tyrant?*(Wisdom House Publications Limited, 2010).

¹⁰ A. BUTLER, *Lives of the Saints, Vol. 1* (New York: Kenedy, 1956), vii.

¹¹ Cf. A. MAZRUI, “Nyerere and I,” *Daily Nation*, Sunday, December 26, 1999. <https://www.nation.co>. Accessed 25\02\2019.

Nigerian politicians run whenever it pleases them. Although not of the same number of tribes as Nigeria, Tanzania still has many. In fact, it can boast of over 120 tribes. But it is to the credit of Nyerere that he did not set his tribe, Zanaki, for instance, against others, or join it with others and then set them against other groups – all for his selfish gain. Instead, he appeared to have realized better than many politicians in Nigeria the import of the line that immediately follows the aforesaid Though-tribe-and-tongue-may-differ line of the old national anthem: “In brotherhood we stand!” Yes, he made his compatriots to always look beyond their tribes and see Tanzania as their own. “Our recognition of the family to which we all belong,” he once said, “must be extended yet further –beyond the tribe.”¹² That seed he sowed then, despite the vagaries of time, has really flourished today. In fact, while the evil of tribalism continues to wreak havoc in many countries in Africa, Tanzania remains, as it were, the exception.¹³

Against Playing the Religion Card

Related to what is said above is the issue of religion. As previously pointed out, Tanzania in the time of Nyerere had three religions: African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. Nyerere was a Catholic Christian. But he still did not play the religion card in order to win elections. He did not incite the Christians against the Muslims. He simply refused to identify the nation with any religious group. While Tanzanians, individually, had their religions and were free, within the law, to believe and worship as they wished, Tanzania, as nation, had no religion: it was a secular state.¹⁴ He did play his politics so well that when he stepped down from the presidency, he handed over not to a Christian, but to a Muslim: Ali Hassan Mwingi. Neither did he find it strange as well to help out the Muslims in his village as they constructed their mosque nor to ask Christian missionary schools to admit Muslims in their schools so as to bridge what could be a future imbalance in that area. While he received many criticisms as he did all these and more, he was able, however, to keep alive what Brueggemann, talking about the prophet’s task, had called the “ministry of imagination” and the ability to propose, “alternative solutions and futures not yet conceived.”¹⁵ The “not yet future” of those days for Tanzania has

¹² J.K. NYERERE, “Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 1.1 (1987), 11.

¹³ K.B. RICHBURG, *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 240-241.

¹⁴ L. MAGESA, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence*, (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 151-152.

¹⁵ W. BUEGGEEMANN, *Prophetic Imagination* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 45.

become the reality of today in which, as a country, despite as well, some problems here and there, it leads many others in Africa in both political unity and religious tolerance,¹⁶ and many people today have come to appreciate what he was up to those days. Hence, a confirmation of the observation by Irenaeus that, “No prophecy is fully understood until after the fulfilment of it.”¹⁷

In a way, therefore, it could be said that Nyerere’s was an Interreligious Dialogue in practice and not just in theory – and it is something needed so much in Nigeria today. This is why many politicians in Nigeria have, as well, a leaf to borrow from him, here. While it is true that Section 10 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution has expressly stated that: “The Government of the federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State religion,” many politicians know how to overlook it and do what they want – all for their personal gains. Yes, going through the annals of violence in the country, it will be discovered that a good number of them had been instigated by politicians. Even, most of the violence termed “religious” have always had political colouration. Politicians who lost elections, always tended to play the religion card. Loss of lives and property had been on the trail of such episodes. Is it any wonder then that Meredith concluded that Nigerian politics, by nature, tends to be not only mercenary but also violent?¹⁸ But this is not how it should be. Politicians in Nigeria should help in the building of a Nigeria where the followers of the two major religions thereof, Christianity and Islam, will live more, in tolerance and peace, than they do at present.

Beyond Materialism

One of the characteristics of politicians anywhere in the world is the fact that they are usually in love with words. Yes, most politicians eat words, drink words and sleep over words. They are merchants of words. Indeed, words-made-flesh! But the problem is in marrying the words with actions. Only a few of them could be called doers of what they say. Nyerere was one of them. For instance, he once said that, “there are more important things in life than the amassing of riches.”¹⁹ But those

¹⁶ J.M. KIKWETE, “Managing Religious Diversity in a Democratic Environment: The Tanzania Experience.” Speech at Boston University (U.S.A.), September 25, 2006. Cited in Angolwisye Isakwisa Malambu, “Nyerere, Julius Kambarage,” Dictionary of African Christian Biography, <https://dacb.org/stories> Accessed 25\02\2019.

¹⁷ Cited in William Barclay, *Gospel of John*, vol. 1 (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), 134.

¹⁸ M. MEREDITH, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent Since Independence* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2005). <https://books.google.com.ng>. Accessed 24\02\2019.

¹⁹ J.K. NYERERE, *Freedom and Socialism/Uhuru na Ujamaa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 316.

were not empty phrases. He believed them. When he died, it was discovered that truly there had been “more important things in [his] life than the amassing of riches.” For one, he never had foreign bank accounts. He never had any eye-popping state-of-the-art cars in his garages. Neither did he have mansions scattered here and there in his country and elsewhere. He had one old house in his village. The government and the army, it is said, had to build one for him. Even when he retired, he did not have a pension to live on: the Tanzanian Parliament had to vote to create one for him. This happened even as he was, while in office, the least paid of the world’s heads of state.²⁰ This is another thing that many politicians in Nigeria should take note of. Nigeria, as a country, has not been blessed with many leaders who show a similar Nyerere-like attitude towards wealth. Instead, she’s got a plethora of leaders who seemed to have considered the amassing of wealth as the most important thing in their lives. At the end of the day, they would often have amassed so much wealth that one could not but wonder whether they would have as many as a thousand and one lives to be able to finish all they looted. In fact, not only do they own houses and property here and there, have foreign bank accounts, they also engage in money laundering. Little wonder, the former chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Farida Waziri, had to hazard the possibility that a good number of these leader-looters might be suffering from “‘madness’ or some form of obsessive-compulsive psychiatric disorder.”²¹

Lesson in Simplicity

Very close to what has just been said above is Nyerere’s legendary simplicity. He never allowed the pecks and paraphernalia of his office to turn him into a god. He simply had his feet on the ground. In his autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom*, Mandela has this to say about Nyerere in the early part of his presidency: “We arrived in Dar es Salaam the next day and I met Julius Nyerere, the newly independent country’s first president. We talked at his house, which was not at all grand, and I recall that he drove himself in a simple car, a little Austin. This impressed me for it suggested that he was a man of the people.”²² When he, Nyerere, became older, “he moved around Dar es Salaam in an old car with just his

²⁰ G. MWAKIKAGILE, *Life Under Nyerere* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2006), 82.

²¹ Farida Waziri, “The Role of Anti-corruption Agencies,” *A Keynote Address at a Workshop on Transparency and Accountability in the Public Service, Kaduna, Kaduna State* (September 28, 2009), 3.

²² N. MANDELA, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 290.

driver, who stopped for red lights.”²³ Also, it is recounted that while in office, he had attended Mass at Kampala, in Uganda. The crowd was much. An arrangement was made for him to have a special seat in front. But he did not want any of that. Instead, he chose to sit among the people. During Holy Communion, he simply got in line, against the intentions of many who wanted him to jump the queue.²⁴ This is unlike the situation in Nigeria, where almost every Tom, Dick and Harry in office would like to let others know that he or she has “arrived.” How often has it been reported that this “big man” or “big woman” in office has given orders to his\her escort to forcefully remove, or, at the worst, beat up, a “stubborn” road user for daring to “block” the road as his\her “excellency” was passing by! This, of course, would be accompanied by the blaring of sirens strong enough to wake the dead from their prolonged sleep! May be, many Nigerian politicians can have one or two things to learn from him in this sense.

Again, it was Freeman who had noted that, “With their luxury air travel, five-star hotel rooms and vast entourage of hangers-on, the life of a Nigerian politician has long been more akin to that of a rap star than a public servant[...]. Nigerian ministers could act like a state-funded version of Sean ‘P Diddy’ Combs, travelling the world in private jets.”²⁵ As hard as that sounds, there is a tinge of truth in it. Many politicians in Nigeria today have this penchant for travelling the world over. In these days, this is done mostly for vacations. Going on vacations overseas has become the in-thing. It has become a status symbol. Dubai, the United States of America, many countries in Europe, as well as some in the Caribbean, are the preferred places. For them, doing vacations within the country is infra dig. It is something for the hoi polloi. As the Mwalimu, the teacher, that he was, Nyerere can teach many of these politicians in Nigeria something here as well. It is reported that while he was in office, he spent most of his vacations in his home town of Butiama, “working in his fields with his own hands, raising cattle or planting trees.”²⁶ In doing this, even without his knowing, he, being as he was then, the most intellectual of all

²³ M.T. KAUFMAN, “Julius Nyerere of Tanzania Dies; Preached African Socialism to the World,” *The New York Times*, October 5, 1999. <http://www.nytimes.com> Accessed 21\02\2019. See also Cf. Trevor Huddleston, “The Person Nyerere” in Colin Legum, and Geoffrey Mmari (eds.), *Mwalimu: The Influence of Nyerere* (London: James Currey, 2003), 3-4.

²⁴ M. SERUMAGA, “Tanzania: The Venerable Julius Nyerere of Butiama, Teacher and Leader,” *AfricaFiles* 30 July, 2015. <http://www.africafiles.org> Accessed 21\02\2019.

²⁵ C. FREEMAN, “High Life Over for Nigeria’s ‘Big Men’ as Crackdown Looms on Big Entourages and VIP Travel,” *The Telegraph*, 28 December, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/Accessed> 21\02\2019.

²⁶ L. MAGESA, “The Hidden Face of Julius Nyerere.” <http://pascalbcdeng.over-blog.com/Accessed> 20\02\2019.

English-speaking heads of state in Africa,²⁷ helped to demolish the fallacy rife in many quarters in Africa, even today, that, “anything to do with the cultivation of the soil is fit only for the poor and uneducated rustic.”²⁸

Not Trading in Blames

Apart from being the above-mentioned merchants of words, a good number of politicians in Nigeria, are often merchants of another thing: blames! No sooner does a policy, programme or enterprise go wrong – in fact, fails – than it is considered the “handiwork of detractors,” the “evil machinations of the opposition party” or the “product of the jealousy of some disgruntled party members,” etc. But rarely do they blame themselves or accept the fact that for good or bad, the buck stops at their table and see how they could make amends. Here, Nyerere can have something to teach the politicians in Nigeria, still. As it is well known, one of his signatures in office is the philosophy of *Ujamaa*, an African socialism, built, as it were, on the African extended family system.²⁹ But theory is usually different from practice. His *Ujamaa* programme did not entirely pan out as he had wished. It was almost a disaster, especially, on the economic front. It simply could not, as Mazrui observed, “deliver the goods of development.”³⁰ But when that happened, Nyerere did not start playing the blame game. In a farewell speech of November 5, 1985, he publicly stated: “I failed. Let’s admit it.”³¹

At Home with Positive Contribution

Most politicians in Nigeria, when they retire from active politics – if ever they do – become “godfathers” and “godmothers.” In fact, they become “deities.” They soon receive the “spirit of anointing” and anybody who wishes to become politically relevant or wishes to vie for any office would surely fall under their anointing! Such aspirants must always bow down and worship them. And when they win elections and assume their positions, something else happens! They would bring to the godfathers and godmothers the allocations meant, as the case may be, for the entire country, state, ministry, constituency, local Government Area, etc. This is to enable them to cut the size they want. Others bring the lists of appointments to various positions

²⁷ A.A. MAZRUI, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 230.

²⁸ S. ANDRESKI, *The African Predicament* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 204.

²⁹ NYERERE, “Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism,” 10.

³⁰ A. MAZRUI, “Nyerere and I.”

³¹ Cf. G. MWAKIKAGILE, *Tanzania Under Mwalimu Nyerere: Reflections on an African Statesman* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2006), 67.

so that they would choose the choicest and plum ones for their “boys” and “girls.” When these are not forthcoming, they simply make the place ungovernable for the person in power. But Nyerere was different. When he relinquished his presidency in 1985 - though this is not the main issue, here, it remains a milestone in a continent in which people would rather die than give up power - he had become the chairman of his party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, until 1990. While it is said that ever since the aforesaid relinquishing of his presidency, his “endorsement was to be a vital component for any Tanzanian politician for, in truth, he never ceased to be Tanzanian leader,”³² it is obvious that his kind of endorsement or “anointing” had nothing to do with that of the typical Nigerian political godfather or godmother as captured above. His endorsement had no strings attached to it. His interest was in the emergence of a corruption-free candidate who had the best of intentions for the people. But that, as well, is not even the main issue, here. The main issue here is what he became when he eventually retired from active politics: The Catechist of his village parish!³³ Yes, the Mwalimu in him could not die! He continued to teach and enlighten others. This is still something that the average Nigerian politician can emulate.

Always in Solidarity

Writing about the education system in his country, Tanzania, Nyerere had said that, “It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group.”³⁴ He incarnated, so to say, the aforementioned as he shared fairly in the good or bad fortune of his people. He was practically always there for them. His was a government of solidarity. There is a great deal of lesson that many politicians and public servants in Nigeria can take hereof. As it has often happened, many a time a good number of them have left those they govern in their bad fortunes; for example, when terrorists struck, when herdsmen attacked or when they were visited by one natural calamity or the other. Instead, in such instances, some of them junketed all over the world, attending one “useless” conference or another, when they would have delegated such to others so as to be with their people. Others have been known to have used the time of such misfortune, to move to other side of the country

³² D. MARTIN, “Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere: Obituary,” South African Research and Documentation Centre(SARDC), cited in Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2010), 572.

³³ G. OKORO, “Tribute to the Great Mwalimu: Julius Karambage Nyerere,” *The Catholic Ambassador* (October/November 2017), 20-21, 21.

³⁴ J. NYERERE, “Education for Self-Reliance,” March 1967. <http://www.swaraj.org/Accessed> 19/02/2019.

and be campaigning for re-elections, surrounded by myriads of sycophants, court jesters and praise singers. Or, even, some have used the same to play host to other hangers-on who had come to “urge” them to go in for a re-election in the face of crass incompetence, nepotism, selfishness and lack of solidarity.

With a Spirit of Selflessness

It was Abraham Lincoln who, in his famous letter to his son’s teacher, had urged the latter to teach his son, “that for every selfish politician, there is a dedicated leader.”³⁵ Indeed, Africa has been blessed with many selfish politicians and few dedicated leaders. Nyerere, as could have been obvious from the foregoing, was one of the dedicated and unselfish few. His was not a world of Me, Mine, Myself and I. Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar had said: “What touches us ourself shall be last served.”³⁶ This could have been said by another Julius: Julius Nyerere! His motto could have been: “That which touches me, should be served last.” He would have kept to it. Only somebody with such unselfish mentality would fail to convert the national purse into his private use. For instance, it is reported that while still the president of his country in the 1960s, he, after paying the school fees of his children, had to beg his bank to give him a few months’ grace on the repayment of the mortgage on his personal house.³⁷ For many African leaders of his time and a good number of them today for whom there was and still no difference between the national coffers and their private ones, that was a most foolish act. But that was vintage Nyerere! Again, only somebody with the aforementioned unselfish mentality would have the courage not to cut corners for himself, friends, family members or even village people. It is said that during his time in office, he had given, or better, imposed a leadership code that forbade government officials from involvement in a private business. This was to discourage corruption. But his wife ran a poultry business and was as well the head of the country’s major women’s organization, the United Women of Tanzania. Nyerere did not bend the rules to favour her. He was convinced that faced with the two options, the wife had a choice to make. A choice she did make.³⁸ Similarly, it is said that there had been, during his life, plans to construct a tarmac road to his village, Butiama. But he had refused. Reason: He believed that it was not proper for

³⁵ Cf. <http://englishbookgeorgia.com>. But it is good to point out immediately that there are doubts today as to whether Lincoln actually wrote this letter. See Thomas F. Schwartz, “Lincoln Never Said That,” *For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 3.4 (Winter 2001), 5.

³⁶ W. SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar*, 3.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 158.

³⁷ ACHEBE, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 17.

³⁸ KAUFMAN, “Julius Nyerere of Tanzania Dies.” See also Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 17.

his village to enjoy the privilege alone, while other villages could not.³⁹ No wonder, we could not but elsewhere call him, the “master of political altruism.”⁴⁰

As a Man of Principle

Writing in the *Young India* newspaper of October 22, 1925, Gandhi had listed, “Politics without principles,” as one of the Seven Social Sins.⁴¹ From all that have been said above, it is obvious that Nyerere never committed this social sin, of politics without principle. His, indeed, was a politics in and of principle. He always knew what he wanted and went for it. His actions were never motivated by pecuniary gains, but always by the common good. Is it any surprise that when he died, the *Newsweek* exclaimed: “The world has lost a man of principle.”⁴² Many politicians in Nigeria can learn from him: How to be men and women of principle in politics. For many, unfortunately, are not. Instead, they are “Spineless aspirants of office\ Harbingers of powerless will power\Possessors of void principle\Purveyors of porous promises.”⁴³ Yes, they are often men and women who, like nails, are attracted to where the magnet of money is and for whom the stomach seems to be the main motivation for joining political parties.⁴⁴

The Church in Tanzania and Julius Nyerere

In his apostolate of public service, Nyerere was supported by the Church in Tanzania. As pointed out above, he, Nyerere, is well known for espousing a system of philosophy called Ujamma socialism. While his socialism was built on the traditional African extended family, it was also built, in line with the teachings of the Church. Although it is true that at the initial stages of his Ujamma, Church leaders did not, a kind of, support it wholeheartedly for fear that it had communist undertone,⁴⁵ support became much better later.

In Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, there is the character, Papa (Eugene Achike), the father of the narrator of the novel, Kambili. He was, so to say, a man of the Church. He

³⁹ L. MAGESA “The Hidden Face of Julius Nyerere.”

⁴⁰ A.E. AMAEFULE, *Icons of Valour: Courageous Saints and Heroes for Courageous Living* (Ibadan: Daily Graphics, 2005), 327.

⁴¹ Cited in Anil Dutta Mishra, *Mahatma Gandhi On Ethics* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2010), 39.

⁴² MWAKIKAGILE, *Life Under Nyerere*, 82.

⁴³ A.E. AMAEFULE, *Songs of an African Bard* (Calabar: Print House, 2016), 35.

⁴⁴ Cf. O. P’BITEK, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 208.

⁴⁵ Castor M. Goliama, *Where are you Africa?: Church and Society in the Mobile Phone Age* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2011), 212.

frequented the Church and received the Eucharist. In his parish at St Agnes, Enugu, his expatriate parish priest, Father Benedict, often used him, the Pope and Jesus, during his sermons, to illustrate the gospels. Reason: After the coup, he, Papa, used his newspaper, the *Standard*, to speak the truth as well as to speak for freedom.⁴⁶ But when this Papa, so praised in the Church, left the same Church for his house, he became something else: A religious tyrant! He could not become the Eucharist he had received. Like Papa, Nyerere was also a man of the Church. He frequented the Church. It is said that he attended, wherever he was, the morning Mass almost every day. This was to enable him, as he said, to “ask God’s blessing on the day’s work.”⁴⁷ At such Masses, he did receive the Eucharist as well. But unlike Papa, he allowed the Eucharist he received to take flesh in him and be manifested in the things he did. Balasuriya had once said that, “The Eucharist is the spiritual food in so far as it leads to greater love, self-unity and communion among persons and groups. Today this requires love among persons and an effective action for justice.”⁴⁸ Yes, the Eucharist Nyerere received did lead him to foster greater love, unity, communion, justice and peace among the various tribes and religions in Tanzania. This is acknowledged, in a way, by the prayer composed for asking graces through his intercession: “We thank you, O God our Creator, for the gift of your servant, Julius Kambarage Nyerere [...] who [...] gave himself up completely for your people with love that knew no boundaries, building tirelessly unity and solidarity among all Children of God. He cared for the poor. He uplifted the downtrodden. He consoled orphans. He welcomed and fed refugees.[...] He defended justice and fought relentlessly against oppression and discrimination of any kind.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, the Church in Tanzania supported Nyerere by giving him the opportunity to serve, as already pointed out, as a catechist and also to translate the four gospels and the book of Acts of the Apostles in the style and genre of popular Swahili poetry.⁵⁰ All of which, of course, helped in the enrichment of the same Tanzanian Church. But then, if one side of the coin is the fact that the Church in Tanzania supported Nyerere, the other side of the coin that should not be downplayed is the fact that the same Nyerere, through his criticisms and challenges

⁴⁶ ADICHIE, *Purple Hibiscus*, 4-5.

⁴⁷ HUDDLESTON, “The Person Nyerere,” 6.

⁴⁸ T. BALASURIYA *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 22.

⁴⁹ Cf. MAGESA “The Hidden Face of Julius Nyerere.”

⁵⁰ A. MOJOLA, “Postcolonial Translation Theory and the Swahili Bible,” in Musa W. Dube and R.S. Wafula (eds.), *Postcoloniality, Translation, and the Bible in Africa* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 26-56, 49. It is good to point out here that even before now Nyerere had translated Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and the *Merchant of Venice* into the same Swahili. He also did some translations into his native language, Kisanaki.

that he knew how best to put them at the doorsteps of the Church, helped the Church in Tanzania to become what he ought to be: A more prophetic Church! For one, he had challenged the Church and its workers to fight against everything that “prevents a man from living in dignity and decency,” reminding it that even as “saints may be found in slums,” the slums cannot be preserved, “in order to make them breeding grounds for saints,” since there is “nothing saintly in imposed poverty.”⁵¹ In doing this, however, he pointed out that the Church should not see it as an abnegation of her duty to evangelize and a consequent identification with particular political ideologies. Instead, it should be seen as her own way of pursuing social justice.⁵²

Julius Nyerere, the Church and Catholic Politicians in Nigeria

In view of the aforesaid relationship that existed between the Church in Tanzania and Julius Nyerere, the Church in Nigeria today will be challenged at least on three scores:

To Wake Up From Slumber

It was Ezeogu who noted that, “As far as Nigerian politics is concerned, the Nigerian Catholic Church can be called a sleeping giant. It has not always played the leadership role and responsibility that she is supposed to and is capable of playing.”⁵³ Hence, the first challenge facing the Church in Nigeria in this context is for her to wake up from the aforesaid slumber and take up all the more her responsibility in the area of politics. Doing this, however, should not be seen as an unnecessary intrusion of hers into the temporal sphere as against her spiritual jurisdiction. Neither should it be regarded as an extra added to her mission of evangelization. Instead, it is part and parcel of it since the same temporal order, says Paul VI, “is the activity of men, and all that concerns men concerns the Church.”⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, many sons and daughters of the Church in Nigeria are already in the amphitheater of politics and public service. This is something encouraging since theirs, according to the bishops of Africa in their message to the people of God, is an apostolate to “promote the common good and God’s kingdom of justice, love and peace, in line with the

⁵¹ J. NYERERE, “The Church and Society.” A Speech to the Maryknoll Sisters’ Conference, New York, 16 October, 1970, in Julius K. Nyerere, *Man and Development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 82-101, 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵³ M. EZEUGU, *Bible and Politics: Can Nigerian Catholics Baptise the ‘Dirty Game’ of Politics?* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2007), viii.

⁵⁴ Cited in J.O. ODEY, *The Eleventh Commandment: You Shall Not Keep Silent in the Face of Injustice* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2007), 35.

teachings of the Church.”⁵⁵ But many more of her sons and daughters could have been there. Many factors have mitigated against this. Among this is the notion still rife that politics is a “dirty game” that committed Catholics should have nothing to do with or, at the worst, should touch with the proverbial long stick. Hence, the need for adequate catechesis so that a good number of the lay faithful may come to look beyond the apparent “dirtiness” of politics and thus see it as a mission field to which they have been called. It is a call that would eventuate, to borrow the title of Lehmann’s book, into the transfiguration of [the same dirty] politics!⁵⁶

To Bring Closer Her Members in Public Offices

The Church in Nigeria will also be challenged on yet another score; this time, in relation to the aforementioned sons and daughters of hers already in the “amphitheater of politics and public service.” She is asked to bring them closer which would see them sometimes being given responsibilities in the Church, or more precisely, in both their local parishes and the parishes where they reside. These responsibilities may include being extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, marriage instructors, part-time catechists, parish councilors, etc. The Church must not wait till when they would retire like Nyerere before this may happen. Their assuming such responsibilities and more in the Church would have at least two implications. One, it will be, in practical terms, an inspiration to others, in and outside the Church. Reason: That being a politician or in public service, as hinted above, does not preclude one from practising one’s faith. In fact, being an active politician and a practising Catholic are not mutually exclusive. Two, to the politicians or those in public service themselves, it will raise the consciousness in them that they are not just there alone, on their own. Instead, that they are representing the Church and that their actions and inactions can bring disgrace to the same Church. Hence, they have to sit up. And the same “bringing them closer” will also see these sons and daughters of the Church in politics being encouraged to attend Masses, make use of the sacraments and then assess the ecclesial resources, ever ready and available, in the form of advice, enlightenment on the social teachings of the Church and even spiritual direction. In this way, the Church in Nigeria would help all the more to “form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Bishops of Africa, *Message to the People of God*, 18th General Congregation of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, Friday, 23 October, 2005, 23.

⁵⁶ P. LEHMANN, *The Transfiguration of Politics* (London: SCM Press, 1975).

⁵⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (Rome, 25 December, 2005), 28.

However, in this “bringing them closer,” the Church should be mindful of at least the following points. One, that she should always try to put her own house in order. As a matter of fact, some “holy” politics, tribalism, ethnocentrism, etc. are observable sometimes in her scheme of things, at all levels. These are too heavy a burden for her to bear and still have the freedom to offer advice to her sons and daughters in politics or to speak out against such evils in the larger context of the nation. Two, as the bishops rightly observed in the same Message to the People of Africa, “[m]any Catholics in high office have fallen woefully short in their performance in office.”⁵⁸ But such “many Catholics” are still the children of the Church. The Church, being the mother she is, must welcome them. In welcoming them, however, she should have the courage to tell them that they have not done well and that they are “giving the Catholic Church a bad name.”⁵⁹ Hence, they should turn over a new leaf. She should not keep silence or be seen as condoning their evils for reasons of privileges or financial gains.

However, to help improve the performance of her sons and daughter in public office, the Church in Nigeria should do the following:

- (i) Constitute a committee made up of committed faithful who would be charged with the responsibilities of monitoring their performance in office. The committee, existing at the national level, would be replicated in every state and Local Government Area in the country, or better, in every province and diocese in the country. The committee should not be seen as usurping the functions of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) which, admittedly, has been doing a great job. This, especially, in the area of the enlightenment they carry out before elections (even as more needs to be done) and in the monitoring of the elections proper. But what it has not been doing and which is the vacuum the committee would fill up is in the area of monitoring the performance of those elected. The committee will incorporate some members of the JDPC into its fold in view of their ontological relatedness. Those Catholic politicians found to be doing well should be recommended to the Church hierarchy in the country for the presentation of award and those found not to be doing well, a means should be devised to “punish” them.
- (ii) According to *Gaudium et Spes*, “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.”⁶⁰ Taking a cue from this and going straight to

⁵⁸ BISHOPS OF AFRICA, *Message to the People of God*, 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁰ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) 76.

what is the interest of the paper here, the Church, it could be said, should not be identified with and bound to the candidate of a particular party. This, however, has not been the case as far as the Church in Nigeria is concerned. Sometimes, some bishops and priests, by their actions and inactions have “endorsed” some candidates. Such candidates often know how to make the best of the situation. They would never leave the Church or any of her functions or activities. They would simply become “Church rats.” And the bishops and priests, taken in by their seemingly show of piety and humility, would cement the endorsement and they would be elected. But soon after, their true colours will come out. In his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti had observed that, “Wherever you see an African, you’ll see his religion.[...] if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.”⁶¹ But some of these hitherto-endorsed-but-now-elected Catholic politicians do not take their Catholic faith anywhere to their elected offices. All the Masses and Church functions they attended would simply be forgotten. By their actions and inactions - mostly, contrary to the teachings of the Church – they would each be telling the same Church leaders: “I have arrived. You can now go to blazes.” It is the same actions and inactions of theirs in office that people often see and are thus forced, with a tincture of unbelief, to exclaim: “Look at Catholics! Is this what Catholicism is all about?” Hence, Rahner says: “The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny Him with their lifestyles are what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable.”⁶² Therefore, the leadership of the Church in Nigeria should always tread with caution in their endorsement of candidates for elected offices. Let them allow such candidates prove themselves by their actions and inactions. Hasty endorsement often bring hasty regrets!

- (iii) To Timothy in his first letter, Paul had advised: “I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for rulers of states and all in authority.”(2:1-2) It is undeniable that the Church in Nigeria has been, for a long time, in this business of offering prayers for “rulers of states and all in authority” and, especially, for her own sons and daughters. But since there can never be an overdose as far as this manner of prayer is concerned, more will still be needed from her. This is because the temptations strewn in their ways are many, so that they may overcome them and come, as Paul observed in the same letter, to “enjoy a quiet and peaceful life in goodliness and respect.”(2:2)

⁶¹ J.S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 2.

⁶² Cited in A.P BOERS, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: A New Look at the Lord's Prayer* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 64.

To Help Such Sons and Daughters See their Being in Politics as a Means of Sanctification

It is a fact that “among the saints, the Church venerates many men and women who served God through their generous commitment to politics and government.”⁶³ The implication of this is quite simple: That it is possible, as well, to work out one’s salvation, even today, through a “generous commitment to politics and government.” This is where one can locate another challenge of the foregoing for the sons and daughters of the Church in Nigeria who are in politics. They are asked to see their being in politics and government – just as Nyerere did - as a means to their sanctification. In fact, they are urged to see it as a call, a vocation, for them to become saints and then, sanctifiers!

Conclusion

The preoccupation of this paper has been to look at the life of Julius Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania. Nyerere’s life, as revealed in the paper, was one of simplicity, humility, selflessness, love, tolerance, solidarity, honesty, etc. The paper looked at what the politicians in Nigeria, today, can learn from him as they endeavour to build the Kingdom of God in the country, and thus help make the same country, as the national anthem urges, a “nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.” Nyerere was a committed Catholic Christian. The paper also did consider how the Church in Tanzania influenced him and helped him to become what we know of him today. It equally looked at what that has to say to the Church in Nigeria in her relationship with her sons and daughters. It was discovered, among other things, that it challenges her, the Church in Nigeria, to, first of all, wake up from her slumber so as to assume the responsibility expected of her as far as the nation’s political landscape is concerned. Secondly, it urges her to bring the aforementioned children of hers closer to herself by way of prayer, spiritual direction, availability, enlightenment, creation of room for their greater participation in Church’s life and well as helping to monitor how they perform in office, etc. And just as in the case of Nyerere, the sons and daughters of the Church in Nigeria also have the responsibility to criticize, in love and truth, the same Church and never to relent in challenging her to become what she ought to be: The vanguard of good governance,⁶⁴ the conscience of the society and a much more prophetic agent of the Kingdom of God!

⁶³ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (Rome, November 24, 2002), 1.

⁶⁴ Cf. CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA (CBCN), *Communiqué*, “Governance in Nigeria and the Common Good,” Resource Centre, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Durumi, Abuja, 10 - 16 March 2019, 4.