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Conference abstract:

Pentecostalism & socio-political engagement: a prolegomenon for the Common Good

Pentecostals are traditionally seen as 'apolitical'. Since the world of 'politics' is seen as corrupt, some find partial justification for this stance in the narrative of 1 John 2:15 to 'love not the world'. This paper explores the relationship between Pentecostalism and political engagement. It outlines the case for political engagement from a biblical perspective, as well as champions the Aristotelian and Crickian view of politics as the 'master science' capable of humanizing social relations. In arguing for active Christian citizenship, it invokes Jeremiah's 'Letter to the Exiles' as a foundational document and a prolegomenon for negotiating questions of Christian leadership and participation in the cultural politics of contemporary society. Using examples from history and contemporary politics, the paper argues that Pentecostals cannot be indifferent to the political institutions, ideas and culture where they live if the biblical metaphor of being 'salt and light' is to have relevance in society. The paper explores how one particular Pentecostal organisation has grappled with a range of socio-political themes and issues, including race, liberal democracy, internationalism and 'political culture'. Questions are raised about the nature of 'political culture' and its relationship to the Pentecostal understanding and location of the Pauline 'principalities and powers' against which we wrestle. The paper concludes with a series of reflections on contemporary global politics and the role Pentecostals can play, uniting politics and prayer.

Introduction

In this paper I want to attempt four things. Firstly, make some preliminary remarks and observations about US politics and President Trump. Secondly, say something about the nature of politics. Thirdly, outline some possible sources for a biblical theology of political engagement and make some comments upon two Resolutions in a classical Pentecostal tradition explicitly encouraging socio-political engagement. Fourthly, reflect upon the political document that came out of the African and Caribbean Christian community in 2015, namely, its manifesto for political mobilisation produced by the National Church Leaders Forum (NCLF) and its implications for Pentecostals. I will conclude with some brief comments and reflections on contemporary politics and the role Pentecostals can play, uniting politics and prayer.

On the day Donald Trump decisively won the American presidential election, I attended a seminar where my colleague at Roehampton University was giving a paper on politics and empathy.¹ The subtext of the early part of the paper was the notion that people are not outraged enough at social and political injustice; and by the latter half of the paper there was a distinct change of trajectory: namely, that too much 'empathy' and outrage might in fact be counterproductive. I suspect this is one of those perennial conundrums in depth psychology and political philosophy. Of course, given some of the politically incorrect (some might say 'strategic') things that Donald Trump said during the presidential campaign the question raised was whether the President-Elect had demonstrated a degree of emotional illiteracy. To put it another way: if, as Goleman asserts, 'emotional intelligence' (our 'emotional repertoire'²) includes qualities such as impulse control, empathy and social deftness, as well as the ability to take into consideration 'others' perspective, and understanding what behaviour is acceptable in a situation'³, then some of the language used by Donald Trump appears to be a radical departure from previous presidential campaigns and discourse. And the current attempt to install Nigel Farage, interim UKIP

¹ Dr Nina Power, "Radical Empathy: Politics and Emotions", Roehampton University, 9 November 2016.

² Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, London, Bloomsbury: 1996, p.6.

³ *Ibid.*, p.259

leader, as the UK's ambassador to the United States merely confirms a foretaste of a new world in the making. But Donald Trump won the highest prize in American politics, so we will have to wait and see if Armageddon is around the corner, as some have predicted, or whether things will continue much as before with a few changes here and there.⁴

In this week's special report on Trump's America, there is an article on the Pentecostal pastor, Jentezen Franklin and his Free Chapel in Gainesville, Florida. This megachurch pastor is a Trump supporter; he relates to his congregation his visit to a White House for dinner and how glad he is that 'the Lord's Prayer is being prayed in the White House'.⁵ The Pew Research Centre (PRC) tells us that the President's ratings among white evangelicals is close to 80% the White House. A truly revealing/troubling question is raised in the report on 'Trump's America': back in 2011, white evangelicals (with Pentecostals constituting a large percentage of them) believed that personal morality was very important in a President, but since Trump became President they have become the least likely group to say that according to Pew research. How does one explain this 'sudden shift in the fundamental issue of morality to accommodate their support for the President'?⁶

We know that politicians often 'campaign in poetry', but then they have to 'govern in prose'. Yes, we are living in interesting and surprising times indeed, post-Brexit and the spectre of a man with no political experience and has held no elected office becoming the 45th President of the most powerful country in the world. No, it's not the Second Coming, but W.B. Yeats poem is pregnant with political and emotional significance at this political juncture: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.'⁷ And in the subjunctive, we pray—and indeed we must— that nothing like Yeats's 'Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' will overtake us.

⁴ See cover of the *NewStatesman*, 11-17 November 2016. The cover caption reads: "The Trump apocalypse: How is populist revolt threatens the world order".

⁵ See *The Economist*, July 1- 7th 2017 ('Special Report—Trump's America', p. 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ W.B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming' in his *The Collected Poems*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth: 2008.

In light of Trump's presidential triumph and the voting patterns of Evangelicals in the U.S., one person inquires: 'Where is God in all of this?' To which one can reply: God is where He always is, allowing us to exercise our free will to make all kinds of decisions (even stupid/unenlightened ones with unintended consequences) and choices and then find rationalisations to live with them and justify them. We are existentially responsible for our choices, especially our psephological ones.

Let's see what we will discover in the coming months and years about the changing nature of Christian voting patterns in US, the place of personal morality of those seeking high office... about politics, faith and race. In the meantime, let me say something about the nature of politics...

On the nature of politics

Generally speaking, we have two definitions of politics: a broad definition and a much narrower one.⁸ The broad definition, according to John Stott, denotes the life of the city (*polis*) and the responsibilities of the citizens. The narrow definition sees politics as 'the science of government', often associated with the 'directing and administrating states or other political units'.⁹ One recognises the contested nature of defining 'politics' and 'political activity' in modern societies and contemporary discourse. What is clear is that 'politics' is concerned with our common life together in communities, however defined. The Creed reminds us of the political impact of the Roman Empire on the life and ministry of Jesus: 'He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.'¹⁰

At a time when many have become disillusioned with politics and politicians (the so-called political elites) you can adopt a number of views about politics and the political process, including the one that it's all a mess – a bit of a dog's dinner without being too unkind to dogs. Equally, you can adopt the general Hobbesian view and say that political life is not too dissimilar to the 'state of nature' which is characteristically 'poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.¹¹ But in the face of the current cynicism you can also take the view celebrated by the

⁸ See John Stott, *Issues Facing Christian Today* (4th ed), Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2006, p.34.

⁹ Iain Mclean and Alistair McMillan (Eds.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (3rd edition), Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2009, p.417.

¹⁰ See Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, London, SCM Press: 2012, pp.108-113.

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, Penguin Books: 1985 (edited and introduced by C.B. Macpherson, first published in 1651), p. 186.

late Professor Bernard Crick in his classic book *In Defence of Politics*.¹² This Crickian view is that politics is, in the Aristotelian sense, the 'master science'. Man is by nature 'a political animal', says Aristotle; a 'social instinct is implanted in all men by nature' and living in a society or in a state is natural unless you are 'a beast or a god'.¹³ The state exists for the 'good'. 'Every state', says Aristotle in his *Politics*, 'is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view of some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.'¹⁴ It is that great humanising activity, that 'process of discussion' demanding a dialect of opposites and competing interests to sustain itself; it is that principled acknowledgement that 'some tolerance of different truths' and 'some recognition that government is possible, indeed best conducted, amid the open canvassing of rival interests'. Crick goes on to say:

Politics, then, can be simply defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share of power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and survival of the whole community. And to complete the formal definition, a political system is that type of government where politics proves successful in ensuring reasonable stability and order.¹⁵

This high view of 'politics' thus described is, of course, intimated in Sophocles' *Antigone* and has particular resonances with Karl Popper's 'open society' thesis.¹⁶ In the *Antigone* we hear something of the importance of plural and competing voices in the polis, as well as the dangers and implications of autocratic rule in the dialogue between Creon the King of Thebes and his son Haemon:

Creon: The people of Thebes! Since when do I take my orders from the people of Thebes?

Haemon: Isn't that rather a childish thing to say?

¹² Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, Middlesex, Pelican Books: 1964 (originally published in 1962 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

¹³ Aristotle's, *Politics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon (ed), New York, The Modern Library, Book 1.i, p. 1129-30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1127.

¹⁵ Crick, *op. cit.*, p.21.

¹⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London and Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1966 (5th edition). In this two-volume work Popper offers a masterly criticism of those he calls enemies of democracy and the open society, including Plato, Hegel and Marx.

Creon: No, I am King, and responsible only to myself.

Haemon: A one-man state? What sort of state is that?

Creon: Why, does not every state belong to its ruler?

Haemon: You'd be an excellent king – on a desert island.¹⁷

For the Christian, it says that there is still a lot to play for; it says that if we believe in, or we get a glimpse of, the *Imago Dei* in the other, then we have a moral responsibility to fight for and struggle to create institutions and social conditions conducive to that dignity. Of course, as we will see later, the basis on which we frame the socio-economic and political discourse for Christian activism can be purely pragmatic, instrumental and rooted in self-enlightened interest (Jer. 29:7).

Citizenship and the 'two kingdoms'

As a constituent part of Protestantism, Pentecostals share the 'evangelical characteristics' or the 'quadrilateral of priorities' outlined by David Bebbington: this means that they are concerned with *conversionism, activism, biblicism* and *crucicentrism*.¹⁸ In focusing on activism in this quadrilateral it is important to point out the rich theological and historical pedigree of Christian concern for social-economic and political engagement. The metaphor of 'salt and light' in the Gospel (Matt 5-7) provide clues as to our redemptive and transformatory role in society. But we also have examples of the kind of engagement with the world and its structures of power by Old Testament prophets, New Testament writers, as well as Christian thinkers and church leaders down the centuries. Sometimes this is done at a great cost; and at times when the Church is under severe attack and criticism there arises an apologetic for the Church which clarifies the relationship between Church and State, the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Kingdom of Caesar' (the doctrine of the 'two kingdoms') and the 'two cities' identified by Augustine.¹⁹ In the case of Augustine's monumental work, it was an apologetic against those who attributed the fall of Rome to its abandonment of the city's traditional pagan gods for the Christian God; or as Augustine

¹⁷ Sophocles, *Theban Plays*, London, Penguin Books: 1974 (Translated by E.F. Watling in 1947.)

¹⁸ See D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History From the 1730s to the 1980s*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp.2-17.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *City of God*, London, Penguin Books: 2003 (Translated by Henry Bettenson, with a new introduction by G.R. Evans).

says: 'enemies against whom the City of God has to be defended'.²⁰ In twenty books, Augustine writes about the 'origin, the development, and the destined ends of the two cities. One of these is the city of God, the other the city of this world; and God's City lives in this world's city, as far as its human element is concerned, but it lives there as an alien sojourner.'²¹

At other times it discloses the nature of Christian commitment to active citizenship and the transformation of communities, as can be seen in the second century CE Letter to Diognetus.

The Bible as a 'political document' and the rediscovery of Christian socio-political engagement as the norm

When we speak of biblical and theological roots of socio-economic and political engagement, we are generally referring to those critical norms and sources that inform the way we think about and reflect upon society and a particular Christian vision of its transformation and re-imagining. The Old and New Testament, along with Christian tradition, offer a rich repository for the way we approach key social ideas and political institutions. The demarcation between 'religion' and 'politics' is often blurred; and some would like to delineate the two categories in rigid parallel so as to keep them apart – a kind of 'non-overlapping magisterial' (NOMA) advocated by the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould in the way we speak of religion and science. This is typically expressed by those who say that 'religion and politics shouldn't mix'. That those who express such views are *misreading* Christian tradition is clear from the new forms of Christian activism we are seeing among Pentecostals in the UK (expressed in the 2015 Black Church Manifesto) and elsewhere, along with the rediscovery of this rich and vibrant Christian norm and legacy. Of course, here in the UK, we only have to think of the Christian Socialists and the formation of the Labour Party.²² And the quip is that the Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marxism. Richard Bauckham aptly sums it up in the rediscovery of the Christian 'norm' of political engagement:

²⁰ Ibid., Bk. I.i.

²¹ Ibid., Bk.XVIII.i

²² See Christopher Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism*, Sevenoaks, Spire: 1993.

‘Many Christians have recently been discovering the political dimension of the message of the Bible. This is really a return to normality, since the notion that biblical Christianity has nothing to do with politics is little more than a modern Western Christian aberration.’²³

In respect of the Bible and what we can glean from it to guide our political actions and inform our political philosophy, Michael Walzer in his book on politics in the Hebrew Bible is right to remind us that the Bible is above all a ‘religious book’ and that ‘there is no political theory in the Bible’, for ‘political theory is a Greek invention’. Having said that he is keen to argue that the Bible’s content makes it also ‘a political book’. From the history of Israel a number of important political observations are made by Walzer which resonates with our own time and political lexicon: we witness ‘regime change’ as the tyranny of Pharaoh gives way to the leadership of Moses and Joshua; this is followed by the rule of God under the Judges who are rejected by the Elders and the people who demand a King. Later the Kings are overthrown by conquering armies of Assyrians and Babylonians, Greeks and Romans and ‘replaced by foreign emperors and their priestly collaborators’.²⁴ According to Walzer, most of the biblical writers are monarchists and ‘Republics and democracies make no appearance in the biblical texts’.²⁵ There are, of course, elements of ‘antipolitics’, as Walzer terms it, in the Old Testament; the ‘biblical writers are obviously interested, and explicitly so, in law and justice— which are for us, if not for them, highly politicized subjects’.²⁶ And when we think of the prophets and their role in biblical history, they are seen by Walzer as ‘poets of social justice, utopian visionaries’.²⁷ Walter Brueggeman describes them as ‘passionate poets who will not be silenced’, speaking words grounded in Yahweh’s own disclosure’.²⁸

Two things are clear from the preceding discussion: firstly, the Bible can be seen as a ‘political document’²⁹; and secondly, while ‘there isn’t a single version of the good political

²³ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, London, SPCK: 1989, p.1.

²⁴ Michael Walzer, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press: 2012, p.xii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.72.

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Disputes, Advocacy*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press: 1997, p.632.

²⁹ See James Barr’s “The Bible as a Political Document” in his *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, London,

life' or a preferred regime, there is little doubt that one can find in the Bible 'all the material necessary for a comparative politics'.³⁰ These include of ideas of justice, social solidarity, equality before the law, constitutional monarchy and separation of powers can all be gleaned from biblical theology. It is clear from Exodus that God is not indifferent to injustice when we read: The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. (Exodus 3:7); or when the prophet Micah (6:8) reminds his fellow Israelites: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." There is something here akin to Eldin Villafane's 'politics of the Spirit'. In his 1996 Presidential Address to the Society of Pentecostal Studies he stated:

To speak of the politics of the Spirit is simply to state that the Holy Spirit has a political Agenda for God's creation... I believe that the Spirit challenges us to go beyond the church to embrace the total social order and its organizing institutions as legitimate arenas for a true and wholistic Christian discipleship. This wholistic approach would require an expanding definition of the political and a better understanding of the Spirit's historical project—the Reign of God.³¹

'Saints' in the political economy – prolegomenon for a Pentecostal biblical theology of socio-political engagement

What I want to suggest here at this juncture is that Jeremiah's 'Letter to the Exiles' constitutes a veritable prolegomenon for a Pentecostal biblical theology for socio-political engagement and new forms of Christian activism. Jeremiah 29:11 is a favourite verse for many, for in it God says: 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.' However, there is a socio-political and economic imperative in the injunction of Jeremiah 29:7 that establishes a dialectical relationship and a civic duty between the 'saints' and society. The relationship is one of mutuality and interdependence in the political economy of the society in which we find ourselves:

SCM Press: 1980.

³⁰ Walzer, op. cit., p.xii.

³¹ See *Pneuma, The Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, Vol. 18, Number 2, Fall 1996, p. 162.

‘Pray for peace in Babylon and work hard to make it prosperous. The more successful that nation is, the better off you will be.’

The message of the text implies that Pentecostals cannot be indifferent to society’s social, political and economic structures and operations; for the *degree* to which we ‘prosper’ correlates to and is *dependent* upon these factors. Their success or failure directly impacts our wellbeing. To put it another way: we have a vested interest in our society’s political economy and its socio-political and institutional development. This poses a number of problems and hermeneutical challenges around our understanding and critique of the Christ-culture³² problematic and the ensuing ‘culture wars’ in the US for example, especially in light of 1 John 2:15 (‘love not the world’) and Romans 12:18 (‘live at peace with all people, if possible’). In addition to Jeremiah’s injunction, we can also deduce significant biblical warrant for socio-political engagement and Pentecostal activism from the final judgment narrative of Matthew 25:31-46. Here we see an eschatological foreshadowing and disclosure of the seed of compassion sown in socio-political concern and transformation reaping a rich eternal harvest in the world to come – in the ‘world without end’. From Jeremiah and Matthew we see how our motivation for socio-political and economic engagement can be both pragmatic and/or rooted firmly in compassion and concern for the other based upon the *Imago Dei*.

Political engagement and spiritual ‘principalities and powers’

Earlier I intimated that notions of the *Imago Dei* are replete with social and political implications; it speaks to a vision of our common life together and the sorts of political institutions we create and the political values we espouse. In a sense it is about the ‘political culture’ we engender and the political climate we struggle for which best approximates to our understanding of the Christian ideal and vision of the common good. Political culture is best understood as the attitudes, beliefs, and values which underpin and inform the operation of a particular political system.³³ Dennis Kavanagh uses the term ‘political culture’ as a shorthand expression to denote ‘the emotional and attitudinal environment within

³² See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York, HarperCollins: 2001 (first published in 1951). In this classic study of the Christ-culture problematic, the first answer (and Niebuhr gives us five, including Christ ‘the transformer of culture’) to the question of Christ-culture dynamic is the one the ‘uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture’s claim to loyalty’ (p.45).

³³ Iain Mclean and Alistair McMillan, *op. cit.*, p.409.

which the political system operates’—our ‘orientation and predispositions to political action. These qualities are informed and influenced by factors such as traditions, ‘historical memories’ and symbols.³⁴ Recent voting patterns in the US and the UK reveal the fragmentary, diverse and conflicting nature of our body politic as themes of race, migration and inequality take on toxic dimensions. We will have to be more attentive to what now looms large on the political horizon.

Understanding the formation and transformation of our ‘political culture’ is important. And Pentecostals have to come to terms with the range of political and spiritual structures of power and how these are negotiated locally and globally. The Apostle Paul gives us a number of clues and insights as to what we are up against when he says: ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.’ (Eph.6:12)

The implications of this insight/revelation for our political economy and communal wellbeing are conveyed in Amos Yong’s work on Pentecostalism and political theology.³⁵ And here his logic is persuasive, inexorable: if the work of Satan is still to ‘to steal and kill and destroy’ (John 10:10) and his fall has produced chaos in ‘the world’s social and economic structures’, then the key to the struggles of daily injustices, poverty and disenfranchisement ‘resides in churches’ properly engaging in spiritual warfare prayer’.³⁶ Pentecostals are attentive to this dialectic and dynamic relationship between prayer and politics and bring ‘spirits and powers’ under subjection to the lordship of Christ. A significant aspect of Pentecostal spirituality is the practice of ‘taking authority’ and ‘spiritual warfare’ (2 Cor.10:3-6), recognizing, as Nigel Wright argues, that there is ‘an extensive matrix of real but unseen forces that shape human life’.³⁷

It is certainly not true that Pentecostals are not interested in social transformation and political engagement. In 1925, Robert Clarence Lawson (1883-1961) an associate and co-worker with Bishop C.H. Mason of the Church of God in Christ wrote his *The Anthropology of Jesus Christ our Kinsman*. This volume was highly political in the way it spoke about race

³⁴ See Dennis Kavanagh, *Political Culture*, London, Macmillan: 1972, pp. 11-12.

³⁵ See Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Company: 2010.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.126.

³⁷ See Nigel Wright, “Government as an ambiguous power” in Nick Spenser and Jonathan Chaplin (eds.), *God and Government*, London, SPCK: 2009, p.20.

and social relations among Pentecostals. ³⁸To some extent it foreshadowed many of the issues dealt with in by Pentecostals in the 1994 Memphis Racial Reconciliation Manifesto. The numerous Pentecostal-initiated projects and initiatives globally testifies to the contrary, especially in Latin America and Africa.³⁹ Of course, from its early pioneering days there was an eschatological urgency for world evangelism to usher in the *Parousia*. There was also, as William Kay points out, the fear of ‘liberal theology’ of the nineteenth century and its association with the ‘social gospel’ of the early twentieth century.⁴⁰ In addition to this evangelism impulse, there was also a tendency toward what can be seen as an ‘ideology of withdrawal’ from the world.⁴¹ And given that many of the early Pentecostals were drawn from a lower socio-economic strata of society (from what Robert Mapes Anderson refers to as the ‘disinherited’⁴²) it is not surprising that evangelism and conversion were their major concerns as opposed to socio-political engagement and societal transformation.

Over the last forty years or so we have witnessed changes in the stance and attitude of Pentecostal churches and leaders to politics and Christian activism. In the US one only has to look at how Pentecostal leaders have influenced the politics of the Right and the role of the Moral Majority, as well as a host of Pentecostals like Eugene Rivers and the Azusa Christian Community and the popular T.D. Jakes. In Africa, Latin America and elsewhere Pentecostals are providing a range of social and welfare services in their communities; often they are filling the welfare gap left by the state. Pentecostal leaders, according to Calvin L. Smith, are also encouraging their members to be active citizens and agents of social transformation, including seeking public office.⁴³ This is clearly seen in the global Pentecostal organisation I have chosen to reference.

Encouraging active citizenship and political engagement in the Church of God

³⁸ See Douglas Jacobsen (ed), *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices From the First Generation*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press: 2006, pp.200-210.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.31-38.

⁴⁰ See William Kay, *SCM Core Text: Pentecostalism*, London, SCM Press: 2009, p. 302.

⁴¹ See Malcolm Calley, *God’s People: West Indian Pentecostal Sects in England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1965.

⁴² Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*, New York, Oxford University Press: 1969.

⁴³ See his “The Politics and Economics of Pentecostalism: A Global Survey” in Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, New York, Cambridge University Press: 2014, pp.175-194.

In its governing documents, the Church of God⁴⁴ enshrines the importance of active citizenship and gives credence to the need for social and political engagement by its members through a number of its *Resolutions*. Indeed, many of the Resolutions are highly political. They demonstrate an acute awareness of some of the major social, economic, cultural and political challenges facing society and a willingness to speak out and guide its members to advocacy and action. There is an implicit and explicit espousal and commitment to neo-liberal political values in a number of the Resolutions, especially the identification of these values with religious freedom and the flourishing of Christianity.

This is not at all surprising, given the cultural and political soil in which the Church of God took root. The creed of so-called ‘rugged individualism’ is constitutive of the liberal political values we identify with capitalism. Although its roots and progeny are varied its fruits culminate in the sort of political culture and institutional framework we readily associate with liberal democracy and what is triumphantly celebrated in Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*. In this modern classic text, Fukuyama informs us that in the wake of the post-Cold War era and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) we witnessed a profound change: on the one hand there is the imaginative foreclosure of any ‘socialist future’ and the ‘ideological coherence’ once given by Marxism-Leninism to socialism and authoritarianism, on the other hand, we see ‘one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universality: liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty.’

The apotheosis of the triumph of liberal democracy—capitalism, in short— is summarized thus: ‘Two hundred years after they first animated the French and American Revolutions, the principle of liberty and equality have proven not just durable but resurgent.’⁴⁵ But Fukuyama’s book was written before the recent financial crisis and its aftermath. Capitalism and liberal democracy are in crisis and in need of reimagining and rehabilitation⁴⁶; and

⁴⁴ The Church of God has its HQ in Cleveland, Tennessee; its formation predates the Azusa revival of 1906 by a decade. The New Testament Church of God in the UK is the sister church of the Church of God in the US.

⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London, Penguin Books: 1992, p.42.

⁴⁶ See Rowan Williams and Larry Elliot (eds.), *Crisis and Recovery: Ethics, Economics and Justice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010.

inequality, as Thomas Piketty has shown, threatens to stir more discontent and further undermine liberal values.⁴⁷

Although we hear echoes of Milton Freeman's political economy and Hayek's⁴⁸ individualism and anti-collectivist sentiments in the association of 'freedom and rights' with the 'democratic process', we also feel the tension of the cultural wars that characterises modern America in the *Resolution on The Moral Responsibility of Those Who Control and Use the Media* (1984). Here the General Assembly of the Church of God calls upon 'those who control the media' to respect the rights of all Americans and to desist from ignoring or ridiculing the Judeo-Christian moral and ethical values held by a majority of Americans'.

While the implications for socio-political engagement are far-reaching in many of these Resolutions, I want to focus on two of them, namely, the one dealing with Voting and the other on Political Engagement, passed in 1984 and 1992 respectively.

It's appropriate to quote both of the Resolutions in full to get a feel for some of the subtext and socio-political assumptions inherent in them. Concerning Voting, the Resolution states:

Whereas it is constitutionally and Biblically right for Christians to become involved in government; and

Whereas the exercise of the right to vote is one of the most basic ways Christians can influence the issues and policies facing our society; and

Whereas Christianity has flourished in those areas where freedom and rights are guaranteed and safeguarded through the democratic process; and

Whereas Scripture promises that when the Righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;

Be it therefore Resolved That the Church of God urges its members, and especially its ministers, to consider carefully the guiding principles of Scripture in deciding social, civil, political and religious issues (60th A., 1984, p.57).

⁴⁷ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁴⁸ See Milton Friedman, *Capitalism & Freedom*, Chicago and London, Phoenix Books: 1963. Friedman was one of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's favourite adviser and economic gurus. In this book he argues that while history 'only suggests that capitalism is a necessary condition for political freedom' it is certainly not 'a sufficient condition' (p.10). The Prime Minister was also an enthusiast of F.A. Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*, Oxford, Routledge: 2006 (first published in 1960). Concerning this classic text by Hayek, she is reported to have said: 'This is what we believe.'

Before we briefly consider some of the challenges of the resolutions we will quote the second one on *Political Involvement* which reads:

Whereas the Church of God as a member of the National Association of Evangelicals has endorsed and agreed to support "Christian Citizenship Campaign" (CCP); and

Whereas the two main objectives of the NAE resolution are to encourage Christians to pray for their leaders and to exercise their liberties to register and vote as part of the democratic process; and

Whereas the Church of God is an international organization which has historically encouraged Christians to seek godly means to improve standards of their respective societies;

Therefore Be It Resolved that in cooperation with the National Associations of Evangelicals , the Church of God encourages all constituents to avail themselves of every opportunity to peacefully and orderly register, vote and otherwise seek to improve the health, safety, and general welfare of all mankind (1 Peter 2:12); and

Be It Further Resolved that all political efforts should be and effected with prayerful deliberation, knowing that we will give account to God for every deed done (Romans 2:12), or not done, in accordance with His divine and eternal plan for man (64th A., 1992, p.79)

A number key points (implicit and explicit) can be deduced from the two resolutions. I will focus briefly on three of them. Firstly, there is the assumption that civic participation and political engagement is a biblical imperative. Christians have a moral responsibility to be co-agents in social and political change and transformation. There is, therefore, a moral and theological legitimization of Christian involvement in all spheres of government. The dual foundation for this legitimization (i.e., 'constitutionally and Biblically right') raises questions about the nation's political culture and its historical treatment of minorities. For example, the disenfranchisement of African Americans from the political process even when they were 'constitutionally' granted certain rights calls into question (and certainly engenders hermeneutical tension) any easy identification of a political 'regime' with the Bible.

Secondly, there is concern for religious freedom; and it's assumed that these are best protected under a liberal democracy. Of course, there are some of the assumptions I alluded to earlier about the relationship freedom and democracy and its triumph in Fukuyama and others. The resolutions identifies Christianity with American democracy. As pointed by Philip Wogaman, although Christians will always maintain the 'transcendence of God in Christ above all political systems, including democracy' they are nevertheless persuaded that 'the case for the superiority of democracy among possible political systems is irrefutable'.⁴⁹

Thirdly, both resolutions contain elements on the importance of reflection on what is termed 'guiding principles of Scripture' and 'prayerful deliberation' on political involvement. Because there are no serious or systematic attempts to tease out precisely what these 'guiding principles' are for the Church of God, it leave open the possibility for a range of political responses to active citizenship. In the process of 'political education' it is not unlikely that members of the Church of God in US and the UK may use these resolutions for political resistance against racial injustice and inequality in ways that fracture the assumed liberal consensus implicit in them 'knowing that we shall give account to God for every deed done (Romans 2:12), or not done, in accordance with His divine and eternal plan for man'.

Political mobilisation and the 'new activism' of African and Caribbean Pentecostals

In this final section I want to turn to the Manifesto produced by African and Caribbean Christian leaders under the auspice of the national Church Leaders Forum (NCLF) last year. In anticipation of the 2015 General Election, NCLF began a major consultation with four sections of the Black church constituency: social and political activists, church leaders, academics, and young people.

Too often African and Caribbean Pentecostal churches in Britain are depicted as 'apolitical' and radically pietistic. Political engagement from this constituency is poor. In 1987 Marian FitzGerald published her *'Black people and party politics in Britain'* which showed that post-war generation of black migrant were 'very constrained in their political activity and development by various factors', including their obvious 'newness and unfamiliarity with the political system'. Crucially, apart from the 'struggle to establish a material foothold in this

⁴⁹ See J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, Kentucky, Knox Press: 2000, p.105.

country' there was what FitzGerald calls 'a cherished fantasy (often referred to as 'the myth of return') that their stay in Britain was only temporary'.⁵⁰

One inevitable consequence of this, according to FitzGerald, was that their 'political frame of reference remained their country of origin'.⁵¹ Of course, as Mark Shelton Saints recognizes, there has been many attempts to engage in the political process, albeit with limited success, over the last two decades or so. Included among the many socio-political activities and initiatives listed by Shelton Saints are Bishop Eric Brown's involvement in Citizens UK, Pastor Nims Obunge's development of the Peace Alliance and the formation of the Black Church Civic Forum (BCCF) in 1999. In respect of the BCCF, Shelton Saint argues that this was an attempt at a 'prophetic political connection' – 'a valiant effort to bring together the disparate elements of the Black church leadership to establish a powerful voice for justice' to 'increase the political involvement and social action of Black Christians nationally'. This 'prophetic political connection' failed, according to Shelton Saints (and there is something both kind and cryptic in the assessment which need to be deciphered), because it was 'ultimately stifled by the lack of cohesion and discord of the occidental orientation'.⁵² Similar issues and themes concerning the need for Pentecostals to be much more intentionally active in the socio-political and economic spheres of public life are raised by authors such as Babatunde Adedibu,⁵³ Joe Aldred,⁵⁴ Robert Beckford,⁵⁵ R. David Muir,⁵⁶ Mark Sturge⁵⁷ and Israel Olofinjana.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ See Mirian FitzGerald, *Black People and Party politics in Britain*, London, The Runnymede Trust: 1987, p.9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See his "Politics and the Black Church", in Joe Aldred and Keno Ogbo (eds.), *The Black Church in the 21st Century*, London, DLT: 2010, p.100.

⁵³ Babatunde Adedibu, *Coat of Many Colours: The Origin, Growth, Distinctiveness and Contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity*, Gloucester, Choir Press: 2012. Adedibu sees significant areas for African and Caribbean churches to use their 'social capital' to deal with many of the problems faced by the black community and others, arguing that they need 'to move from provision of social services to fighting structural inequalities within British society, such as the criminal justice system, addressing racial and economic inequalities and the criminalizing of black youths' (p.243).

⁵⁴ See his *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity*, Peterborough, Epworth: 2005.

⁵⁵ See his *Jesus is Dread, Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain*, London, DLT: 1998; *Dread and Pentecostalism: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain*, London, SPCK: 2000. In his *Jesus is Dread*, Beckford concludes by pleading that our scriptural and other 'rereadings will bespeak a socio-political wholeness that brings the liberating Gospel of Christ to bear upon every aspect of human life' (p. 180).

⁵⁶ See his "Theology and the Black Church", in Joe Aldred and Keno Ogbo (eds.), *The Black Church in the 21st Century*.

⁵⁷ Mark Sturge, *Look What the Lord Has Done! An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain*, Bletchley, Scripture Union: 2007. With the numerical and financial resources at the disposal of Black churches in Britain, Sturge argues that they could have greater political and economic impact. The reason that this does not

What is clear from the authors cited above is that there is something of a paradigm shift, a conscious recognition that the separation of religion and politics, piety and socio-political participation, is neither desirable nor intelligible to a church seeking to be relevant in local communities or providing solutions to the creation of peaceful, prosperous and cohesive communities. Selwyn Arnold of the New Testament Church of God signalled this shift in articulating the implications of ‘the social imperatives enshrined in the gospel of Christ and his kingdom’ that legitimates socio-political engagement ‘without compromising one’s faith’.⁵⁹ This shift in emphasis was continued under Bishop Eric Brown whose Big Move philosophy incorporated the notion of developing members of the church as social activists and political leaders in the community.

These are all signs of the changing trajectory from the ‘apolitical’ label often attached to Pentecostal, especially with the publication of a Black Church manifesto. Amos Yong in the 2009 Cadbury Lectures critiques this ‘apolitical’ characterization of Pentecostalism by reference to what he calls ‘prophetic politics’, i.e., ways in which this Pentecostal apolitical rhetoric ‘actually serves as a prophetic critique of the existing political order’, and how its ecclesial practices function ‘performatively to engage the domain of the political’.⁶⁰

Ahead of the party conferences and the 2015 General Election, the National Church Leaders Forum (NCLF) produced its own manifesto for action. This marked a radical departure for the Black Church. The document is entitled ‘*Black Church Political Mobilisation – A Manifesto for Action*’ and it focuses on a number of key social and political issues.⁶¹ But what is the purpose of the manifesto? Why was it produced and what does it hope it will achieve?

The first thing to say about this manifesto is that it represents a ‘first’ for the Black Church in

happen, according to Sturge is partially due to the ‘absence of a coherent theology...on social justice, thus stifling the churches’ political engagement and aspiration’ (p.167).

⁵⁸ Israel Oluwole Olafinjana, *Partnership in Mission: A Black Majority Church Perspective on Mission and Church Unity*, Watford, Instant Apostle: 2015.

⁵⁹ S.E. Arnold, *From Scepticism to Hope: One Black-Led Church’s Response to Social Responsibility*, Nottingham, Grove Books Limited: 1992, p.11.

⁶⁰ See Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company: 2010, p.11.

⁶¹ The Manifesto was formally released at the end of January 2015; it was endorsed by all the main political parties.

the UK. This is the first time that African and Caribbean church leaders have produced a document like this to politically mobilise its constituency. For some it demonstrates that the Black Church has 'come of age', signalling its willingness and commitment to fully engage in the wider social and political issues of the day.

In the history of the Black Church in the diaspora, especially in America, there is a rich tradition of the church taking the lead in the fight for justice and equality. We think of radical and prophetic people like David Walker, Sam Sharpe, Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King, Jr., to mention a few. We also call to memory a time when, according to the African American scholar Eric Lincoln, the church was the 'organizing principle around which life was structured' as it became the 'school', the 'forum' and the 'political arena' for individuals.⁶²

Because the Black Church in the UK is often perceived as being silent -- failing to speak out on social and political issues and challenging major injustices faced by the black community - it is sometimes referred to a 'a sleeping giant'. The manifesto challenges this view in two ways. Firstly, by highlighting the range of social and community projects leaders of the African and Caribbean churches have established and led; it demonstrates what the churches have done and continues to do. Secondly, it advocates and recommends specific ways the church constituency should tackle some of the major problems facing the community.

Looking at the content of the manifesto it is clear that important issues are raised, but the document does not pretend to be comprehensive. It is anticipated that the manifesto will be a 'live document' with other issues added to it beyond the 2015 election. Questions will be raised in regard to its operationalization, communication and resourcing. We know that political communication is seldom budget neutral.

In nine sections it deals with topics including church and community, policing and criminal justice, mental health and marriage, youth and education. Each section is divided into three parts, providing what it calls 'the current picture', 'the biblical picture', concluding with

⁶² See Eric Lincoln's 'Foreword' in James Cone's *A Black theology of Liberation*, Philadelphia and New York, J.B. Lippincott Company: 1970.

'where do we go from here?' There are some challenging and controversial statements about international aid and foreign policy, as well as on the disproportionate amount of young black men incarcerated.⁶³ It calls attention to the work of Michelle Alexander on what she terms the 'New Jim Crow', and what is referred to by cultural critic Cornel West as the 'prison industrial complex'.⁶⁴ It is obvious that the disproportionate incarceration of black people in the UK and the US is both a moral and political that churches have to engage with. In the recommendations on the former the manifesto calls upon Government to examine the conditions it attaches when giving aid to poorer countries if it wants to avoid charges of 'residual imperialism and cultural hegemony'; on the latter, the manifesto wants the Government to work with Black Majority Churches (BMCs) and other key agencies 'to facilitate a national dialogue on the disproportionate representation of black people in prison and work to reduce it'.

As a 'manifesto for action' and 'political mobilisation', it recognizes, like the two Church of God Resolutions discussed above, the importance of voting and political engagement. It sees no dichotomy between the Christian faith and political engagement. Indeed, it argues that political engagement is 'a part of our civic duty and Christian responsibility'.⁶⁵ This is certainly meant to be a challenge to those, both inside and outside the church, who say that Christians should 'keep out of politics'.

Indeed, the manifesto argues that being 'salt and light' (Matthew 5:13-16) and taking seriously the welfare, peace and prosperity of 'the city where I have sent you' (Jeremiah 29:7), demands radical and prophetic Christian engagement in the political process. To this end, it calls upon Pentecostals and other church leaders to do more to promote and teach 'the importance of active civic and political engagement for the common good', as well as to host hustings, vote and support the National Voter Registration Campaign.

⁶³ In the section dealing with prisons and the disproportionate number of black men in them, reference is made to Michelle Alexander's book (*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, New York, New Press: 2010) where black mass incarceration in the US is seen, metaphorically, as 'the new Jim Crow'. The Manifesto points out that, on average, five times more black people than white people in England and Wales are in prison.

⁶⁴ See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness*, New York, New Press: 2010.

⁶⁵ See Recommendations on Voting and Political Mobilisation.

We all know that political parties often forget about the electorate until elections looms large on their agenda. The manifesto challenges them not to play games with the BME constituencies, but rather to engage with Pentecostals and BME communities in the political process on an on-going basis 'and not just during the election season'. And given the fact that Operation Black Vote (OBV) had identified around 168 marginal seats in which the BME vote was a critical deciding factor in the 2015 elections who wins and who loses, it is important that politicians take this message and seriously.

The Black Church manifesto was produced in anticipation of the 2015 General Election, but was more than the usual exercise in the production of manifestos for political window-dressing. It was declaration of a paradigm shift in political consciousness; it was African and Caribbean Churches (largely Pentecostals) saying that they were making a step-change in how they think about some of the critical issues facing faith nation, the church and state; it was Pentecostals saying that their constituencies had 'entered a new era in their development in the UK'. Ultimately, Pentecostals were saying that leaders in their community are ready to encourage, engage and resource a new form of Christian activism for the common good. I'm reminded of the wisdom and insight distilled by Bernard Crick when he said: 'Politics and love are the only forms of constraints possible between free people.' In respect of the former, I have tried to provide a brief overview; the latter might prove more difficult.

But where do we go from here?

Pentecostals today, whether they are in the US, the UK or in Nigeria, are not immune from the politics and the injustice in the society of their sojourn. As 'pilgrims' in the Augustinian sense of the term, Pentecostals are members of the 'City of God' while simultaneously members of the earthly kingdom in its manifold configurations.⁶⁶ Even without our 24-hour news media, there are stories and tragedies enough to stir our conscience, engender outrage and drive us to our knees. Indeed, Karl Barth stated nearly a hundred years ago in his *Epistle to the Romans (Rom Brief)* that 'it is our actual observation of life as it is that

⁶⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, (Translated by Henry Bettenson, with a new Introduction by G.R. Evans), London, Penguin Books: 2003

thrusts us back upon the necessity of hearing and speaking the Word of God'.⁶⁷ One may disagree with Barth as to whether a wide reading of the newspapers is the recommended route to 'any one desirous of understanding the Epistle to the Romans',⁶⁸ but there is something to be said for his observation concerning 'wickedness in the streets'⁶⁹ and how our print and social media convey this to us.

As a people of 'the Spirit' can we develop and engender what Eldin Villafane called the 'politics of the Spirit' as we discern God's 'political agenda'. There is always the seductive tendency to identify God's agenda with certain types of political ideology and institutional arrangements. In this regard, I would like to suggest that this agenda for Pentecostals must be informed and influenced by key biblical insights where justice is a controlling and dominant value. How this is pursued will, undoubtedly, be *diverse* (contextually so); it will also offer space and open up insights for *development*. And if history is anything to go by, it will also be *dangerous*. In being 'good news' people, Pentecostals can bring hope, socio-political transformation and redemption to their respective communities. There, of course, will be the men and women of Issachar among their ranks: those who understand the political times and know what course of action to pursue (I Chronicles 12:32). The growth of global Pentecostalism may well open spaces for what Miller and Yamamori calls 'progressive Pentecostalism'. In places like Latin America, this means a Pentecostalism that 'operates with an entirely different set of guiding principles than those of Liberation Theology', effecting a 'quiet revolution' in which, as they argue, church members will eventually 'find their way into positions of civic leadership'.⁷⁰ The paradigm shift has taken place according to a Latin American theologian: 'Liberation Theology opted for the poor at the same time the poor were opting for Pentecostalism'.⁷¹

Dr R. David Muir (July 2017)

⁶⁷ See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (translated from the 6th edition by Edwyn C. Hoskyns), Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1968.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.425

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.438

⁷⁰ Donald Miller and Testsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, Berkely, University of California: 2007, p.215

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

