

**SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*One of the sources of spiritual support that some Christian politicians rely on is persons spiritually endowed who they referred to as spiritual directors. Unfortunately, what they engaged with such persons is sometimes far from what can be regarded as Christian spiritual direction. It is either they are simply prayer companions or they are simply Christian counsellors far from being spiritual director. Added to all these is also the fact that some of such spiritual directors have sometimes turned their spiritual assistance into financial profit-making venture for personal enrichment. In such a situation, their focus ceases to be the Spiritual good and journey of the political directee. The consequence of these is lack of proper spiritual direction for such politicians in their state of life on how to live Christian socio-political Spirituality for their eternal salvation. This paper examined spiritual direction for politicians from spiritual-theological perspective to show how it ought to be practiced especially as needed in the contemporary time. It proposes a Prophetic spiritual direction.*

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Spiritual Direction, Spiritual Director, Politicians, Socio-Political System

**1. Introduction**

This study, though built on Socio-political spirituality, focuses on Spiritual direction for Christian Politicians. Christian Spiritual direction is one of the ministries in the Church that in the long past was a practice found more among desert Fathers and Mothers, and among the priests and the religious. However, over times it has grown to be a practice not reserved for any particular group but for all. Also, while its nature is also growing to be understood as distinct from other helping ministries such as Christian sacramental confession, Psychological and pastoral counselling, there are people who are yet to understand this distinction both in its principles and goals. Among those who fall victims of this misunderstanding are Christian politicians. While some of them are yet to understand that Spiritual direction is a need in their lives, some who understand and seek it, do fall into wrong hands. The major question that this paper seeks to answer is what is the nature of Christian Spiritual direction for politicians? From spiritual-theological perspective, the paper discusses the topic from scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Magisterium, the spiritual masters and the contemporary

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Spiritual theologians. It will proceed to study the nature of spiritual direction for politicians within the context of the contemporary Nigeria with some recommendations and conclusion.

## **2. Clarification of Terminologies**

The term ‘spirituality’ has lots of meaning. However, within the context of this article, it focuses on its religious meaning. From its Latin root *Spiritualitas*, it refers to a life lived in relation to the spirit where all things including values, morals, steps and the direction of such life are as directed by the spirit. The particular spirit that directs a life defines its spirituality. Christian spirituality is the life directed by the Spirit of God-incarnate, Jesus Christ. Louis Bouyer views the word of God, Christ, as the source, and what gives birth and as well nourishes Christian spirituality. He shows the centrality of the liturgy in Catholic spirituality.<sup>2</sup> In this vein, Charles Anene sees Catholic spirituality as the ‘lived Christian experience, which in its doctrinal and vital principles as well as its style is inspired, nourished, modeled and expressed starting with the liturgy.’<sup>3</sup> This Spirituality governs entire life as celebrated and directed through the liturgy.

There is only one Christian Spirituality: Christo-centric. But when the plural term ‘spiritualities’ is used, it refers to the various ways this one Christian spirituality is applied with the one goal of leading people to perfect union with God.<sup>4</sup> Socio-Political system is one of the ways it is applied and within such context called socio-political spirituality. In the bid to assist politicians to live socio-political Spirituality, the ministry of Spiritual direction is practiced. Spiritual direction has various definition among which is the one given by William Barry and William Connolly.<sup>5</sup> They see spiritual direction as help given by a Christian to another Christian to be sensitive and listen to the direction of the Holy Spirit in his/her life and to enable him/her to live accordingly. Chester P. Michael gives a good clarification of this supposed Christian helper and his/her function and the goal of Spiritual direction. The helper is not just anybody but ‘interested and wise human being whom he referred to as ‘Spiritual director or soul friend’.<sup>6</sup> The function of this helper includes, encouraging, guiding, advising, confronting and challenging the individual on the path to holiness.<sup>7</sup> Giving a good clarification of the goal of

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<sup>2</sup>Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 2013), 45.

<sup>3</sup>Charles C. Anene. *Spiritual Theology Based on Liturgical Spirituality* (Owerri: Edu-Edy Publications, 2013), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Charles C. Anene. *Spiritual Theology Based on Liturgical Spirituality*, 17.

<sup>5</sup>William A. Barry & William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 0-86683-951-8), 8.

<sup>6</sup>Chester P. Michael, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction: A Psychological Approach for Directors and Directees* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 7

<sup>7</sup>Chester P. Michael, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction: A Psychological Approach for Directors and Directees*, 7.

Spiritual direction he said: ‘The goal of spiritual direction is to help us fulfil our God-given destiny on Earth, to carry out the purpose of our existence, to fulfil all the duties of our state in life, to save our souls after death in heaven, and to become saints.’<sup>8</sup> So the goal of spiritual direction has earthly dimension which includes socio-political system. Within the context of Socio-political system which has got to do with the governance of the human society, are predicated of the term ‘Politician’. Though every human being in one way or the other engages in governance at different levels, within the context of this study, the politicians are those actively involved in partisan politics. They are those who participate actively in either seeking to be elected into political positions or actively involved in the governance of the human society. This study seeks to offer the nature of their spiritual direction. Socio-political system is the sphere of Christian Politicians and it is where they are called to seek Christian perfection. This study intends to bring its fruits to bear on the contemporary time, the present age.

### **3. Spiritual-theological perspective on Spiritual direction for Politicians**

#### ***Biblical Perspective***

The era of human history that Old Testament covers is generally religious. What is general about this era is that there is really no separation between religion and other sectors of human life. The political, social, economic and religious spheres were all connected and directed by their gods. The gods of every religion determine the nature of spiritual guidance and the human agent used. So, it was between Yahweh and the people of Israel. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger said God the Creator and who declares Himself in His creation gave direction to human action.<sup>9</sup> The different Ages in the development of socio-political life in the Old Testament<sup>10</sup> show clearly the various ways the people were guided spiritually by God and the human agents used. These were the Ages of Theocracy, Monarchy and Imperialism. These agents were called by God and not appointed or elected by the people. The covenant offers the primary light for the Spiritual guidance. Under theocratic dispensation, the human agent represents God in both political leadership and spiritual guidance since both affairs are subjects of the same God. This is clear about Moses, Joshua and the Judges. It is their duty to tell them the direction God is leading and also lead them in that direction. God is present in their entire situation as the sovereign

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<sup>8</sup>Chester P. Michael, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction: A Psychological Approach for Directors and Directees*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>10</sup>Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, ‘Fully Catholic, Fully Political: Exploring the Biblical Grounds For Active Christian participation in Politics’ in *Politics, Social Change and the Church in Nigeria: Acts of SIST International Missiological Symposium*, Ed. Bona, Ikenna Ugwu (Enugu: Kingsley’s, 2007), 20-23.

leader who is concerned about all their affairs. Within such context, socio-political spiritual direction is part of the whole guidance of the life of the people. So, these agents that may be termed in our context as spiritual directors are versed on all aspects of the people's life, concerned about their entire lives and gives directions on all issues.

The monarchical age during which human beings became the sovereign, brought in clearly defined divine agents of spiritual guidance as separate from political leaders. These agents were involved in the political affairs as spiritual guide to ensure faithfulness to the covenant. Those who played this role at this period were the prophets. They told the direction God was leading (Jer. 29:10-11). There were true prophets and false prophets. The former were truly close to God, loved Him and faithful to Him and were prominently recognized. They equally loved and manifested love for the people. In all, they were ready to put their lives on the line for the truth as directed by God. To perform their role as spiritual guides, the prophets were in touch with the world of God, with the socio-political life of the people, and capable of reading the direction of their situation and the proper direction God desired them to follow. The true prophets were simply disposed to be at the service of God among the people. But on the other hand, the false prophets were neither truly in touch with God nor had sincere love for the proper spiritual guidance of the people. Their concern was their personal gains. They were paid by the Kings.

In the Age of imperialism when the Jews were ruled by foreign rulers, at the local level, the religious institutions were still maintained and doubled up as the local rulers. At this level without compartmentalization of religion, political and economic lives of the people, the religious leaders offered the spiritual guidance. The only issue at this level was that there were many parties: the Pharisee party, the Sadducees party, and the Zealots etc. One's party would determine the nature of spiritual guidance and the agent. In all, spiritual guidance was covenant based.

In the gospels, the two people that appear clearly in spiritual guidance are John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. It is very clear that though they did not stay aloof they were not into partisan socio-politics to the level of seeking political positions. They were interested in how rightly things were done for the good of the people in the light of the kingdom of God. John guided the people in expectation of the Messiah, but Jesus as the Messiah guided for the goal of the Kingdom of God. While John was clearly an activist who though never mingled with people, denounced any wrong doing of a political leader, Jesus mingled to an extent that the people desired to make Him King. John gave a spiritual guidance applying it to the different professions in the civil services when he was asked by different groups of people. He told the crowd, the tax collectors and the soldiers what they should do based on their different professions (Lk 3:10-14). Though politicians were not mentioned

among those who came, it is clear, that if they had come, John could have told them what uniquely applied to them. He told King Herod the fact of wrongdoing for taking his brother's wife. The personality and lifestyle of John as spiritual guide freed him from being entangled by anything that could compromise his task. Jesus, in whom Christian spiritual direction is rooted, serves as spiritual guide at various levels. He did at the level of one-to-one relationship and at group level. The instances of one-to-one relationship are in the cases of Nicodemus, Nathaniel, and the young rich man who wants to know what he must do in order to enter the kingdom of God, and the Samaritan woman by the well.<sup>11</sup> Jesus' guidance is often issues based. He constantly guides people in the light of God and the values of His Kingdom, aiming at drawing them into living in union with the principles of the Kingdom within the context of their daily lives. Though Jesus lived among the people, He never allowed anything to compromise His role of spiritual guidance. He refused being made a King (Jn.6:15), and maintained a clear focus on the fact that His kingdom is not of this world (Jn.18:36-37).

In the early Christian community, even though Christians had an eschatological focus, they received spiritual guidance on socio-political matters. Paul enjoined them to live up to their civic duties (Rm.13:1-7). Paul as spiritual guide remained focused, seeking how to guide the people to live within socio-political context in the light of God's Kingdom. He taught on the duties towards the King. He was not into active participation in partisan politics; the affairs of God's Kingdom were his primary concern. In any case, he was very much aware of and as well as respected the socio-political structure and guided the people accordingly.

Until 313 AD, Christians were not actively involved in socio-political affairs. However, with the declaration of Christianity as the state religion at that time, their active involvement in socio-political life began. With the rise of Monasticism in the desert at this period, spiritual direction as one-to-one interaction formally began. While the desert Fathers and Mothers practiced spiritual direction within their desert setting, the clergy were largely responsible for the spiritual guidance of the lay Christians in the larger society. The basic difference was in the form it took. In the desert and monasteries, spiritual direction was given to the disciples by the desert Fathers and Mothers who were qualified based on their level of asceticism and detachment. However, in the larger society, it was the clergy, bishops and priests who by virtue of their ordination were believed to have received the gift of the Spirit for discernment and as such the spiritual directors for the lay Christians. This was done largely through their homilies, exhortations, Christian doctrinal instructions, confessional counselling and private consultations. Though ordination automatically qualifies one, level of one's asceticism adds to the

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<sup>11</sup>Carolyn Gratton, 'Spiritual Direction' in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003), 912.

spiritual authority of the bishops and the priests to be spiritual directors.<sup>12</sup> Besides the clergy as lay people's spiritual directors, the lay faithful, including politicians such as Kings and princes, equally visited the desert to seek it.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Fathers of the Church***

The Fathers of the Church by their teachings guided the people spiritually on political matters. Among these Fathers were St. Ambrose, St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Ambrose as Bishop of Milan went beyond teaching to enforcing Christian principles insisting that 'Christian emperors are subject to the moral demands of his Church.'<sup>14</sup> Daboh said when people were killed in thousands as a result of an Emperor's brutal command, Ambrose 'demanded public penance from the emperor. The emperor had to submit.'<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine taught on the two Kingdoms: the City of God (Spiritual Kingdom) and the city of Man (earthly Kingdom).<sup>16</sup> Teaching about the superiority of the Spiritual Kingdom over the earthly Kingdom is not about the domination of the Church over the state but in terms of the spiritual values of the Kingdom of God that the Church is entrusted to teach and uphold. He encourages Christians to be involved in the earthly Kingdom<sup>17</sup>, for the purpose of transforming it in the light of the values of the heavenly Kingdom. St. Thomas Aquinas upholds similar view.<sup>18</sup> The Church's role is in upholding and teaching about the spiritual kingdom. By these teachings, these Fathers spiritually guide the politicians to always hold the guidance of the Church with the goal of serving as means of transforming the society to ensure its salvation. Their teachings served as guide for those who are involved in the spiritual guidance, counselling and direction of politicians especially as largely witnessed in the Middle Ages and the later years till date.

In the Middle Ages, notable among those who engaged in spiritual guidance of people including politicians were St. Dominic Guzman and his followers, and St. Francis of Assisi and his followers too. The Age within which St. Dominic lived and the circumstance that led to his emergence influenced his spiritual guidance. It was a time Christian preaching was poorly done by both priests and bishops. It was

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<sup>12</sup>George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 3-5.

<sup>13</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 38.

<sup>14</sup>Habila T. Daboh, *Church History Simplified* (Nigeria: Virtual Insignia, 2013), 86.

<sup>15</sup>Habila T. Daboh, *Church History Simplified*, 86.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, An Abridged Version from the Translation by Gerard G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan and Daniel J. Honan, edited and Introduced by Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Double Day, 1958), 418.

<sup>17</sup>Benjamin Y. Bala, *Self Defense: Permissibility and Legitimacy* (Ibadan: Society of St. Paul, 2020), 130-132

<sup>18</sup>Henry Townsend, *Theology Today Series 29: Society and the Gospel*, 65.

equally a time when lots of heretical teachings thrived and many Catholics were either taken away by the heretical groups or poorly lived the Christian life. Souls were in need of salvation from the wrong spiritual path. It was an Age that needed proper spiritual guidance to get people back and to sustain them on the right path. He therefore engaged in preaching that was largely doctrinal. His followers, the Order of Preachers, continued this with spiritual direction, confession, counselling. With politicians, they served as prudent advisers and confessors.<sup>19</sup> They engaged in helping politicians live the right Christian spirituality through understanding of the right Christian teachings and so to walk the path to Christian perfection within the context of socio-political space.

One of those who exercised spiritual direction for politicians following the spirituality of St. Dominic was St. Catherine of Siena. In teaching on the vineyard of the Lord, which she saw at two levels: Mystic body of the Holy Church, and Universal body of Christianity, she offered spiritual guidance to both the clergy and the lay people. The clergy are called to serve God at the first level of the Vineyard, within the Church, and the lay people called to serve God at the second level of the Vineyard, outside the Church in the secular society.<sup>20</sup> Both the clergy by ordination and the lay people by baptism are called to service of God. The service of God which St. Catherine of Siena referred to as service of the blood of Christ, is salvation of souls. In one of her letters to Charles V, king of France, she said: 'I want you to follow Christ Crucified and be a lover of your neighbour's salvation'.<sup>21</sup> Everyone is called to service of the blood of Christ under the guidance of the pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth. In this direction, one of her major points of spiritual guidance is calling to work in union with, in support of, and in submission to guidance of the pope<sup>22</sup> who heads the Church that is primarily entrusted with the mission of salvation of souls. The politicians are both to support the Pope with their offices as well as allow his teachings to guide them in the discharge of their services. Through her letters to politicians, she gave spiritual guidance, reminding them that baptism in the blood of Christ is the basis of their call into socio-political life. The purpose is salvation of souls. She called politicians to dwell in the cell of self knowledge which rids them of self-centred love for God-

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<sup>19</sup>Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls*, 64.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue* 23, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 60 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council documents, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 Nov., 1965), 2.

<sup>21</sup>Letter 78, in Catherine of Siena, *Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (Binghamton, N.Y: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1988), 167-68.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Giovanna d' Angio, Queen of Naples Letter T362/G318, in Catherine of Siena, *Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, Vol. IV, trans. Suzanne Noffke (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 225-226.

centred love, to enable them fulfil their mission of salvation of souls in the socio-political sphere.

Besides the Dominicans were the Jesuits founded by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. They championed the Counter-reformation of the Council of Trent. Their goals were education and spiritual formation of the laity for the purpose of winning back those who have either become Protestants or at the verge of losing their Catholic Faith.<sup>23</sup> Their target audience included the politicians. They engaged in spiritual direction for political leaders as confessors and confidants largely within the context of their *Spiritual Exercises*. This enabled politicians to discern the direction and the leading of the Holy Spirit within the socio-political space.<sup>24</sup> Till today the Jesuits have remained faithful to the spirit of their founder and in this direction recommendable to everyone including those in the public life.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Magisterial Teachings***

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council uphold the teachings of the Fathers of the Church on the matters of the relationship between the Church and the states. The Church is involved in everything that concerns the human family.<sup>26</sup> The Church's engagement in the temporal order is through the Lay Faithful.<sup>27</sup> In this direction, the Church's teachings on the spirituality of the lay faithful are helpful for spiritual direction of the politicians.<sup>28</sup> Teaching on how the lay faithful should seek spiritual guidance in their mission in the temporal order, the Fathers taught that the clergy are the first among others the lay people are to turn to for spiritual guidance and strength. However, the lay faithful have in them the guidance of Christian wisdom through the Gospel constantly preached and taught by the Church. The Spirit of God is in them and among them by virtue of their baptism that in their mutual dialogue or sharing, they grow in the knowledge of the direction the Spirit is leading. The role of the clergy (Bishop and priests) is basically through their good preaching of the Gospel to give them the light needed in their activities

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<sup>23</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls*, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls*, 189.

<sup>25</sup> Annemarie S. Kidder, *Making Confession Hearing Confession: A History of the Cure of Souls*, 296.

<sup>26</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December, 1965), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (Citta del Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticano, 1994), 33. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) [accessed 13-11-2022].

<sup>28</sup> Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November, 1965), 4.



in the temporal order.<sup>29</sup> The Congregation of the Clergy in their teachings adds to this role of the clergy as formation of the laity which includes formation on socio-political spirituality and assisting the laity to discern the will of God through spiritual direction.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Teachings of Contemporary Theologians***

Antonisamy quoting Archbishop Oscar Romero teaches that while the priests cannot venture into partisan politics, they are positioned as pastors to call the laity to use their God-given talents in socio-political sphere. This is very much in agreement with the teachings of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council as earlier stated. The task of directing politicians spiritually by the pastors is to draw them to awareness of their God-given talents in the socio-political spheres.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary theologians largely teaching in the direction of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, make provisions for defining the nature of spiritual direction for the politicians. One of such theologians is Philip Sheldrake. He locates Political Spirituality within Prophetic type of Spirituality that is explicitly committed to social transformation as spiritual task.<sup>32</sup> This is very much in line with Matthew L. Lamb that sees Political theology as insistence 'on the concrete importance of the transcendence of genuine faith for the redemptive healing and creative transformation of society.'<sup>33</sup>

## **4. Contemporary Situation of Spiritual Direction for Christian Politicians in Nigeria**

Nigeria is among the countries of Africans whom John Mbiti describes as notoriously religious.<sup>34</sup> It is a multi-religious country and recourse to various religions' Spiritual leaders to seek for divine assistance is very high. As Traditional Africans, Nigerians in their traditional religion do seek to inquire from the spiritual world what they should do to ensure their well being on earth. While this often applies in various spheres of their lives including socio-political life, exploring the nature of spiritual assistance that most Nigerian Christian politicians seek from

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<sup>29</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December, 1965), 43.

<sup>30</sup> Congregation for the clergy, *Directory for the ministry and the life of priests* (Citta del Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticano, 2013), 41. [www.clerus.org](http://www.clerus.org) [accessed 07-10-2023].

<sup>31</sup> F. Antonisamy, *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2003), 263.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Christian Spirituality and Social Transformation*, <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-231?mediaType=Article> [Accessed 21-10-2022].

<sup>33</sup> Matthew L. Lamb, 'Political Theology' in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Bangalore: Theological publications in India, 1999), 773.

<sup>34</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 1.

their spiritual leaders reveals that it is not so much for what is understood as spiritual direction which is discernment of the will of God or the direction the Spirit of God is leading. In fact, while they often refer to Christian spiritual leaders as their ‘spiritual Fathers’ or ‘spiritual men of God’, it is not so much for who is understood as Christian Spiritual director or guide.

In the course of this study, through a random interview of people that include Christian politicians and priests whose spiritual assistance has been sought for by some Christian politicians, it is revealed that 95% of Nigerian Christian politicians who seek spiritual assistance from the ‘Spiritual Father’ is mainly for prayer support for both protection and for realisation of their political interests and ambitions. It is purely for utilitarian purposes. An interviewee, a priest, said it is about how much a ‘spiritual man of God’ can stand by them as ‘spiritual watchdog’ against attacks, and not the ability to guide them on morality or holiness. Only about 5% or less may seek some level of spiritual or moral guidance. The Christian interviewees believed that less than 5% Christian politicians even seek for ‘Spiritual Fathers’ among their spiritual leaders and just for prayer support. Another interviewee, a parish priest judging from his encounters with Catholic politicians added that, it is not just prayer support for their political ambitions, they seek for prophecy that assures them of victory. They want to hear it clearly said that they will win and anything said to the contrary is not appreciated. For this desire, they keep on visiting various spiritual leaders, prayer houses until they hear it. Since they are not looking for Spiritual direction and the will of God, an interviewee opines that it is not easy for any spiritual director to direct Christian politicians as there is always a conflict between their interests and the director’s desire to guide or direct them on the path of growth in relationship with God and holiness. In fact, many directors end up succumbing to their political desire in giving their guidance, jettison the principles and goal of spiritual direction, becoming as the biblical false prophets. In this lack of understanding and poor attitude towards spiritual direction for politician, the consequence is that social political sphere is not used as sphere for growth in Christian perfection.

### **5. Recommendation for the nature of Spiritual direction for politicians in Nigeria today**

Spiritual direction and spiritual directors have always operated within the religio-socio-political situation because God leads His people and the individuals within such situation. This situation and context define the nature of the spiritual direction and spiritual director. Christian spirituality and spiritual direction have equally developed, taken into cognizance the plurality of spirituality in the contemporary world as held by Carolyn Gratton.<sup>35</sup> In the midst of the situation of plurality of

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<sup>35</sup>Carolyn Gratton, ‘Spiritual Direction’ in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2003), 913.

religions and spiritualities, spiritual direction for the politicians, ought to acknowledge and respect other religions and spiritualities. The spiritual director needs to be versatile on the socio-political situation of the contemporary Nigeria, the teachings of the Church, through whom divine guidance by the Holy Spirit is given in every age. Since spiritual direction is meant for discerning the Holy Spirit as He leads the politician, the spiritual director must have the capacity to recognize the signs of the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance in the contemporary socio-political space. The ministry of spiritual direction and the spiritual director should be in touch with the social situation of the politicians like the prophets of the Israelites.

Therefore, in line with Sheldrake, who located political spirituality within prophetic spirituality, spiritual direction for politicians should be prophetic. Prophetic spiritual direction is one that is conscious of the Socio-political situation, able to read the signs of where everything is heading, challenges and encourages the politician to be both the light of Christ and agent of social transformation within the social-political space. After proper discernment, and ascertaining the right thing to do, the spiritual directors are to challenge and encourage the politicians to make and follow the right decision, when they lack the courage to do so. Within this context, there is need for projecting models for Politicians such as Mordecai (Esther 3:1-15) who within a Pagan world, opted to live faithful to his religious principles in the Socio-political space even at the risk of his life; St. Thomas Moore, who opted to live faithful to the Catholic Doctrine at the cost of his political position and life, St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, who in the King's court, upheld their Christian Faith at the cost of their lives.

Within a context such as Nigeria where many Christian politicians are both ignorant of what is spiritual direction and some only prepared to receive prayer support for their political ambition, there is need for educating Christian politicians on the meaning, goal and importance of spiritual direction in their lives. Experiencing in the contemporary world a situation similar to the era before Emperor Constantine, means Christians are living again in the age of persecution and Martyrdom. Though the form may differ, the basic elements are still the same. Therefore, the preaching of spirituality of Martyrdom to politician is important, especially in an increasing world of secularism. Models of martyrdom preachers such as Ignatius of Antioch are to be projected for the spiritual directors.

If Socio-political spirituality and Spiritual Direction ought to be prophetic in nature, it equally informs the expected nature of the Spiritual Director. He/she ought to be prophetic, living in the spirit of the true prophets of the Old Testament who spiritually guided the socio-political leaders. Specifically, the later prophets, through simple observance of the socio-political situation made their call to faithfulness to the covenant. In this regard, we have prophets like Elijah and

Nathan. They courageously call the political leaders to live up to the terms of the covenant. A typical example is Jeremiah (Jer. 2:12-13). They were characterized by ardent love of God. They stood in between the people and God, telling the socio-political leaders what God wants them to hear even at the cost of their lives. They were neither on the pay list of the kings, nor depended on them for survival as John the Baptist and Jesus lived. This way enabled them to be faithful to their prophetic calling. The Spiritual Directors to Politicians should strive to give their services freely for love of God's glory and for the love of the good and salvation of the people.

This study shows that those primarily charged with the spiritual direction for the laity which includes politicians are the parish priests and other clerics. Therefore, both in the pre-ordination formation and post-ordination ongoing formation for priests, formation on spiritual direction for politicians should be given. Ability to pray alone is not enough qualification to spiritually direct anyone. The awareness of religious congregations like the Jesuits and their centres that are often disposed and helpful in the spiritual direction for the laity including politicians should be promoted. One of the ways the lay faithful have often found help to sustain their spirituality is reliance on networks of friends and maintenance of relationships of honest disclosure to whomever they consider spiritually helpful.<sup>36</sup> Christian politicians therefore should be encouraged to form this friendship among themselves that can support and help them to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit especially as they encounter situations in the political space. Finally, in a situation where few Catholic politicians seek for spiritual support and even in this search it is purely for prayer support, an option for spiritual directors is to make use of any opportunity of encounter either during Eucharistic celebration or any meeting, to give spiritual guidance through either homily or words of exhortation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Spiritual direction for the politicians is very much needed in the contemporary time that the world is gradually being taken over by secularism. While it is very clear that God has never left His people without Spiritual directors in the Socio-political space, the form of Spiritual direction and the type of Spiritual directors needed have always changed from time to time. This study therefore with clear understanding of the present socio-political situation suggests prophetic form of spiritual direction and type of spiritual directors for politicians that would be able to help discern the Holy Spirit and also encourage, challenge and support politicians to remain faithful to their Christian spirituality and its demands within the socio-political space.

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<sup>36</sup>Edward C. Sellner, 'Lay Spirituality' in *The Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 594.