

# The significance of *Basiliea* in political leadership in Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** The Greek term *Basiliea* means the Kingdom of God. It is the reign of God and not a geographical location or territory. *Basiliea* is significant in the Bible considering the fact that God's sovereign reign and dominion brought justice and peace. Therefore, the paper examined the significance of *Basiliea* in political leadership in the country with the view of encouraging political leaders to subject themselves to the reign and sovereignty of God in order to appropriate Christian leadership principles for good leadership to prevail. It engaged in a comparative analysis of *Basiliea* aimed at bringing the import of the *Basiliea* to the fore of political leadership in the country. The work adopted historical and phenomenological approaches. It made use of books like journals, bible commentaries and internet materials. The method for data analysis was descriptive and analytical. From the research, it was discovered that political leaders have neglected the values and principles of *Basiliea* which have occasioned bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, electoral malpractice and selfish interests to mention just a few. The writer proffered solutions by making recommendations that arrested the situation.

**Keywords:** *Basiliea*, church, citizens, leadership, significance.

## INTRODUCTION

It is clear to all and sundry that all is not well with the corridor of powers in this country. The outcries for ineffective and bad governance in the country have become the order of the day. This has resulted in the incessant yearnings by the masses for good leadership that will bring dividends of democracy to the people. Unfortunately, the expectation of good governance has become a mirage. It is observed that the poor masses find it difficult to cope with bad leadership that characterizes leadership in almost all levels of administration in the country. The problem of the country is not land, climate, water and air. The trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership (Achebe, 1984). It simply means that leaders have failed the masses and have fallen short of their expectations. Similarly, the problems with Nigeria include among others, lack of ideal leaders, corrupt political leadership, wrong value system, inferiority complex, ignorance and general lack of common sense. All these problems jointly attest to the fact that there is no effective leadership in the country (Ekwunife, 2004). The

aforementioned causes of bad leadership in the country as itemised by Ekwunife were findings of previous researchers that had done research on leadership in Nigeria, but none linked poor leadership to lack of Christian leadership style as epitomized in the *Basiliea*. This accounts for the urgent need for *Basiliea*-kind of leadership in the country. Therefore, the paper will examine the significance of *Basiliea* in political leadership in the country with the view of encouraging political leaders to subject themselves to the reign and sovereignty of God in order to appropriate Christian leadership principles for good leadership to prevail. It will engage in comparative analysis of *Basiliea* aimed at bringing the import of the *Basiliea* to the fore of political leadership in the country.

### What *Basiliea* is all about

The term *Basiliea* is an ambiguous term that means different things based on its usage. The Hebrew word

*Malekut* and the Greek word *Basiliea* mean Kingdom which also can be used either in abstract or concrete sense. When it is used in abstract sense, it means God's reign but when it is used in concrete sense, it means the sphere of God's reign (Ikechiamaka, 2015). In most cases, the *Basiliea* is used in the bible to mean king's dominion. Kingdom here literally means sovereignty, kingship and reign. It means God's reign itself (Asaju, 2015). The kingdom of God is the kingship, sovereignty and reign of God. For the Jews, the kingdom of God is universal. It has no beginning and no end. It should be stated here that the kingdom of God is not territorial but eternal. The kingdom of God means "the kingly rule of God, and it is nothing if not dynamic. It is God's sovereign power becoming manifestly effective in the world of human experience..." (Hunter, 1978). *Basiliea* is the exercise of God's sovereignty, royal power and dominion over His people (Gwanma, 2008).

There is a controversy that surrounds the term *Basiliea* in the New Testament. *Basiliea* is used to denote the kingdom of God and on other occasions, it is referred to as the Kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven means the earthly physical kingdom which God promised to Israel while the kingdom of God is referred to as the spiritual rule of Christ in the hearts of those that accept him. In Matthean gospel, the term kingdom of heaven is used 34 times and the kingdom of God is only used four times. It is noteworthy that the term kingdom of heaven did not appear in Mark, Luke and John, rather they used the kingdom of God (Pfeiffer, 1975). Asaju disagreed with the notion that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are different kingdoms. He argued that Matthew who wrote to the Jews avoided the name of God due to the Jewish reverence for the name of God (Asaju, 2015). Therefore, he used the kingdom of heaven to substitute for the kingdom of God. It is observed that in the Apocrypha, particularly in Maccabees, there is no mention of God. The author of Maccabees frequently used the term Heaven to refer to God (Filson, 1964). In other words, the kingdom of heaven also means the kingdom of God. Jesus used the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God interchangeably, which means that they are the same.

### **Background of the *Basiliea***

Israel became a chosen generation through the call of Abram. The descendants of Abram found themselves in Egypt where they became slaves to the Egyptians. On their way to the Promised Land, God made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. Not only did the Sinaitic covenant give birth to Israel as a nation, but it also established a theocratic nation in which God is the king of Israel and they are His immediate subjects. God becomes both the religious and civil ruler of Israel. Afterwards, the people of Israel settled in the Promised Land where they formed the

kingdom of God. It was during the reign of King David that the people experienced peace, justice and righteousness in his administration of the kingdom. However, as time went enemies of Israel like Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians defeated Israel and carried Israelites into exiles. The enemy - nations plundered Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. In exile, Israelites started expecting that one day God will raise a king from the Davidic line, who will restore the Davidic kingdom for the kingdom of God to commence. Having heard their cries, God promised Israel that He will restore them and send a Messiah who will establish His kingdom on earth (Nyoyoko, 2001).

It was during the post exilic period after 538BC that the kingdom of God became an eschatological event rather than a present reality (Iwuoha, 2014). Eschatology is a combination of two Greek words, *eschaton* and *logy* or *logi* which mean the study of last things. From the post-exilic era, the kingdom of God began to be understood as something that will come at the end of the age among the Jews.

### ***Basiliea* in New Testament**

The expectation of the *Basiliea* is responsible for the formation of Jewish sects, for example, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Qumran community. Each of the Jewish sects has a peculiar way of imposing the kingdom on the people through human efforts. It is widely held by the pious (Pharisees) that the only way to acknowledge God's present kingship is to obey His will as commanded by the law of Moses (Torah). The Qumran community was formed in preparation for the coming of the kingdom which is believed to be imminent. They held that the Qumran will be the kingdom of God that is coming very soon. The Zealots was a political group formed to overthrow powers that occupied Palestine in order to recognize God alone as King (Guthrie, 1983). They used force in the execution of their plans. Nwigwe elucidated this view when he claimed that the Zealots was a party "founded by Judas the Galilean, who stirred up a rebellion against the Romans in A.D. 6 (Acts 5:37)". They opposed the payment of tribute by Israel to a pagan emperor on the grounds that this was treason against God, Israel's true king" (Nwigwe, 1998). The Jewish monotheism believes that it is only God who is King and there is no other continued till the time of Jesus, the Messiah.

The eschatological kingdom of God is linked with the expectation of the Messiah who will engage the enemies of Israel in bloody battle aimed at hastening new age of Messianic peace. Jesus' inability to fulfil Jewish messianic expectations resulted in the dichotomy between the old age and the new age (Sider, 1986). In fact, during the time of Jesus' ministry, many Jews did not accept him as a Messiah. Messiah is a term that is used to describe an

anointed one who is the great loving king or priest imbued with the power to rule for God on earth. Little wonder, prophets devoted great part of their prophecies to stress on the promise of God to bring in a new age where the power of God will be made visible to all (Goodchild, 1987). Even today the Jews still expect the Messiah. Despite the fact that Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus went ahead to announce that the kingdom the Jews expected is now here with them. Jesus' statement that "the kingdom is here upon" you means that he is God with all his power and majesty to reign over the people (Dodd, 1971). John the Baptist is among the Jews that believed the coming of the king – when Jesus will reign over his people will bring judgment upon the Jews and their religious leaders. This led John to preach the message of repentance (Matthew 3:2, 8, 11) (Richardson, 1958). John the Baptist became disappointed when Jesus did not meet the Messianic expectation of separating the righteous from sinners as farmers sift their grains. He expected that Jesus would have threshed and winnowed his harvest by gathering the righteous and putting them into his kingdom while the wicked would be sent to the fiery judgment (Ladd, 1959). Jesus is expected to overthrow the Roman kingdom in order to establish the Jewish kingdom (Wenham, 1993). But, on the contrary, Ladd observed "Herod Antipas ruled in Galilee. Roman legions marched through Jerusalem. Authority rested in the hands of a pagan Roman Pilate. Idolatrous, polytheist, immoral Rome ruled the world with an iron hand" (Ladd, 1959). The situation became worst when John the Baptist having boasted with the name of Jesus as the Messiah was disappointed to know that Jesus was not able to deliver him from prison. This led John to start having doubts about Jesus as a Messiah. John sent messengers to Jesus from his prison to enquire if he is the one or whether they should wait for another. Jesus responded to the message of John by telling him that he is doing miracles which are one of the evidence that the kingdom of God has come (Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1) (Evans, 1962). The manifesto of Jesus is an evidence of the messianic expectation of the messiah who will deliver His people from the satanic kingdom and transfer them to the kingdom of God. It should be stated that Jesus cast out demons in fulfilment of Jewish thought that the Messiah would reign with power over the kingdom of darkness (Kummel, 1973). Jesus cast out demons to show that the kingdom of God has already come. The summary of the Early Church's understanding of the kingdom is that the kingdom of God is a present reality but not yet. It is based on this that the Early Church expressed their belief that the kingdom of God is a present reality by proclaiming the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Their futuristic expectation of *parousia* is borne out of Jesus' teaching that the kingdom of God is here, but it will be consummated in future (Evans, 1962). The early church's view of the kingdom of God is synonymous with the *parousia*. There is a belief among the members of the early church that the

final manifestation of the Kingdom of God is imminent with the coming of Jesus Christ. However, as the coming of the Kingdom was delayed, their expectation waned. The resultant effect of the delayed manifestation of the kingdom of God is the believers' identification of the kingdom of God with the church or individual believers (Sharpe, 1983).

## THE CHURCH AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Politics was derived from *politeia* which means citizenship in heaven. But, later it was used to denote or mean citizenship in the country. Originally, to be a citizen meant to participate in politics (Robinson, 1977). The citizens were regarded as the politicians that participated in politics by carrying out their duties to the state. Governance is those that govern the people from the President or Head of government, Legislators, Governors, local government chairmen to representatives of arms of government (Iroegbu, 2004). It is held by some people that leadership is solely the responsibility of the leaders alone, without taking into cognizance the fact that citizens that constitute the led are expected to contribute their quota in making leadership effective. Leadership is the ability of a leader to influence the led positively, purposely and meaningfully (Oshun, 2017). Effective leadership is devoid of coercion of citizens for selfish ends. Leadership is all about influencing the citizens positively so that optimal political goals can be realized. Leadership is the act of occupying a leadership position in a group, organization and country (Balogun, 2017). It implies that immediately after a person assumes a leadership role as a leader of a group, leadership has commenced. Leadership is "the process of guiding, directing, commanding others to achieve a desired goal or vision (Treat, 1989). For leadership to be effective, a leader must have vision and know the way. There is no way this country can have effective leadership unless the leaders at all levels possess the leadership qualities of honesty, integrity, leadership by example, followership, accountability, team spirit (carrying the citizens along), fair play, sacrifice, selflessness and above all patriotism.

The separation of the church from political or secular authority dates back to the Enlightenment. It was an era in which people started looking at authority as something that is derived from the people not from God (Stephenson, 1981). The humanists emphasize that it is by the consent of the people that leaders emerge. The relationship between *Basileia* and political leadership is similar to the relationship between the church and secular leadership. Political leaders have criticized religious leaders for intruding into secular political affairs. Among Christians, there are those that deny the divine origin of political powers on the grounds that political leadership is dirty, corrupt, worldly and satanic (Dike, 2010). Based on that,

they refuse to participate in politics. As stated earlier some Christians are not interested in politics. This accounts for the dichotomy between the church and politics. Some Christians that are apolitical justify their position by claiming that Christianity is other-worldly and politics is mundane (Odey, 1999). For them, there is no relationship between the kingdom of God and secular authority. The former is godly and holy while the latter is unholy and unrighteous. This nonchalant attitude to politics by some Christians has given room for the election of corrupt, ungodly and selfish tyrant leaders.

The earlier the Church understands the real approach to governance that will help her to appreciate that there is no separation of God's kingship from secular authority. Prior to the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, traditional societies were known for intermingling religion with politics. Politics and religion were intricately linked; to separate one from the other was to cause grievous harm to each other. Traditionalists believe in the divine right of the king which means that the king derives his authority from God (Inyama, 1997). In the primitive society, there was no priestly class. The king exercised authority as both a religious and political leader. He offered sacrifices to God and carried out sacred duties on behalf of the people (Ugwu, 2002). Having known and believed in the divine right of the king, the traditional leadership is characterized by truth, sincerity, justice, fairness, selflessness and openness (Ekwunife, 2004).

The missionaries did not align themselves with the traditional leadership anchored on "city states" ruled by kings and paramount chiefs in some places where they existed like Eko (Lagos), Badagry, Benin, Aboh, Bonny, Calabar and Onitsha (Ahamba, 2006). It should be stated that the British discarded the Igbo republican government led by societies whose authorities were derived from the worship of local deities. Again, the British intervened in religious matters with the view of protecting their economic interest (Ahamba, 2006). The Igbo pre-colonial system of government had no central government. Rather, each kingdom was made up of towns and villages. Each community was autonomous and also each village was independent of one another. The traditional system of leadership revolved around title-making societies, fraternities, age grade associations and general assembly (Oyediran, 2003). Colonial rule disregarded Igbo traditional rulership and introduced indirect rule. The indirect rule worked in northern Nigeria due to its disposition to theocracy but it did not work in Igbo land owing to its democratic structure (Uchem, 2001). The colonialists appointed warrant chiefs that were more interested in carrying out the whims and caprices of those that appointed them. They ruled the people as dictators, not as leaders. Nevertheless, since the advent of Christianity in Nigeria, Church has been active in politics through its sensitization and denunciation of bad leadership including colonial misrule.

The church is interested in politics as a result of the divine purpose for which the state was created. Luther offered explanation of the origin of secular authority when he argued that secular authority is derived from the ordinance of God and not on the consent of the governed. Luther based his position on Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13 to say that secular authority is established by the divine will for the preservation of fallen creation and prevention of sinful man from actions that will put asunder in God's world (Luther as cited in Uka, 1999). Uka maintains that state was constituted by God to render good governance by maintaining law and order in the country (Uka, 1999). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the church to intervene in politics for the state to realize its lofty aim of maintaining law and order. It was William Wilberforce that spearheaded the anti-slavery campaign in the parliament in 1788 before he handed it over to Thomas Buxton Fowell. Finally, the slave trade abolition bill was finally passed in 1833 after 45 years of sponsorship (Nebo, 2006). The Christian missionaries played a significant role in ensuring that British rule suffered no setbacks.

At that time, the Christian missionaries helped in advancing the British government's influence in the country by providing the government with geographical and strategic data about Yoruba land, the Niger and the Benue. The Christian missionaries' assistance to the British Government made the administration easy for them (Ayandele, 1966). It is based on this alliance between the Christian missionaries and the British Government that attracted a bad name to the Christian Missionaries. Some Christian missionaries were spies to their home governments by secretly giving them information about the mission field. Others worked assiduously in making sure that political ties were strengthened between their host governments and their home governments. Perhaps, this was informed by the Christian missionaries' economic interest in their evangelization. Economic interest was one of the driving motives that led to Christian Missionary activities in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular (Agha, 1999). The Christian missionaries set out to achieve their selfish economic motive by establishing trade and mission posts. They exploited Africa with the view of expanding their trade for the acquisition of wealth (Ayandele, 1966). Despite the shortcomings of the Christian missionaries, they served as watchdogs of the British government. The Presbyterian Missionaries took it upon themselves to criticize ineffective British administration in old Calabar, thereby, facilitating good governance (Ayandele, 1966). At present, churches have followed the footsteps of those that evangelized Nigeria which has made it possible for them to wade into political matters that concern the nation.

The Churches like the Anglican and Catholic Churches through their communiqué advise government on what it should do and what it should not do. It also organizes leadership workshops for leaders and future leaders with

the aim of instilling into them the godly qualities of a good leader. The church prays for the elections of people into political positions. For instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organized a day of prayer for the peaceful, free and fair elections in 2019. Christians participate in politics by praying for the leaders for God's guidance, wisdom and justice. Also, they exercise their franchise. Some of them serve as observers, party agents, and electoral officials to ensure free and fair elections. The church participates in politics owing to its belief that secular authority is ordained by God. It is observed that the Justice Development and Peace Commission, an organization in the Roman Catholic Church monitored the 2003 general elections. At the end of its observation, the JDPC made its findings public in which it condemned the massive rigging of the general elections by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in collusion with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and some security personnel (Achunike, 2004).

### **THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *BASILIEA* AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

The church believes that authority is ordained by God and nobody becomes a leader unless he is destined by God. The *basiliea* is the kingdom of God ruled by God Himself while political leaders rule the subjects under their jurisdictions. Immediately, political leaders assume leadership positions, their jurisdictions become their kingdoms. There is no kingdom without a king or ruler. The Jews expected the Messiah to restore the kingdom of David (Jewish kingdom) from their enemies. There is no doubt that citizens of the country expect a president who will not only restore the former glory of this country but also protect the territorial integrity of the nation from its enemies and infiltration of bad weapons, illegal immigrants and unwholesome goods that threaten the peace and security of lives and property in this country. The Jews expected a messiah-king who will rule the people in peace and justice. Of course, there is no peace without justice. The president is expected to equitably distribute the 'national cake' to all the ethnic groups in the country. Every tribe should be allowed to produce the president of this country.

Every Jew believed that the kingdom of God would bring deliverance to the people that were under the bondage of Satan. It would bring release to the oppressed and marginalized. The citizens expect the political leaders to deliver this country from bribery and corruption, poverty, injustice, unemployment, *Boko Haram*, Bandits, unknown gunmen and killers – herdsmen that inflict terror on the Nigerian populace. Political leaders should bring religious conflicts and insurgency in this country to an end. There was no manipulation in the divine election of Jesus as the messiah. It is the die hard expectation of the electorate that one day their votes will count when there will be an end to

ballot snatching, vote buying, intimidation of electoral officials to change figures, electoral violence by political thugs, political assassination of opponents and lack of spirit of sportsmanship. Jesus Christ (Messiah) started His reign by announcing his manifesto. Almost, every political party has its manifesto announced to the public without fulfilling it.

The kingdom of God has no geographical boundaries. It is believed that God is the king of the universe. Political leaders exercise authority over those that are within their jurisdictions. They are not leaders or kings of the universe. Jesus was not made a Messiah by election but by divine appointment. He is accountable to God. Political leaders are elected by the governed and they are accountable to the people and God. The Jewish expectation of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus. Some political leaders are yet to fulfil the expectations of the electorate. Therefore, the political leaders have not performed like the Messiah, Jesus who was known for fulfilling His manifesto. Some political leaders of our time are known for unfulfilled manifestos. The Kingdom of God was made a present reality when Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, delivered the oppressed and raised the dead. Some political leaders are not interested in the welfare of the citizens; they are interested in their selfish interests. It has become a necessity for the citizens to be patient with their leaders as they make efforts to bring dividends of democracy to the people.

### **Conclusion**

The kingdom of God is God's leadership of the universe through Jesus Christ who demonstrated servant leadership for His disciples. He showcased servant leadership in His earthly ministry. It was in a bid to ensure continuity of His reign as a servant leader that He constituted His church which He described as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The implication of the church being the salt and light of the world is anchored on Jesus' expectation that the church should be a role model by striving to be a light that exposes bad and corrupt leadership. It is saddled with the responsibility of making this world "tasty" by exhibiting ingredients of leadership which are founded on Justice, love, selflessness, accountability, followership, vision, integrity, respect for rule of law and due process. There is no way the church can be the kingdom of God on earth when it is devoid of Christian principles of leadership as explained above. Christians are expected to be law abiding. They need to do away with the erroneous impression that politics is dirty that scares many of them from having political engagement. This country has suffered due to separation of religion from politics. There is no gainsaying this development is a whirlwind that blows nobody any good. It is clear that there was no distinction between politics and

religion in the Bible. In the New Testament, Jesus is addressed as Messiah-King. He fulfilled the expectations of the kingdom by the Jews when he made the dividends of the kingdom accessible to all. The expectations of the people did not go unfulfilled. It is expedient for the political leaders to emulate the good leadership examples of Jesus in their administration of the people. By so doing, they will bring the much desired effective leadership to the people.

### Recommendations

In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. Political leaders are expected to submit themselves under the guidance of God.
2. Political leaders need to realize that their authority is derived from divine ordinance. Therefore, they are accountable to God.
3. It was high time the political leaders have to make sure they abide by their manifestos.
4. This country is expected to get rid of secularism that poses a major obstacle to the influence of religion on secular authorities.
5. Political leaders have to expedite action in making sure that the expectations of the electorate are met.
6. Every Christian needs to participate in politics in order to usher in good governance.
7. For good leadership to take place, there is need for good followership. Therefore, the citizens are expected to give maximum support to their leaders in order to enable them to succeed.
8. Political leaders have to shun bribery and corruption and work assiduously to improve the welfare of the poor masses.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that they have no conflict of interests.

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