

# Religion and Politics in the Public Square



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# African Theological Journal for Church and Society



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## In this issue

### Editorial Introduction

Christian “Dual Citizenship” and Civic Duty : Implications of the Accra Charter (2011) for Africa Today by Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, PhD and Kyama Mugambi, PhD (Guest Editors)..... p. 1

Together with the Accra charter, this special issue equally challenges Christian nationalism and insubstantial actions, both of which have been problematic in Africa's recent history. It is intended to contribute to guiding responsible Christian thought and action around the issues raised. The task is as urgent as it is essential.

### Articles

Christianity and Democracy in Nigeria : Toward a Rethink of the Role of the Church for a Viable Democracy by Dr Hassan Musa..... p. 13

This essay attempts to reconsider the practical implications of democracy in Nigeria, with a view to addressing vested interests. It is our contention that democracy has not firmly taken root in Nigeria, nor across the broader African context. This article seeks to present a clarion call that will hopefully awaken the conscience of the nation.

The Nexus of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism : The Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist and Militia Violent Groups on Peace and Development in Africa by Dr John Peter Bwire ..... p. 25

This study explores the impact of politico-religious extremist armed militia groups in Africa. Armed groups in Africa have caused destruction of both life and property, resulting in underdevelopment and making it difficult to engage in profitable and meaningful development and peace due to conflict, which has affected all regions in Africa.

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The Nexus Of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism in Malawi by Dr Jones Hamburu Mawerenga .....p. 45

This article explores the intersection of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi. The aim is to interrogate the influence of politics and religion on violent extremism in Malawi from 1891 to 2003. The article draws attention to the urgent need to address violent extremism in African communities by fostering peacebuilding, safety, and security.

A Contention for the Separation of Church and State in Kenya by Samuel Mwangi .....p. 66

The separation of church and state in Kenya has always been a polarizing issue due to its contentious nature. A significant problem, often overlooked in research, is the misunderstanding of the wording in the 2010 Constitution and the interpretation of High Court judgments concerning the separation issue. This paper aims to demonstrate that there should be a separation of church and state, provided it does not imply a separation of church and politics.

The Role of the Church in Political Reform : Lessons from Ethiopian History on the Relationship between Church and State by Yimenu Adimass Belay .....p. 87

This paper posits that, despite the replacement of religious laws with modern codified state laws aimed at unifying the Ethiopian population, insufficient consideration of Ethiopia’s religious contexts persists. Therefore, the church’s involvement in political reform is essential for developing a legal framework that transcends the ethnic ideology of the current situation and considers the religious history and context of Ethiopia.

The Interface Between the Christian Concept of the Common Good, the African Concept of Ubuntu, and Politics by Paul Abudulai Yelinje .....p. 109

By analyzing the compatibility and tensions between these ideologies within political contexts, this paper sheds light on how combining Christian principles and Ubuntu philosophy can contribute to more ethical, inclusive, and people-centered governance practices. The paper advances four points to enhance a holistic integration of these concepts to mitigate tensions between religion and African politics. Although the context of this paper is Ghana, the author views it as applicable across Africa and the globe.

Ndereba, KM & K Mugambi 2024, ‘Christian “Dual Citizenship” and Civic Duty : Implications of the Accra Charter (2011) for Africa Today’, *Religion and Politics in the Public Square : African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Supplementa), pp. 1-12

# **Christian “Dual Citizenship” and Civic Duty: Implications of the Accra Charter (2011) for Africa Today**

Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, PhD  
St. Paul’s University  
kndereba@spu.ac.ke

Kyama Mugambi, PhD  
Yale Divinity School  
kyama.mugambi@yale.edu

## **Introduction**

On 25 June 2024, Kenyan youth stormed the Kenyan Parliament buildings. This event was the culmination of many days of unrest, characterized by continuous battles between the youth and state law enforcement agencies (Gachuki, 2024; Makhulo, 2024). What began as a sporadic wave of virtual protests on social media in 2023 rose to a crescendo in April 2024, with emotions and deep sentiments of dissatisfaction with the government eventually spilling into the streets.

The activities on the streets were fueled by Kenya’s Finance Bill of 2024, which proposed a heavier tax regime without promising any relief for the strained economy (Omweri, 2024). The youth, popularly known as Gen Z, protested against the lack of representation in national dialogue regarding these issues. They decried the inattentiveness to the problems they raised through carefully coordinated social media interactions, with the protests reaching a high point in 2024 (Ngigi, 2024). These events coincided with a series of alleged government sponsored abductions of key voices affirming these protests. The demonstrations inspired a wave of similar youth initiatives in Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Nigeria (Bojang, 2024). This unrest was a fulfillment of Lamin Sanneh’s (2011:197) ominous prediction that, “in the long run, the

continuing dictatorial abuses will likely spark popular disenchantment and a demand for change.”

The nature and scope of church engagement in political and economic affairs within the African context remain a contested issue. Like the Kenyan youth’s concern for the state of national affairs, scholars and public intellectuals decry the church’s complicity on one hand or inaction on the other (Nzwili, 2024). A case in point are Kenyan Pentecostal ministers who were active in campaigning for and inaugurating the elected president in 2022. Since that time, the key religious figures who stood with the incoming government have done little to comment on or seek remedial action regarding the excesses. In other quarters, religious leaders and institutions encouraged and even actively participated in the protests, symbolizing meaningful action towards a desired societal outcome (Lee, 2024). Churches in the Nairobi area where the political protests were intense, like the Anglican Church of Kenya’s All Saints Cathedral, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa’s St. Andrew’s Church, and Mamlaka Hill Chapel, became a sanctuary for those wounded by security forces during the protests.

These practical interventions and ensuing discourses provide a context for the extent to which the church engages in the public sphere. The “Politics and Religion in the Public Square” conference at St. Paul’s University in 21 October 2023 and this special issue are attempts to critically examine this engagement. We are happy to see this special issue come to print. This issue brings together critical reflection on the intersection of politics and religion from various theological perspectives. The discussions at the gathering at St. Paul’s University in some ways echoed, albeit in a modest setting, the sentiments voiced militantly on the streets six months later. St. Paul’s University’s concern for the church follows after a growing tradition among African Christians of critical intellectual engagement with politics from the 1980s (Gitari, 2011; Mejia, 1995; Njoya, 1987; Njoya, 2002; Okullu, 1984). We now focus on one ecumenical effort in the 2010s that holds much promise in framing the discourse that is the substance of this special issue.

## **Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship (2011)**

The Accra charter sought to address the question of church involvement in the public sphere. The charter aimed to “bear witness to our dual citizenship as believers and as members of African societies and nations” (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship”, 2011:198). Twenty senior leaders from academia and the church met from 24 to 26 February 2011 in Accra. Sixteen of these leaders were from West, Central, and East Africa, while the remaining four were from various parts of the global north. The gathering represented many different Christian traditions from diverse places on the continent. At the time, those gathered were coming to terms with pressing issues such as the civil war threatening Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya's recently concluded long and tumultuous constitutional process, the birth of the new nation of South Sudan reconciling with its long and violent past, and Nigeria, along with other parts of the Horn of Africa, contending with religious extremism from various traditions.

It was within this context that the group decided to contemplate what it means to be dual citizens—both of nations within political boundaries and of a heavenly nation. The group considered the idea that societies, as constituted in modern democracies, are temporary arrangements. Guided by their faith, they looked “forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder is God” (Hebrews 11:9-10). This was an important time for reflection, given the widespread disruptions in Northern Africa—in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Tunisia—where the citizenry mounted pressure on their governments as a way of demanding representation in their everyday life affairs. These disruptions, later known collectively as the Arab Spring, gave hope to those subjugated under despotic rule in this region and had a ripple effect in other parts of the world.

### **Motivations for the Accra Meeting**

The Accra meeting provided a context for these Christian leaders to envision new ways of expressing their devotion to God that would meaningfully engage with their realities. The group was aware that within the tenets of Christian faith, there were injunctions to give due regard to the governance structures within which a pluralistic society lives, and where citizens are challenged to

share their humanity. The group was convicted that “faith gives its noblest expression in settings where all are free to follow their religious convictions” (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship”, 2011:198).

The gathering aimed to realize that such a context for free worship in a pluralistic society could only come together if the governing structures secured order and peace to allow freedom of worship (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship”, 2011:198). The charter represented, at the time, a formidable attempt to guide responsible thought and action around the matters pertinent to this special issue. The charter reached back to historical and theological resources, using them to craft a framework for Christian responses. These responses have implications for the political, economic, and social issues that prompted upheavals all over Africa at the time and continue to be a source of ongoing concern.

The charter established that governments are set up by common consent and are required to create the atmosphere for the common good to take root. However, means other than the government are required for “the production of the values essential for moral progress” (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship”, 2011:198). Divine rule and the governance of the nation-state both demand allegiance, but these allegiances are not mutually exclusive. From within the Christian context, the duties of shared faith complement the understanding of the responsibilities of citizens in a state.

Through its extensive set of affirmations, the charter critiqued government failures that are endemic in post-independence Africa. The charter also challenged, in equal measure, the Christian nationalist trajectories that have threatened to derail good order and societal well-being in a pluralist Africa. Additionally, the charter stood against the inaction within churches and church institutions regarding political action against injustice. The resulting document provided a vision of what responsible Christians could do to build a better future for the modern pluralist African nation.

## **The Salient Points of the Charter**

The charter established fundamental differences between political sovereignty and divine sovereignty. Within political boundaries, governments are to assist



in developing the well-being of the human family. However, governments can also hamper that goal when they crush religious freedom. Freedom of religion is not a pretext to fragment or misuse human and other resources. Rather, such freedom provides a reason to master the conscience, so that believers, as citizens, can exercise patience, tolerance, and esteem for those with whom they live. It is within this context that compassion can be stirred up to create an environment that uplifts society. In the work of “civic righteousness”, people of faith are answerable to their Maker and to their fellow human beings in achieving this task.

The charter draws from the understanding that Christians living in African nations in modern times are citizens of earthly nations and are answerable to divine rulership. They share a common heritage, living lives in kinship with one another, where the virtues of home and society are interwoven into the fabric of the nation-state. It is within that understanding that they are to act in the interest of the common good. They uphold government under law for purposes of this common good and for the common security and protection of all individuals.

To this end, governments should not compel, prohibit, favour, or obstruct the institution of religion. Rather, governments are responsible and accountable to their people to provide a healthy environment that makes it possible for faith to be lived for the mutual benefit of the nation and faith communities. The independence that forms the political, social, and moral core brings responsibilities among its citizens for civic duty and accountable governance for Christians living within this environment.

This civic duty inspires the enactment of God's purpose for all creation and the responsibility to uphold shared humanity. Such an environment affirms the equality of all under the law and rejects “the use of coercion and repression in matters of religion, political affiliation, and personal choice” (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship”, 2011:198)

Within the framework of the charter, citizenship should not diminish the citizen's status as a moral being. That is because the state is not an alternative to the church, which sees itself as “the edifice of human worth, freedom, and well-being” (198). Rather, citizens who affirm their faith as Christians bind

themselves together through their moral commitments. They interpret citizenship through this frame as an opportunity to align with and propagate God's purposes for His creation.

For the citizen who is a believer, the charter outlines the duty owed to the Creator and the manner in which that duty acts within society. Such a duty calls for the repudiation of violence while acknowledging that all citizens can practice their faith freely under the direction of their conscience. The believers has a responsibility towards those outside their religious confession. In the spirit of shared humanity fostered by their faith, the citizen contributes to the wellbeing of all, as an act of Christian charity and in response to the command to “love thy neighbour.” This dual citizenship is not easy to live out. The charter illustrates the intricacy of this dual legacy of citizenship in the world and submission to divine sovereignty.

## **This Journal Edition**

As the gathering in Accra applied their commitments to their social and political context at the time, they determined that “political failure and the corresponding growth of religious allegiance have demanded from religious leaders fresh ideas about restoring confidence in the right of citizens to decide their own political destiny” (Sanneh, 2011:197). The church, both as a corporate entity and as individuals, is duty-bound by their faith to participate in the process of developing this new vision. Sanneh (2011:197) further pointed out that “Scripture and the experience of the Christian tradition do give us important models of religion in the public order.”

Contemporary Christian leaders have a wealth of history and theology to mine in the quest for satisfactory answers to the issues at hand. This is the posture of the leaders who signed the accord, and it is the spirit that guides the editorial task which has produced this journal.

This special issue originated from a workshop designed for early career scholars, specifically postgraduate students, early PhD candidates, and postdoctoral researchers. The primary purpose of the workshop was to provide a space for mentorship, academic development, and networking opportunities. Entitled “Politics and Religion in the Public Square”, the

workshop was co-hosted by the Department of History, Mission, Religion, and Practical Theology at St. Paul's University, with generous funding from the Yale MacMillan Center's Project on Religion and Society in Africa. The event took place on 21 October 2023.

As recognized in the Accra Charter, religion in African countries has creatively navigated colonial legacies and the push for democratic reforms in recent decades. The conference explored the often-blurred boundaries between religion and politics in contemporary times, along with the resulting implications. This theme is central to both the conference and this special issue, which investigates the positive and negative outcomes of the interrelationships between religion and politics, examining how these relationships manifest within religious communities and the political arena (Parsitau 2017).

For instance, the emergence of new religious movements in African cities carries both religious and political dimensions. These movements represent either unique branches of mainstream religious traditions or social and spiritual innovations within failing economic and welfare systems in the diaspora (Adogame 2016:3). Media representations of politics and religion also play a critical role in this discussion. Political interventions, such as government restrictions, have significantly impacted the legal registration of religious organizations in recent decades in countries like Rwanda and Kenya.

Violent extremism (VE) remains a significant issue on the African continent, with nearly half of all terrorism-related deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, and more than one-third concentrated in four countries: Somalia, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali (UNDP 2023). In response to these complex socio-political contexts, the workshop featured presentations from biblical scholars, theologians, legal scholars, philosophers, and religious scholars. This publication compiles six of these papers, incorporating perspectives from West, East, and Southern Africa.

The first article, titled "Christianity and Democracy in Nigeria", explores the historical tension in Nigeria's transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance. While focusing primarily on this West African nation, the article also addresses the broader challenges of democratic leadership

across Africa, which are rooted in ethnic, religious, and socio-economic divisions. The author argues that Christianity has a distinctive role in promoting the democratic principles of human dignity and respect for authority. This argument is substantiated through a concise biblical and theological analysis.

“The Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist and Militia Violent Groups on Peace and Development in Africa” examines a significant obstacle to peace and development in Africa. It provides a comprehensive analysis of Violent Extremism (VE) through case studies of groups such as Al-Shabaab in East Africa, armed conflicts in Sudan, Joseph Kony’s insurgency in Central Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, and ISIS in North Africa. The author assesses the intertwining of religious and political motivations behind these groups. Central to VE groups are their conflict-driven ideologies, problematic hermeneutics, and theological perspectives that either assert fighting for divine causes or opposing those with differing ideologies. The article highlights how many VE groups claim exclusion from democratic political processes or religious participation, leading to leadership conflicts where certain groups feel marginalized. It also details the detrimental consequences of politico-religious conflicts, including murder, property destruction, underdevelopment, insecurity, and food scarcity.

The author of “The Nexus of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism in Malawi” provides a country-specific analysis of VE. He offers a historical perspective on violent extremism in Malawi from 1891 to 2003, focusing on significant events such as the Chilembwe uprising of 1915 and Dr. Kamuzu Banda’s sacralization of politics during his thirty-year rule from 1964 to 1994, which resulted in the persecution and exile of over 21,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses to Zambia. The article concludes with an examination of violent religio-political extremism in Malawi. While acknowledging the potential of religion for socio-economic development, the article critically observes that political fanaticism and religious fundamentalism can exacerbate, legitimize, and inflame various forms of violent extremism. It underscores that such extremism fundamentally arises from the beliefs and actions of individuals who resort to violence to achieve their objectives.

The fourth article, titled “A Contention for the Separation of Church and State in Kenya”, expands on previous arguments by examining how Christianity has

been utilized to justify political excesses. It highlights the dual issues of state interference in religious matters and a compromised church that has lost its moral authority in society. This discussion is contextualized by recent events, including the impeachment of Kenya's Deputy President in his second year of office and the inauguration of a new Deputy President on 1 November 2024. The article was written before official responses from church bodies such as the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK) and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) to the proposed Religious Organizations Bill of 2024. It illustrates how President Ruto has coopted churches in Kenya for political gain, contrasting with previous regimes where the church actively participated in socio-political liberation movements. The article contends that the separation of church and state is essential for maintaining the church's role and voice in the political realm.

The fifth article, "The Role of the Church in Political Reform: Lessons from Ethiopian History on the Relationship between Church and State", examines the historical connection between the Ethiopian Orthodox church and the state from 325 to 1974. This relationship has facilitated significant socio-economic development in education, judicial systems, and healthcare. The article focuses on the pivotal moment of Emperor Haile Selassie's fall in 1974, viewed as a precursor to a secular Ethiopia. It investigates the impact of religious law on Ethiopian state law during the Middle Ages and its influence on Ethiopian identity. Additionally, it discusses the shift to modern codified state law, based on the *Fetha Nagast* (Ethiopian king's law), which supports religious and cultural diversity, leading to the development of the current constitution in 1995.

The sixth and final article, "The Interface between the Christian Concept of the Common Good, the African Concept of *Ubuntu*, and Politics", delves into the nuanced relationship between these philosophical frameworks. Moving beyond the "separationist" and "transformationist" strands of the politics and religion debate, the article explores how the Christian concept of the common good and the African philosophy of *ubuntu* intersect within the political sphere. Both concepts emphasize communal well-being, social harmony, and ethical responsibility towards others. The Christian notion of the common good focuses on promoting justice, solidarity, stewardship, and the well-being of all society members. *Ubuntu*, deeply rooted in African tradition, stresses

interconnectedness, compassion, and the intrinsic value of every individual within the community. The article examines how these philosophies converge and diverge in addressing societal challenges and shaping political discourse.

## **Conclusion**

This special issue offers a platform for African voices to engage with the intersection of politics and religion. It presents a rare broad-based survey of perspectives from West, East, and Southern Africa. The material also delves into country-specific contexts to illuminate the issues affecting African states and the continuing significant role of religion. Religious leaders must pay attention to the impact of their actions, recognizing that their action may inspire either positive or negative responses. Negative responses might include violent extremist groups or the politicization of religion for electoral mobilization. Positive outcomes may consist of enhancing development, peace, and security across the continent. We hope that these articles will inspire further reflection and deeper consideration of these enduring themes in African life and society.

The Accra Charter declared “religious freedom as the charter of citizenship and solidarity in a rapidly changing world of overlapping rights and responsibilities” (“The Accra Charter of Religious Freedom and Citizenship,” 2011:200). It provided a vision of responsible Christian engagement required in a modern, cosmopolitan African nation. Its commitment to historical and theological resources crafted a useful framework for Christian responses to issues such as those that prompted upheavals across Africa. Like the charter, this special edition critiques persisting failures that call for immediate resolution.

Together with the charter, this special issue equally challenges Christian nationalism and insubstantial actions, both of which have been problematic in Africa's recent history. This issue intends to contribute to guiding responsible Christian thought and action around the issues raised. The task is as urgent as it is essential because, in Sanneh's (2011:197) words, “The choice no longer is between religious anointing of dictatorial power and moral indifference, or between resignation and subjugation, but rather between despair and hope.”

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## **Christianity and Democracy in Nigeria : Toward a Rethink of the Role of the Church for a Viable Democracy**

Dr Hassan Musa

[musahass735@gmail.com](mailto:musahass735@gmail.com)

ECWA Theological Seminary Kagoro, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

The history of Nigeria's democracy has been both interesting and challenging. Embracing a democratic form of government, largely in opposition to military dictatorship, has been a significant move for Nigeria as a nation. This transition has opened the country to more critical and viable engagements with local and international partners, providing extensive democratic exposure. This essay attempts to reconsider the practical implications of democracy in Nigeria, with a view to addressing vested interests. It is our contention that democracy has not firmly taken root in Nigeria, nor across the broader African context. This is evidenced by ongoing struggles and contestations across ethnocentric, religiocentric, and sociocentric boundaries, which often seek exclusion rather than striving for a viable, inclusive democracy for the benefit of all. This essay proposes that religion, particularly Christianity, plays a vital role in fostering constructive and inclusive democracy in Nigeria. This argument is approached primarily from a theological perspective, with potential dialogues incorporating disciplines such as sociology, political theory, and history. The role of Christianity in providing principles of life that can serve as a strong foundation for establishing and maintaining good governance will be critically examined. This discussion aims not to create further divisions, but rather to highlight the responsibilities of all citizens, including non-Christians, in building an inclusive democracy

for the common good. While this essay does not purport to offer a definitive solution to Nigeria's democratic flaws, it seeks to present a clarion call that will hopefully awaken the conscience of the nation. It underscores the significant responsibility we all share in constructing and maintaining a viable democracy, one that is not merely a tool for the majority to further their vested interests at the expense of the minority.

## **Introduction**

The emergence of democracy in Africa represents a significant social revolution. However, due to the continent's vastness and the unique characteristics of its various contexts, discussing the growth of democracy in Africa as a whole is challenging. Therefore, as the title of this essay suggests, the focus will be on the Nigerian context. From recent political events in Nigeria, it is apparent that democracy, when compared to international standards of political ideals, has not yet firmly taken hold. This essay calls for a "rethink" of the meaning and function of democracy, particularly in terms of religious contributions. Consequently, we aim to briefly discuss how Christianity, as a religious community, can contribute to rethinking democracy in Nigeria, not only as a political ideal but also as a social theory.

The approach primarily involves a biblical and theological perspective. Thus, the methodology will encompass theological reflection alongside numerous existing contributions. These contributions stem from the important theological voices in Nigeria, who have consistently engaged in discussions to support democratic growth. These voices viewed as essential theological conversation partners. This essay briefly discusses Nigeria's democratic struggle, highlights some emerging voices of political theology in African contexts, and explores the contributions that Christian theology can make towards the establishment and growth of democracy in Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

## **A Brief History of Nigeria's Democratic Struggle**

In his book *Historical Roots of Ethno-Religious Crises & Conflicts in Northern Nigeria* (2010), Turaki builds on his earlier work, *The British Colonial Legacy*

(1993). In this more recent book, Turaki outlines several persistent issues that have hindered Nigeria's growth—socially, religiously, and politically. As with many things in life, these issues have historical roots. Without understanding this history, we cannot explain, correct, or improve our actions for the common good.

Nigeria's political struggle is deeply rooted in social and religious injustice, as well as ideological prejudice. These problematic elements are often overlooked or deliberately ignored by those who benefit from the status quo. Nigeria struggles to identify itself among democratic nations worldwide. The so-called democratic elections have caused significant social, religious, and political embarrassment. Leading figures who should model democratization are often embroiled in legal battles due to dishonesty and injustice. These issues are widely observed on media platforms, including YouTube, and through personal experiences showing how leading politicians have aided and abetted social injustices and corruption for personal political gain. In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, politics is akin to a "Game of Thrones," where "you win, or you die; there is no middle ground" (Cersei Lannister to Lord Eddard Stark).

Turaki (Turaki 2010:1; cf. Aguma 2018:13) explored Nigeria's political history, tracing it back to the traditional African forms of governance in the pre-colonial era. After reflecting on pre-colonial societal norms and governance, he examined the British colonial era to understand the influence of British governance in Nigeria (Turaki 2010:47). He observed that British colonists divided Nigeria in ways that led to biased governance and power organization, fostering social and religious marginalization and injustice.

In chapter three of his book *Tainted Legacy*, Turaki discusses the "legacy of Christian missions" (Turaki 2010:91). He notes how some missionaries aligned with colonialists, acting as religious colonizers rather than preachers of God's goodness and the gospel of salvation and freedom. Chapter four focuses on the post-colonial era (Turaki 2010:107; cf. Aguma 2018:20), highlighting Nigerians' ongoing struggles in the aftermath of both British and Islamic colonization. This era is of particular interest because it reflects our current context of continued struggles under the lingering shadows of these former colonial eras.

From Turaki's analysis, the "parliamentary system" that was established at the time of Nigeria's independence in 1960 was essentially a continuation of the colonial system (Turaki 2010:107). Many critical thinkers still agree that Nigeria has not been truly liberated and is in dire need of genuine freedom. The parliamentary system left the nation's power in the hands of individuals who remained subservient to British interests or, worse yet, became more oppressive in their own form of colonization. Turaki rightly laments, "Unfortunately, Nigerians themselves have held on tenaciously to structures and values of inequality and injustice" (Turaki 2010:109). Unless we critically identify and reconstruct these "structures and values," Nigeria will never be liberated from both external British influence and internal colonizers—namely, the political elites and religious aggressors who unjustly hold the country ransom with their own power.

Contrary to the popular notion of fighting for freedom, there is a suspicion of conspiracy benefiting some at the expense of many. This is evident in the fact that "Ethno-regional politics and sentiments brought the military into power in January 1966. Political rivalry between the North and South kept the fires of ethnicity and regionalism burning" (Turaki 2010:110). This contradicts the claims of almost every military leader professing to be the savior of the country from the ills of the previous regime. This kind of self-glorification has persisted to this day.

While there have been some "military reforms" (Turaki 2010:114; Aguma 2018:24), these often manifested in the creation of more states, leading to further stratification rather than unification of the country. Despite claims of fighting corruption, these leaders frequently failed to address corruption within their own ranks. Claiming to fight corruption while failing to expose and condemn internal corruption and hypocrisy undermines the credibility of such efforts. The fight against corruption must be a collective endeavor, not a means for a select few political elites to elevate themselves.

Regrettably, it is necessary to note that "By the time Chief Olusegun Obasanjo took over as the elected President of Nigeria in May 1999, the Nigerian polity had swung to the extremes of the politics of ethnic nationality and Islamic revolution" (Turaki 2010:128). Towards the end of Obasanjo's tenure, the push to enact Sharia Law in Northern Nigeria nearly came to full force, resulting in

the destruction of many lives and properties across the country. Sharia Law was primarily an Islamic agenda to establish a theocracy "based upon exclusive negative religious and cultural values" (Turaki 2010:129; cf. Dudley 1968).

To some, describing Sharia Law as having negative religious values may seem offensive. However, this view is prevalent among those outside the Islamic community. Ironically, even those sympathetic to Islam yet observing the aggression from extremist groups may not realize how their freedom and dignity could be compromised under Sharia Law. Despite claims that Sharia Law would not affect Christians, these assurances have remained largely unconvincing. As long as the Jihadist history of Northern Nigeria remains unaddressed, the threat of Islamization persists. True societal progress requires Islamic leaders in Nigeria to stand in solidarity with Christians and non-Christians alike to ensure freedom and dignity for all.

From the sociopolitical crises of the 1960s onward, there has been an ongoing "crisis of nationhood" (Turaki 2010:130). Questions of unity and the unification of the country have often been sidelined, as different groups vie for dominance and the final say in national affairs. It is important to note that "the crisis of nationhood inflames ethno-regional-religious conflicts" (Turaki 2010:130).

Turaki (2010:130) further reveals that "Crises and conflicts in Northern Nigeria are simply responses to the revival of ethnic nationality and militancy. The militancy of Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and Niger Delta militants is a product of Nigeria's crisis of nationhood, which is rooted in primordial social factors". Understanding and deconstructing these negative "primordial factors" is a critical challenge that must be addressed seriously if we are to achieve true political growth and participation in our time. We need to come together to combat "political and social alienation" (Turaki 2010:154) and "group power politics" (Turaki 2010:155).

Some may perceive Turaki and the authors of this essay as being deliberately controversial in their views on Islam in Nigeria from an outsider's perspective. However, revealing one's internal thoughts, even when they are perceived as gross misunderstandings, can be helpful. Such revelations can prompt insiders to rethink their agendas and be aware of the self-awareness of outsiders. Turaki is not alone in his insights about inequality in Nigeria, particularly from

a Northern Nigerian perspective. Other scholars and historians have shared these views. Dudley (1968) wrote about the partisan politics of Northern Nigeria, where power has almost exclusively been given to Muslims, who wield it regardless of the sentiments of Christians and others. Similarly, Kukah (1993, 1999 cf. Turaki 2002, Waldman 1965; Willis 1985) has been influential in discussing the religious and political tensions and prejudices in the country.

The persistent inequality between Muslims and Christians is reflected in the tainted legacies of both the colonizers and, unfortunately, the missionaries (Turaki 2010). The missionaries, whether Christian or Muslim, often became tools of colonization and further stratification within the country. While we cannot undo what they did, we can continue to critically read history with the hope of liberating our country from unjust structures and values. This is not to say that everything about the missionaries was negative, but there were areas where things went awry, and we unfortunately take some of these missteps as normative. We need to continually address these issues if our country is to survive and thrive.

## **Christian Faith and Democracy**

The construction of "political theology" as part of public theology is both necessary and urgent. Moving beyond merely identifying problems, as outlined in the preceding section, we need to address historical and ongoing issues stemming from the colonial era and their impact on political power. It is essential to ask questions that seek solutions rather than exacerbate these problems. We must explore ways in which Christian theology can contribute to constructing theologies that are distinctly Christian, yet public and inclusive.

Numerous public theologians have developed political theologies that can serve as leading paradigms for us in Africa today. One such scholar is the American public theologian Robert P. Kraynak. In his book *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy* (2001), Kraynak (2001:165) titles one of his chapters "Rethinking Christian Politics: The Two Cities in the Modern Age". This concept of "rethinking" should be an ongoing process, both in this essay and in our social, religious, and political journeys in Nigeria. During this process, we would engage in "assessing Christian democracy" (Kraynak 2001:166).

Some may object to the notion of "Christian democracy," but as long as we are distinctively called by God to live a different kind of life, our participation in politics and democracy must be critically examined. By recognizing what we are doing, we can identify what we ought to be doing but are not. According to Kraynak (2001:167),

"...the belief in a close connection between Christianity and modern democracy has the benefit of placing the churches squarely against totalitarianism and dictatorship, ending the confusion and waffling seen in the twentieth century when fascism and communism posed genuine threats to the world".

Often, our political and religious practices subtly tend toward totalitarianism. We need to deconstruct such tendencies and reconstruct ourselves in ways that promote freedom, justice, and righteousness. Kraynak (2001:176) views the concepts of rights and democracy as complicating the transition from tradition to liberalism. Democracy should not be seen as insensitive to order and godliness, nor should rights be seen as a license for arrogance and carelessness. Instead, rights in democracy should be viewed as essential goals, and democracy itself as a political system that supports truth and freedom, providing the context in which human rights are recognized and collectively upheld.

Regarding democratic citizenship, Kraynak reminds us not to forget the Augustinian legacy of the doctrine of "the two cities" (2001:202). We are both citizens of heaven and the concrete world. Our responsibility to order in heaven does not nullify our earthly responsibilities; rather, both should be mutually understood and interactively managed. We need Christian democratic participation that can deliver us from "democratic despotism" (Kraynak 2001:202), which arises from the arrogance of power. Where human freedom, justice, and dignity are not protected and promoted, there exists the danger or practice of democratic despotism. The quest to recognize the role of the Church in establishing and maintaining democracy is also a global call (Witte Jr. 1993). Christianity must work diligently to contribute to the world order by promoting God-intended righteousness and justice (De Gruchy 1995). In South Africa, churches have been described as the "midwives of democracy"

due to the vital roles they played in its establishment and sustenance (De Gruchy 1994).

We need similar challenging calls in our Nigerian context, where the Church can be active and sensitive to its role in promoting good and godly governance. From a South African perspective, Boesak sees the witness of the Church in the public sphere as a call for the formation of a "spirituality of politics" (Boesak 2005). This concept emphasizes the Church's responsibility to act as the conscience of the state in a constructive and evangelistic manner.

In discussing the tenderness of the Church's conscience towards the state, Boesak was optimistic about the possibility of transformation that can make life better and more meaningful. He views this transformation from a personal perspective, believing that "overcoming my past is possible, forgiveness is possible, a new life together is possible" (Boesak 2005:211). To move forward with joy and inclusive love in our political and religious systems, we must learn to transition from the past to the future with hope and the joy of forgiveness.

## **Christianity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Way Forward**

At this juncture, it is important to reflect on the way forward in the discourse on Christianity and democracy. As previously mentioned, there have been social, political, and religious flaws over the years. It is neither fair nor productive to single out one region or religion as solely responsible. Instead, in terms of collective responsibility, we all need to acknowledge our shortcomings and work towards amending them for a better life and country. The abuse of religious rights and human dignity continues across religious and political boundaries. To find a viable solution, we must first closely understand what democracy entails. This essay will examine that from a Christian theological perspective.

Gwamna (2014:167) in his book *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*, quotes Hans Küng: "There is no peace among nations and within nations unless there is peace among religions". He proposes this from the perspective of interreligious dialogue and outlines four types of dialogues: "dialogue of life, dialogue of discourse, dialogue of spirituality, and dialogue of action" Gwamna (2014:174). Some people may be disillusioned with interreligious dialogues in



Nigeria, often feeling that "it does not work." Therefore, we need to rethink our frameworks and propose something within interreligious dialogue that is sustainable and effective. Critical to this effort are the values of honesty, integrity, accountability, freedom, and justice. If these values are critically considered and upheld within religious dialogue, there is hope that our religious confessions of salvation history, human dignity, freedom, and peace will contribute to establishing a more viable democracy.

Turaki (2006:785) has also contributed to our understanding of democracy and its Christian foundational values. It is undeniable that "we are still faced with many social, political, religious, economic and cultural crises". Our task is to think and work towards managing these crises to the barest minimum, recognizing that total eradication may not be possible due to human frailty.

Democracy has been defined as "government of the people, by the people, for the people" and is associated with civilian government, elections, free speech, and human rights (Turaki 2006:785). However, its practical significance remains elusive in our personal and corporate lives in Nigeria and the larger African context. Turaki calls on Christians to view democracy as a human creation, "just like all other political systems." This means it is not a utopia that promises and delivers everything. It emphasizes our human responsibility to contribute to its viability.

It is important to recognize the role of submission to God in achieving true accountability. The creation of all human beings in "God's image" (Gen. 1:26) constantly reminds us of our human dignity, which should be respected by all. This represents a true realization of the Christian foundation of democracy. Additionally, the life and death of Jesus Christ for humanity's redemption helps us understand our immense worth in the eyes of God. Romans 14 warns us not to cause any brother to stumble or fall, emphasizing the respect for the rights and dignity of all people. Romans 13 also calls us to obey constituted authorities, as they are established under God to bring justice and order to society. 1 Timothy 2 urges us to pray for all leaders, demonstrating our love and encouragement for those in political offices, which is a crucial step towards establishing a viable democracy.

Hill (2012 cf. Cullmann 1956) also sees the teachings of the New Testament as contributing to the establishment of good democracy. In the life of Jesus, we learn about love, compassion, and the provision of dignity, freedom, and life to all those in need. The Bible does not disdain civil government; rather, it advocates for a government that acknowledges the supremacy of God and upholds justice for all its citizens (Calver 1974; Hill 2012:99). Even though Hill notes that "Heaven will not be democratic" (2012:100), this does not imply that Christians should exclude themselves from democratic processes. We are only prohibited from engaging in unjust, godless, and merciless forms of government, regardless of their labels. We need to live in total equality before God, our Creator (Hill 2012:100; Koopman 2015:19-32). This should continually remind us that God desires order, honor, obedience, justice, and humility (Mic. 6:8). The true democratic country we seek and need to build is one where truth, freedom, justice, equity, and honest respect for human rights and dignity are upheld in both words and deeds.

## **Conclusion**

As previously mentioned, democracy comes in "many shapes and sizes" (Hill 2012:103). It is multifaceted and complex. What we need in Nigeria and the larger African context is a godly democracy, one that pursues the virtues and values of God-given love for all, respect and dignity for all, and mutual economic and social empowerment. We must move beyond the flawed religious ideologies that seek to conquer or eliminate others simply because they belong to different cultures or religious persuasions. It is crucial that we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, so as not to jeopardize the future of the coming generations. We must transcend our African traditional (pre-colonial) primitivism, if it can be called that, and move beyond the colonial segregationist policies that have shaped our social, political, and economic landscapes. Our personal quests and interests should not be disguised as democratic endeavors. We need to shift from a democracy that serves only the majority to one that is truly inclusive. We require a godly democracy, not merely because it reflects the majority view, but because it is inherently good, true, and constructive.

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# **The Nexus of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism: The Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist and Militia Violent Groups on Peace and Development in Africa**

Dr John Peter Bwire  
johnpeterbwire@gmail.com  
St Paul's University, Kenya

## **Abstract**

This study explores the impact of politico-religious extremist armed militia groups in Africa. Armed groups in Africa have caused destruction of both life and property, resulting in underdevelopment and making it difficult to engage in profitable and meaningful development and peace due to conflict. All regions in Africa have been affected by these armed groups; Al-Shabaab in East Africa, armed conflicts in Sudan, Uganda's Joseph Kony in Central Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, and ISIS in North Africa, among others, are both religiously and politically connected. These groups, driven by their ideologies of conflict and deep theological conceptions of a hermeneutical nature, claim either to fight for God or against those opposed to their ideologies. They assert that they have been excluded from democratic political processes or religious participation, leading to leadership struggles where a minority, or majority, group seems to be sidelined in political governance or religious recognition. Politico-religious conflicts have left behind destruction, including murder, loss of property, underdevelopment, insecurity, and food scarcity, among others.

## Introduction

The central argument of this work is that extreme militia or armed, violent groups use of religious and political ideologies of exclusion to access power and natural resources through force. Stein (1996) defines extremism as a complex phenomenon, though its complexity is often hard to perceive. In its simplest form, extremism can be defined as activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) that are far removed from the ordinary. In conflict settings, it manifests as a severe form of conflict engagement. However, the labelling of activities, people, and groups as ‘extremist,’ and defining what is ‘ordinary’ in any setting, are subjective and political matters. Hastings (1988) and Smith (1995) argue that armed groups use arms to achieve political, ideological, religious, and economic objectives. In most cases, they are not part of any government under the control of the state in which they operate. These groups include rebel movements, ethnic militias, and military mercenaries.

In this work, an examination of the causes and reasons for violence reveals manifestations of exclusion and inclusion worldviews by militia groups. According to Nnoli (2018), this ideology is religiously and politically entrenched in people’s minds, practices, and belief systems. The situation is exacerbated by discrimination based on ethnicity, political patronage, gender, and egocentric mentalities. Africa has a history of religious and political acrimony embedded in its structures of governance. For example, heredity became the most common way of ascending to leadership, both religiously and politically, in most communities, thus excluding other communities or clans from leadership. Almost nobody questioned it. This group dynamic is common across Africa, although today new trends are aggravated by external military pressures. In East Africa, recent militia conflicts that have threatened to wipe out communities include the Burundi Civil War (1993–2005), the Rwandan Genocide (1994), the Ugandan Civil War (1986–1994), the Darfur conflict beginning in 2003 (UN Report, 2005), and the Kenyan post-election violence of 2007, among other local conflicts. Armed gangs went on a killing spree because they were either excluded from political processes and access to resources or aimed to eliminate another community, as seen in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis, or with Joseph Kony in Uganda, among others. Histories and traditional ethnic communities are revisited to examine their influence on modern atrocities on the continent today. Case studies of militia groups depict

the casualties and agony inflicted on the continent. In this regard, this work explores some of the dreaded militant groups in Africa among the many that exist.

Africa as a region has seen an insurgency in religious militant ideologies and traditions among Christians and Muslims. Hastings (1988) and Smith (1995) explore religious militant practices and influences in Christian scripture. It is evident that theological justifications for violence can be derived from scripture by different interpreters. However, the point here is that scripture, both in Islam and Christianity, if not properly interpreted and applied, can lead to conflicts and physical warfare. Religion seems to have influenced exclusive and inclusive ideological practices throughout history. Jews, Muslims, and Christians engage in conflict because of their missionary nature and motivations stemming from the common triple heritage they share from their cradle land in Palestine. Some Muslim groups accuse and fight Christians for deviating from the monotheistic faith, while Jews and Muslims fight to reclaim their ancestral land in Canaan. Throughout history these differences have attracted global attention with supporters and opposers on each side. This heritage has been the cause of differences and alignments against one another. Thus, religion has been a powerful force for peace or war in the world, both then and now.

In Protestant Christianity, the theology of election is paramount. Barth (1959), and Hastings (1988) trace some of the ideological sentiments of war in scripture. The Israelites in the Old Testament claimed to be God's chosen people destined to rule the rest of the world, often at the expense of other communities. They saw God as their exclusive deity, while others worshipped idols and were seen as Israel's missionary fields. This missionary view led to violent wars against other groups. This perspective explains the rampant violence in the Old Testament, some of which is depicted as being instructed by God. For example, in Numbers 33:50-56, Deuteronomy 20:13, and Joshua 3:10 (NIV), the Israelites are commanded to drive out the Canaanites and take over their land, as the Canaanites were not in a covenant with God and thus not included among God's favoured people. Similarly, King Saul was instructed to wipe out the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:2-3). Paradoxically, God later uses the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish His own chosen people in a series of battles in Israel and Judah.

Passages such as Matthew 5:38-41, Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:19-20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 appear to suggest that violence will be used against aggressors or those not of their kind: "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (KJV). These and many other examples are sometimes followed blindly by Christian nations, communities, and individuals without proper exegesis, especially against non-Christians. The same scripture that discusses war also advocates for peaceful means to settle disputes. Therefore, proper exegesis must be undertaken before scripture is used selectively to support a particular ideology. For instance, violence is forbidden in Leviticus 19:18. At different levels, Christians have engaged in warfare to safeguard their religion or leadership or as aggressors. The Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and the Israeli-Palestinian wars in the Gulf are cases in point. Modern militant groups like Al-Shabaab, ISIS, or Boko Haram often have links to Muslim Arabs or Israeli-American alliances in the Middle East.

Some Muslim groups possess a similar ideology of war, often taken to the extreme. It should be noted that the meaning of Islam and the concept of Din exclude all other religions. The theology of exclusion begins with the meanings of the words Islam and Muslim. The term Islam is derived from the Arabic root 'SLM,' which implies peace from the Arabic word *aslama*, meaning 'he/she submitted.' It also implies purity, submission, and obedience to the will of Allah and Sharia. Etymologically, Islam signifies complete submission to the will of God and total obedience to His law. Al-Islam is presented as the religion that brings peace to humankind when one submits and commits oneself to God's will.

The ideal of Islam as a religion of peace seems to differ in practice among some Muslims, or those who use Islam as a basis for militant ideologies like Wahhabism, which advocate for force or war. Likewise, a Muslim is one who submits to God by professing the faith or religion of Al-Islam. A Muslim thus believes that Islam is the original and universal religion of humankind, revealed through successive prophets. This belief implies that other religions are considered distortions, corruptions, or derivatives of the true original and universal religion. Islam waged various battles to expand its territory and fend off enemies during its formative periods: the Prophetic, Umayyad, and Abbasid eras. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad fought several battles to establish his position both as a religious leader and as a statesman. During these two



dynasties, Islamdom spread across Asia, Africa, and Europe, becoming one of the most flourishing civilizations in the world. This expansionist mentality was influenced by Islamic scripture, the Quran.

According to the Quran (21:76–93), "Islam is the only religion of humankind," a message professed by all prophets from Adam to Muhammad (Quran 2:128–140, 42:13) (see Yusuf. A.A., 2022). The core message of all prophets of God was Islam. Therefore, a Muslim accepts all the prophets of God without discrimination. God's message to humankind ceased with the final revelations received by Prophet Muhammad. This message is the Quran, which is considered the most comprehensive and final guidance for humankind. It is meant to be followed by all creatures created by Allah. It is common to hear Muslim-related militant groups shout "Allahu Akbar," meaning "Allah is great."

The finality of prophethood is a fundamental teaching in Islam, and according to the Quran (33:40), the universality of Muhammad's message is upheld for all humanity. Jihad is an Arabic term derived from jahada, meaning "to exert oneself" or "to strive, make an effort" (Quran 22:78, 22:39–40, 9:13, 49:15). It can mean fighting or physical confrontation against non-Muslims, as found in the Quran (23:39–40, 47:41) (see Yusuf 2022). The use of force makes jihad a tool for extremists in Islam, although it is often taken out of context without proper exegetical considerations. Those to be fought include opponents of Muslim leadership, rebels against iman (faith), and those who begin hostilities or fight Muslims, including fellow Muslims. Islam is composed of different groups; for example, some Sunnis do not recognize Shiites, while groups like Wahhabis and Salafis hold extreme views and may fight fellow Muslims with whom they disagree.

"Fight those who fight you" (Quran 2:190) (see Yusuf 2022) is often used to legitimize the use of weapons against perceived enemies. However, a Muslim should first appeal to non-Muslims to embrace Islam or avoid unwarranted provocation before applying jihad or force. Jihad should never be weaponized against non-Muslims to convert them to Islam, according to Surah (2:257). Therefore, tolerance and restraint should be practiced. There is a need to clarify the meaning and types of *jihad* due to modern misconceptions perpetuated by militant jihadist groups:

1. The meaning most preferred in pluralistic modern communities is jihad against nafs (self). For example, an individual should struggle with themselves to overcome any anti-Islamic moral code (Quran 22:41) (see Yusuf 2022).
2. Jihad against evil deeds in society (Quran 3:104, 16:125) (see Yusuf 2022).
3. Physical jihad: lesser jihad, only used in self-defense (Quran 2:190-191) (see Yusuf 2022), which prohibits wanton killing of women, children, or destruction of property.

Jihad may include preaching and propagation of faith, religious training and spiritual guidance, reformation of society along Islamic lines by ulama (scholars) and academicians, verbal resistance against oppression, and correction of injustice. This religious ideology is present in most world political organizations. Often, those excluded from politics or religion tend to fight back extremely and radically. However, it is against human rights to use war to settle disputes.

From the foregoing, despite ideals of love, peace, and support for nonviolent strategies for the peaceful coexistence of believers in a pluralist society, groups within religions like Islam and Christianity still resort to militarism and violence to seek recognition and participation in politics and the religious sphere. This occurs despite the availability of other peaceful avenues of engagement, such as dialogue or democratic processes, within their respective spheres of influence. Furthermore, the use of religion by politically motivated groups is perplexing in Africa. According to Mbiti (1969), Africans never fought because of religion or used it to dominate others. Hypothetically, scripture seems to send mixed signals of peace and war, necessitating an investigation into how scripture is either used to promote peace or abused to cause violence. Against this backdrop, this study seeks ways to sustain peace for development in Africa through mitigation measures. Let us analyse why these groups resort to violence.

## Reasons for Religious and Political Militant Groups in Africa

There might not be a direct correlation or influence between current religio-political ideologies of war and militia thought-forms in pre-independence Africa. This does not mean that there were no such militia groups in Africa before modern times. Seemingly, both Christian and Islamic theologies of exclusion perpetrated by armed groups have similar aspects in Africa. The truth is that contemporary militant groups use religion and political ideologies to authenticate their existence and solicit support and sympathy. According to Glenn (2014), African ideologies of exclusion or the use of war find fertile ground in traditional contexts and worldviews where there was almost no dichotomy between secular and religious spheres. Ethnic leaders often held both religious and political offices. This was common among chiefdoms and kingdoms such as the Sokoto Caliphate, Mutapa Empire, Ashanti Kingdom, and the Bornu Empire in West Africa, and the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, Wanga Kingdom, Ankole Kingdom, and Hehe Kingdom in East Africa. These chiefdoms and kingdoms were often in constant conflict with their neighbours, as well as with internal family or clan leadership struggles. Those who felt excluded from ascending to leadership sometimes revolted.

Glenn (2014) and other scholars have extensively written about the military history of Africa, epoch by epoch and region by region: pre-independence, independence, and post-colonial Africa. He has classified several categories of military organizations and systems, what he calls a continuum of African warfare, that have caused ongoing agony and fuelled conflicts in Africa. These categories include:

- Antiquity, before 1800: This includes ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Aksumite military history.
- Military history of modern Africa (1800-1900): Pre-colonial, independence struggles, and post-colonial periods.
- Military history of Africa by region after 1900: Northern Africa, the Horn of Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Western Africa, and Southern Africa.

This evidence shows that Africa experienced wars where military combat has destroyed many communities, lives, and property. Militia groups in Africa have a history and foundation that is difficult to break, with ethnicity, religion, politics, and poor governance being key factors (Glenn 2014). Ideologically, there were well-known ethnic groups and clans with leadership that was often hereditary. Any capable individual not from the ruling clan or tribe could not ascend to power. Those with dissenting voices were often fought, silenced, or exiled from the larger community, eventually forming new groups elsewhere. One main feature of these ethnic organizations was their strong military presence, which ensured their survival. For example, the warriors among the Maasai, or trained soldiers and mercenaries, were used to raid other communities, steal cattle, extend their territories, and safeguard their people. Weak communities often disappeared or were annihilated. In Africa, there is a strong clan and ethnic solidarity that influences other life patterns, such as religion and politics. Politicians and religious leaders have always had ethnic backing, regardless of whether their actions are lawful. In Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, when politicians are accused of corruption and incompetence, they often appeal to their ethnic background for support with slogans like "we are being targeted," when in fact they commit these crimes as individuals, not on behalf of their communities (Glenn 2014).

## **Ethnic and Political Conflicts**

Glenn (2014) contends that, during and after independence, these chiefdoms and kingdoms were consolidated under national political governments using European spheres of influence boundaries. However, the ethnic boundaries remained. Most colonial rulers in East Africa used indirect rule, utilizing local leaders for administrative purposes. This meant that traditional ethnic leaders largely remained relevant and had the authority to define their identity in terms of land and security, as well as to observe some local autonomy. During and after colonialism, traditional structures of leadership remained intact with only minor changes. For example, in Uganda, the Kabaka and Baganda people have always remained a significant force in Ugandan politics, similar to the Kikuyu community in Kenya. Hence, after independence, these ethnic political groups retained their military identities and have resurfaced during times of crisis. Whenever certain communities felt neglected by the national government, denied access to national resources or political patronage, or

forced into opposition by certain ethnic-inclined political parties, they have regrouped to cause mayhem. Al-Shabaab has gained support, sympathy, and solidarity from their Somali brothers in northern Kenya due to claimed historical injustices committed against them by the regimes of former presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi.

Many notorious militia groups in Africa now have an international outlook with foreign support. For example, over ten foreign terrorist organizations support certain communities or ethnic groups in Africa with similar religious influences. The M23 rebel group has been active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2012, led by commanders such as Bosco Ntaganda, nicknamed "the terminator," and Sultani Makenga. They rebelled against Joseph Kabila's leadership, causing significant havoc, but were later captured and imprisoned for life by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

In Africa, politicians often form political parties based on ethnic affiliation or proximity, and these parties later form coalitions with like-minded individuals and ideologies. This has been the case in Kenya and Uganda, where the opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye, supported by fellow Ugandans, has been challenged in political campaigns by the government of President Yoweri Museveni, who is from the Ankole community. In Kenya, the Luo community largely supports parties led by Luo leader Raila Odinga, while Uhuru Kenyatta commands support from his ethnic group in Central Province. Similarly, the Luhya and Kamba generally support politicians or parties formed by members of their own ethnic groups (Glenn 2014).

## **Clamour for Equal Resource Distribution**

According to Glenn (2014), violence in Kenya, Rwanda (the 1994 genocide), Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, and other countries is economically related to the unequal distribution of resources by political governments. Politicians use ethnic affiliation and manipulate ethnic grievances for political gain, which includes land, employment, access to education, and more. Most religious groups discussed here use politics to appeal to their ethnic masses. For example: The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony aims to establish a state that will implement the Ten Commandments. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab's main agenda is to create an Islamic state under Sharia law.

Most, if not all, militia groups adhere to and observe some religious doctrines. They either use religion for their selfish interests or genuinely follow teachings that encourage the use of military force against perceived or real enemies, as seen in the introduction of this paper regarding Christianity and Islam (Glenn 2014).

Al-Ikhwan or Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, whose ideology is based on Quranic teachings, supports democratic principles and aims to create a state ruled by Islamic law, or Sharia, with the slogan "Islam is the solution" since 1928 to date. Their impact in Egypt has led to civil war between different military groups, resulting in pain, deaths, imprisonments, and the destruction of property. On Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Abdulkadir (2012) argued that the Somalian central government collapsed in 1991, leading to clan conflict that has spread beyond the Horn of Africa. This collapse has also led to anarchy, insecurity, poverty, rampant violence, and numerous deaths (Ibrahim 2010). The Boko Haram group has some of the most noteworthy negative effects on West Africa, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2023). The conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government began around 2009, July, in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. From 2010 onwards the group reorganised itself as a terrorist military outfit under Abubakar Shekau.

There are different theories that explain the origin of the term *Boko Haram* but in this work I opt for the etymological origins supported by Jegede (2019). The name of Boko Haram was coined from the word *buku* in for 'book', and has connotations of being against Western education and modernism. According to Muhammad Yusuf's unofficial religious edict, he declared attending government schools (*boko*) and working for the Nigeria government forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims. The second idea related to the inception of Boko Haram came from the graduates of Islamic University in Medina devoted to teaching and implementing the *wahhabi daw'ah* (missionary call) against traditional Sufi orders. The use of armed struggles to implement Sharia forcefully against the government negatively affected community growth and development. The Boko Haram impact is enormous and includes but is not limited to abduction of schoolgirls, attacks on Christians and government officials, and destruction of property like schools\_(Jegede 2019).

## **Bad Governance and Leadership in Africa**

Besides the clamour for natural resources, governance in most African countries is deficient. Coupled with discrimination and marginalization, this has been an accelerator of conflicts in Africa. These ongoing, unaddressed, and underlying drivers of conflict include unemployment, horizontal inequality, and highly centralized ethnopolitics and patronage created by bad governance. This has resulted in the marginalization of certain groups and areas. According to Menkhaus (2006, 2008), Al-Shabaab has found fertile ground to sow their hatred within Kenya's violent Islamist mobilization and militancy, profoundly shaped by local conditions. It has its roots in years of 'alienation, disaffection, and dissent' among Kenya's Muslim community. Due to extrajudicial killings and indiscriminate harassment of suspects in Kenya, Nigeria, and other nations, many Muslims feel that their rights are not recognized by the state. Somalia became a failed state soon after Siad Barre's regime fell in 1991 due to the poor leadership strategy of divide and rule.

Government hostility towards opposition is another significant factor. For instance, when Kenya became a multi-party state in 1992, small vigilante groups arose within some ethnic enclaves ostensibly to counter the aggression of the Kenya African National Union. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Interahamwe in Rwanda and Congo, ISIS in the Middle East, and the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan) in Egypt were exacerbated by government hostility towards opposition rather than engaging in dialogue and negotiations to resolve differences. The same turmoil in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Libya, Nigeria, Uganda, and others can be attributed to bad governance and leadership, which have resulted in many lives lost and communities shattered. While there are other causes, those mentioned herein clearly support this argument. Otherwise, there are some reasons, though weak, why people resort to violence to be heard and make their point.

## **Reasons for Military and Violence as Solutions**

There are arguments for and against the use of armed struggle and violence to create peace. Section Two of this work has shown why violence erupts. Some amicable ways to bring about peace include, but are not limited to, dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation. However, most conflicts in Africa seem to lead to

armed struggle and violence. Instead, dialogue and negotiation typically occur only after interventions by other parties, such as the African Union or the United Nations. Examples of this can be seen in Somalia, Kenya after the post-election violence in 2007–08, South Sudan, Egypt, Sudan, Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Libya, and other countries. Why is this often the case? Hoekema (1986) argues that the following reasons have been advanced in some instances:

- a) Violence is the “language” that those in power respond to quickly. Those in power may enjoy exerting control over others, but when their followers are affected, killed, and have their property destroyed, they quickly realize the pain because it is the same language of violence they use on others.
- b) In many cases, violence is the only option left when dialogue and diplomacy fail to produce any change. Violence becomes a resort when other means such as diplomacy and dialogue have failed. It is seen as a practical way to alleviate suffering caused by violence. In some cases, it is a last desperate measure to be heard, although violence often begets more violence. Hoekema refers to the just war tradition based on the ethical theories of Plato and Cicero, which have also been used within Christian traditions by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Protestant reformers to defend military force as a last resort against grave injustices. In this theory, when the innocent are threatened by an unjust aggressor and all other remedies have failed, Jesus’s command for sacrificial love may require the use of lethal force.
- c) Violence is an effective form of communication. Violence is sometimes viewed as an effectual way to communicate with an unjust power or government. The message sent through violence is loud and clear enough to force a quick response from the other party. Dialogue can often drag on too long while injustices continue.

Regardless of the above arguments, it should be noted that violence begets violence. For Africa to develop and have stable communities, it must heed the warning once given by Martin Luther King Jr. (1991):

"Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot



drive out darkness; only light can do that. [...] Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction" (Jegade 2019).

King warned that this spiral of destruction is must be broken. This call and warning is more relevant to Africa now than ever before, given the agony, pain, suffering, and loss of lives and property inflicted by militia groups such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and others, as argued by Jegede (2019).

## **Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist Groups on Peace and Development in Africa**

From the foregoing discussion, it is noted that religion has been used to whip up political emotions in order to gain political legitimacy by invoking God's word, as done by the militia groups identified herein. This religio-political perception has helped militia groups fight against sitting governments in the countries where they reside, contends Jegede (2019). The enormous impact on peace and development includes the destruction of life, displacement of communities, destruction of property such as houses and social amenities like hospitals and schools, economic retrogression, environmental degradation, kidnapping, and more (Turse 2015). Menkhaus (2006/07) and the Crisis Group Africa Report (2001) have analysed the impact of Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, detailing property destruction and numerous deaths resulting from physical attacks, bombings, and suicide missions.

Similarly, Boko Haram in Nigeria has wrought destruction upon communities, caused fatal casualties, attacked foreigners, carried out kidnappings and killings, indoctrinated and radicalized captives, and turned captives into soldiers, porters, cooks, or sex slaves. Numerous attempts to reach a peace agreement were made between the LRA and the Ugandan government, but Kony withdrew each time. The Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) continues its pursuit of the rebels beyond borders, into Congo.

This analysis shows that militia groups are motivated by ethnic, religious, and regional assertions, contests for political space, access to natural resources, and power struggles. They also react to bad governance, weak state formation,

challenges of development, exclusionary politics, and corruption. These groups view themselves as civil armed forces, alternative police, anti-crime forces, religious and regional armies, or the armed wings of political parties (Wafula and Ikelegbe 2010). The Crisis Group Africa Report (2001) and the analysis within this study indicate that deaths caused by terrorism have been rising year after year. In 2013, there were 18,000 recorded deaths, a 60% increase from the previous year, with 66% of these deaths attributed to militia groups. Five percent of terrorist casualties occur in Europe and America, while the rest occur in Africa.

## **Recommendations**

Military conflict in African countries is so extensive that it cannot be resolved solely through military means, though some situations may call for armed intervention to control turmoil. Communities have been destroyed and continue to suffer in terms of human and material resources. Resolving a conflict through confrontation also constitutes violent conflict. There are no universal solutions that work in every situation. However, strategies of nonviolence at both local and global levels have been tested and can be deployed to quell turmoil. Dialogue, negotiations, proactive mediation, reconciliation, and conflict transformation through the reconstruction of destroyed communities are some of these strategies. Judicial and punitive measures by international criminal courts such as the ICC and local judicial mechanisms are timely to deter future militarily organized groups.

Dialogue in Africa must include all interested groups, such as religious organizations, civil society, and political parties among others. This approach has worked in South Africa and is currently working in Somalia, Kenya, and South Sudan. Uganda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria need to enhance this approach. Dialogue should target the main causes of military conflict, such as resource distribution, ethnicity, religious extremism, and human rights. It should embrace democratic principles as opposed to ethnic-based and despotic rule. Interreligious or interfaith dialogue should also emphasize the use of scripture to create peace and not war. This will help resolve sectarian differences that arise due to biblical misinterpretations and misconceptions, such as jihadist movements in Islam.

Mediation and negotiations have been successfully utilized in Kenya through Kofi Annan after the post-election violence of 2007–08. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and South Sudan have benefited from African Union mediation efforts. There is a need for warring parties to strike deals and agree to work together, share resources, and respect ethnic differences and peace accords. Sitting leaders in Africa, such as in Sudan, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, the DRC, Libya, and Egypt, have reneged on accords entered into with opposition parties, leading to the recurrence of war. Mediation and negotiations should be prioritized to settle all forms of dispute in the world because they give reason a chance against militiamen who follow commands.

Politico-religious, ideological deconstruction, and reconstruction: Exclusive theologies, such as concepts like jihad that can be manipulated against others, should be examined and reconstructed through contemporary contextual studies and applications. Sound hermeneutical approaches to the study of theology are now gaining acceptance in religious institutions. This can help tame religious extreme views and ideologies, such as jihadist movements that often resort to military solutions and terrorism. The way forward lies in proper theologizing and the contextual application of scripture.

God in both religions is depicted as a God of peace, regardless of texts that can be manipulated for personal gains. In Christianity, God did not choose individuals solely because of their faith in Him. In Ephesians 1:5-6, 2:1-19, and 1 Timothy 1:9, the Bible recognizes all as God's people. When God chose certain communities for leadership, it was for them to reach out to others. There is no reason why God cannot choose others as well. It is by God's grace. Isaiah 43:10 states, "You did not choose me; I chose you." Therefore, those who believe they are chosen by God to rule others should recognize that the same God can also choose others to rule them. The United Nations Development Programme report (2023) noted that since wars begin in the minds of people, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. Therefore, conflict transformation, mitigation, and peace restorative initiatives by concerned mediators must target the psychological ideologies of groups like Al-Shabaab and jihadist movements. This can be achieved through education and training. Religions should build cultures that foster peace in mosques and churches as part of socialization.

Reconstruction of displaced communities: Africa has the highest number of refugees in the world. In Kenya alone, the Kakuma and Dadaab camps house about one million refugees from Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, among others. These figures are decreasing due to some peace gained in Sudan, Congo, and Somalia. If the numbers from West, North, and Central Africa are included, the total exceeds two million refugees. These are potential participants in community development activities who are currently underutilized. These displaced persons and shattered communities often resort to becoming migrants to Europe and America, but this does not solve the problem. Displaced persons whose home countries have gained some peace and stability should return home to help reconstruct their lives and maintain peace. The substantial resources channelled through NGOs and governments to sustain refugees in camps are not sustainable and are insufficient. Handouts, grants, and UN protective strategies do not address all humanitarian rights. This assistance can help displaced persons return home and begin rebuilding their lives.

Africa should embrace and respect democratic principles of governance and accept religious pluralism as a reality. Respecting the 'other' does not mean compromising or showing weakness; it is the strongest weapon for coexistence today. Communities should not continue to glorify past military achievements but should positively accommodate contemporary community dynamism and civilization. Sectarian and egocentric religious and political ideologies will tear society apart, leaving no room for any of us to live. To deter terrorism and war, human development in affected communities should take center stage by combining development with security agendas. This means integrating development as a key strategy to tackle war, pain, and terror. This approach helps to implement humanitarian projects that create long-term resilience.

Above all, conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy measures are the most effective ways to address African situations. These measures can be described as actions, policies, procedures, frameworks, systems, and institutions undertaken to avoid the threat or use of physical force to resolve or settle disputes, challenges, or concerns. Preventive diplomacy aims to prevent disputes from escalating into violence, insurrection, or restiveness. This is an area that should be further investigated.

## Conclusion

As seen in the foregoing discussion, Africa has been hard hit by extremist military groups caused by various factors: ideological, religious, and political needs, among others. Armed struggle occurs when people are pushed to conflict by opposing forces—typically when certain groups exclude others from politics for their own survival, prompting the excluded to fight back vehemently. However, there is no justification for military campaigns or war in modern Africa. There is no just war or holy war purported to be fought in the name of any deity or God. No one should kill, rape, hurt, or destroy property created by God.

Although Africa has a history of violence, the current conflicts are internally connected. Religion was not typically the cause of war, but now it is being used to settle and create disputes at the expense of development. If not for the rampant wars caused by various factors, Africa could be ranked among developed nations due to its massive natural resources that can trigger rapid community development. For Africa to develop, there must be peace. Violence destroys communities, scares away potential investors, and kills energetic and prominent individuals in communities, among other human rights atrocities like educational setbacks and political regression.

Finally, the solution to extremist and militia conflict does not lie in military action or the use of brute force by police or armies, but in building the capacity of states and communities to govern well and to share and utilize God-given resources equitably. Equal distribution of resources can mitigate ‘negative ethnicity’. Democratic processes of electing leaders transparently can help avert political conflicts. No political party or ideology related to religion should be allowed to thrive unchecked. No violence is equal to peace and development.

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## **The Nexus Of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism in Malawi**

Dr Jones Hamburu Mawerenga  
jmawerenga@unima.ac.mw  
University of Malawi

### **Abstract**

This article explores the intersection of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi. The aim is to interrogate the influence of politics and religion on violent extremism in Malawi from 1891 to 2003. The study employs qualitative research methods, specifically historiography. It argues that the conflation of politics and religion serves as a linchpin and justification for violent extremism, subsequently impacting the security, stability, and peacebuilding efforts in Malawi. Violent religio-political extremism in Malawi condones, and enacts violence with ideological or deliberate intent, based on two main factors: religion and politics. This extremism is characterized by attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that reflect the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum, thereby threatening the safety and security of the country. The article draws attention to the urgent need to address violent extremism in African communities by fostering peacebuilding, safety, and security.

### **Introduction**

An interrogation of the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Africa presupposes the indispensability of religion, which acts as one of the underpinnings of the African holistic worldview, and human nature, which serves as a meeting point of these factors (Chilufya, 2021:165). Chitando (1997:76) argues that religion exerts an all-encompassing influence on most Africans because their existence is based on a religious underpinning. Mbiti (1990:1) states that the all-embracing influence of religion on African society

cannot be ignored because it has the potential to either positively or negatively impact political, socio-economic development, and influence the physical, psychological, spiritual, and health spheres. Chilufya (2021:166) contends that African religiosity and spirituality exert an incredible impact on African political discourses and practices to the extent of prompting violent extremism in various African communities. Chitando (2023:40) argues that African religious beliefs and practices contribute to political tensions and violent extremism on the African continent. Hence, this article launches from the premise that any fruitful discussion on violent extremism in Africa should be grounded in the context of religion and politics.

Religion encompasses a range of socio-cultural systems, behaviors, practices, ceremonies, festivals, morals, beliefs, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, and organizations that demonstrate the relationship between human beings and supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements (Mbiti, 1990:11-12). The article adopts the threefold definition of politics by Merriam-Webster (2002:23): (a) the art or science of government, (b) the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy, and (c) the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government. Heywood (2001:3-4) defines politics as "the activity through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live." Politics concerns the art of government, public affairs, compromise, and power. According to Bak, Tarp, and Liang (2019:8), violent extremism is defined as a violent type of mobilization that aims to elevate the status of one group while excluding or dominating its 'others' based on markers such as gender, religion, culture, and ethnicity. In doing so, violent extremist organizations destroy existing political and cultural institutions, supplanting them with alternative governance structures that operate according to the principles of a totalitarian and intolerant ideology.

Finally, radicalization is the process by which individuals are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views, they then espouse or engage in violence or direct action as a means of promoting political, ideological, or religious extremism (Smith, 2009:1). Therefore, the article uses these definitions to engage with the discussion on the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi.

Annett et al. (2017:2) argue that the vision of religion is to promote the realization of shared well-being, respect for human dignity, and the advancement of the common good for all. However, religion has sometimes been misappropriated and used to generate ideological and political misrepresentations, resulting in violent extremism in Africa. Ellis and Ter Haar (1998:176) demonstrate that some African politicians employ religion to justify their abuse of power through violent extremism, causing harm and death to ordinary people, and jeopardizing the safety, security, peacebuilding, and developmental processes of their respective countries. Babatunde (2018:382) opines that some African religious leaders misread and misinterpret sacred texts, propagating false theologies to their followers to the extent of inciting violent extremism. For example, the leaders of Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and other Islamic jihadist groups have used Quranic texts to radicalize and recruit youth to engage in terrorism in countries such as Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Mali, and Cameroon. Maiangwa and Agbiboa (2014:52) explain that Boko Haram's acts of violent extremism and terrorism have included the abduction of schoolgirls from a boarding school in Chibok, forcing them to become slaves and offer sexual services to the jihadists.

Badurdeen and Bromley (2023) present extremism associated with Rev. Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, a Kenyan cult leader of Good News International Ministries. Rev. Paul Mackenzie propagated apocalyptic sermons and, in October 2017, was arrested by the Kenyan police for radicalising the youth Okwenbah (2023:1). Badurdeen and Bromley (2023) Mackenzie's second arrest in 2023 was in connection with the deaths of individuals under unclear circumstances. Before their deaths some members were allegedly held against their will, and physically restrained. The victims of these activities were said to be in the order of hundreds (Badurdeen and Bromley 2023; Kithi 2023)

According to Okoth (2023:1), some religious leaders from the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) accused the Kenyan government of political failure in dealing with crime. They observed that the criminal activities connected with Good News International Ministries and Rev. Paul Mackenzie in Shakahola had persisted for many years. During this time, Rev. Mackenzie had been arrested multiple times without sustaining a conviction, only to be released each time to continue his criminal

activities. This case represents possible collusion between the state and organized religious crime.

It is against the background of such cases that the article engages with the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi. In line with the aim of the study, the article is divided into four parts: (a) John Chilembwe and violent religio-political extremism in Malawi, (b) Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and violent religio-political extremism in Malawi, (c) Jehovah's Witnesses as victims of violent religio-political extremism in Malawi, and (d) Muslims and violent religio-political extremism in Malawi.

## **John Chilembwe and Religio-Political Violent Extremism in Malawi**

McCracken and Ross, in their respective books "Politics and Christianity in Malawi, 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province" (2008) and "Blantyre Mission and the Making of Modern Malawi" (2018), demonstrate the intersectionality of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi. For instance, early Scottish Presbyterian missionaries and other Christian missionaries associated with various churches—Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Church of Christ, and so on—played a crucial role in the formation of Nyasaland as a state, in close collaboration with the colonial administration. Ross (1996:15) argues that indigenous Malawians were impacted by mission education to the extent that they developed a liberation political theology and praxis in engaging with colonialism. These initiatives eventually led to Malawi's independence in 1964 and the post-colonial state, highlighting the intersectionality of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi.

Ross (1996:15) argues that extremism in Malawi can be historically traced to the influence of the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries who were instrumental in negotiating a deal that culminated in Malawi, formerly Nyasaland, becoming a British protectorate in 1891. Chakanza (1994) argues that, on one hand, the Christian mission stations in Malawi collaborated with the colonial authorities. On the other hand, these mission stations supplied the ideological bedrock that raised various 'African Independent Churches' which challenged both missionary and colonial administrations. For instance, Rev. John Chilembwe,

who was educated by the Blantyre Mission, influenced by Joseph Booth of the Zambezi Industrial Mission, and studied at the Virginia Theological Seminary at Lynchburg, USA, developed an indigenous liberation theology which culminated in violent religio-political extremism in 1915 (Mawerenga 2024:181-189).

Shepperson and Price (2000:267) argue that the 1915 Chilembwe uprising, which constituted an armed revolt against British colonial rule in Nyasaland, serves as an outstanding example of the intersectionality of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi. Ross (2020:188) argues that the 1915 Chilembwe uprising gives some clues as to how Chilembwe drew political conclusions from his Christian faith and developed a remarkably early indigenous liberation theology, which involved an armed struggle against colonial domination in Africa.

Three important questions to grapple with concerning the 1915 Chilembwe uprising are: (1) Was the uprising a result of a theological decision? (2) Was it an outworking of a public theology? (3) How can John Chilembwe's religio-political praxis exemplify the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi? Ross (2020:247, quoted in Mawerenga 2024:202) considers the basis of the uprising to be a combination of the evangelical faith with a radical social and political standpoint. The Baptist faith that cultivated a deep spirituality among the Providence Industrial Mission (P.I.M.) members also played a socio-political conscientization role regarding the injustice and violence of colonial rule.

According to Shepperson and Price (2000:270), Chilembwe's army attacked the Bruce estates on the Saturday night of 23 January 1915. The army moved from Mbombwe to Magomero, at the heart of A.L. Bruce Estates. Meanwhile, William J. Livingstone, the manager of the Bruce estates, together with his wife, was entertaining dinner guests: Mrs Ranald MacDonald, wife of the director of customs at Chiromo, and Mrs Emily Stanton, who together with her young child had come from Zomba to visit their sister-in-law, Alice Roach, the wife to J.T. Roach, the estate's engineer. Thus, on that fateful night, there were at least eleven Europeans at the Bruce estates.

Shepperson and Price (2000:270) explain some details of the attack, demonstrating the violent extremism that was used by Chilembwe's army. They also narrate how (2000:270) another regiment of Chilembwe's army approached a house where Mrs MacDonald was sleeping. However, her personal servant noticed through a window a large number of armed natives gathering outside. She then called the native servant who quickly came and helped them to escape through the window before the army had attacked them. He then whisked them away into the surrounding bushes and led them to village headman Jumbe, who was a *kapitawo* (foreman) at the Bruce estates. Jumbe then arranged that Mrs MacDonald should be carried on a hammock (*machila*) to a European planter, a Mr Charles Carmichael, based at Nachombo. Thus, Mr Charles Carmichael took Mrs MacDonald to Zomba where the rebellion was first reported to the colonial authorities.

Shepperson and Price (2000:271) narrate that Duncan MacCormick's houseboys had informed him of the attack at the Livingstones' house. He rushed to help but had underestimated the situation; hence, he carried no gun. Probably in his mind he was thinking that he would negotiate with the attackers and attain a peaceful resolution. Unfortunately, while he was on his way to the Livingstones' house, one assailant attacked him with a spear, eventually leading to his death.

Makondesa (2006:134) argues that Chilembwe's violent extremism led to the death of three white people: William Jervis Livingstone, Duncan MacCormick, and Robert Ferguson. John Robertson was wounded and three white women and five children were taken captive because John Chilembwe had instructed his army not to kill the women and children.

Phiri (1999:87) states that the colonial authorities' response in the aftermath of the Chilembwe uprising was characterised by violent extremism. For instance, the British colonial administration responded swiftly to the uprising with force and amassed many troops, policemen, and European settler volunteers to hunt down and kill the suspected rebels. It is estimated that about fifty of Chilembwe's followers were killed in the fighting or were summarily executed. McCracken (2012:143) argues that as a way of suppressing the rebellion, the colonial authorities impelled arbitrary retaliations against the indigenous African people, such as the mass burning of

their grass-thatched houses. This was followed by the sequestration of their weapons and an arbitrary fine of four shillings per person in the districts that were affected by the revolt, without prior determination of whether or not the person in question was involved in the rebellion.

Hynd (2010:547) argues that the colonial authorities convened a series of court hearings which passed death sentences on forty-six men for the offences of murder and treason, while 300 others were given prison sentences. However, the capital punishment which was meted out on Chilembwe's followers fell short of being a penal measure; rather it was used as a political tool for revenge and suppression of the uprising. Thirty-six convicts were executed and, to ensure that the uprising did not occur again, some of the ringleaders were publicly hanged on a main road close to the Bruce estates, in Magomero, where the three Europeans were killed. Shepperson and Price (2000:298) also narrate a story of four prisoners who were executed in Blantyre.

Makondesha (2006:138) contends that John Chilembwe was shot dead by the colonial forces either in Phalombe (Nyasaland) or along the border with Mozambique where he is thought to have been hiding. Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine with accuracy the events surrounding his death. Consequently, his death has been mythologised, spawning an array of different stories. Makondesha (2006:144) wrote that the PIM (Providence Industrial Mission) which served as the strategic hub for the 1915 Chilembwe uprising was shut down by the Nyasaland colonial government. The government further demolished its main church building, the New Jerusalem Baptist Church, by blowing it up with dynamite. The PIM was closed from 1915 until 1926 when Dr Daniel Malekebu reopened it. Thus, the 1915 Chilembwe uprising demonstrates the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi.

## **Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and Violent Religio-Political Extremism in Malawi**

Apwewen (2020:65) argues that the commingling of religious and political fanaticism in Africa causes some African politicians to use radical religious/political ideologies in a violent manner to secure power, exploit national resources, and silence their perceived political enemies. Gentile and

Mallett (2000:19) opine that the intersection of religion and politics often leads to the 'sacralization of politics.' They assert that:

The sacralization of politics means the formation of a religious dimension in politics that is distinct from, and autonomous of, traditional religious institutions. The sacralization of politics takes place when politics is conceived, lived, and represented through myths, rituals, and symbols that demand faith in the sacralized secular entity, dedication among the community of believers, enthusiasm for action, a warlike spirit, and sacrifice in order to secure its defence and its triumph. In such cases, it is possible to speak of religions of politics in that politics itself assumes religious characteristics.

Chirambo (2010:4) describes the sacralization of politics in Malawi by giving an example of Ngwazi Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's first president, whose regime lasted for thirty years (1964-1994), mainly by using religion to consolidate his political reign. Shawa (2012:46-47) argues that Dr. Kamuzu Banda used religious institutions and religiosity to claim that it was God who enthroned him as Malawi's president, thus having divine approval for his political rule. Within his religio-political propaganda, he accepted titles such as Mpulumutsi (savior), Wamuyaya (the eternal one), and Messiah—titles used to refer to the deity in a Christian context.

Chirambo (2001:206) explains that Dr. Kamuzu Banda also allowed traditional songs performed at state functions to disseminate his religio-political propaganda. For example, one song sung by the Women's League from Rumphu District demonstrates the religio-political indoctrination by purporting that, before the Ngwazi was born, he was chosen by God to be the leader of Malawi. The song goes:

*Ba Ngwazi wandababike*  
*Chiuta wakawasola*  
*Kuwa Mulungozi withu muno m'Malawi.*  
Before the Ngwazi was born  
God chose him  
To be the leader of Malawi.



Chirambo (2001:206) argues that Dr. Kamuzu Banda was proclaimed "the father and founder of the Malawi nation," who was "God-sent" like Moses and Jesus in the Bible, to deliver Malawians from colonialism, thus becoming the savior (Mpulumutsi) and a political messiah. The songs were also used to give a religio-political vilification to all political dissenters as rebels (Zigawenga). Moreover, the songs justified the harsh punishment meted out to political dissenters. The punishments included the death sentence, life imprisonment, detention without trial, mysterious disappearances, exile, and confiscation of property. In other words, the songs, couched in the religio-political matrix, inflamed political, violent extremism by Dr. Kamuzu Banda against real or perceived enemies of his regime.

Mbewe (2018:5) maintains that religious leaders constantly alluded to the notion that Dr. Banda was a God-given leader for Malawi to entrench his religious consolidation of political power. Ross (1996) states that the Christian churches in Malawi contributed to the creation of Dr. Banda's totalitarian regime because they actively participated in the liberation struggle for independence by rendering support to freedom fighters such as Dr. Banda, Orton Chirwa, Gwanda Chakuamba, Kanyama Chiume, Dunduzu Chisiza, and others. This can be exemplified by a confession from the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in January 1993:

If we look at our own history as the CCAP during the time of the struggle for independence, we will see that Blantyre Synod was very much in support of the Nyasaland African Congress (later called the Malawi Congress Party, MCP). Because of our socio-political stance in favour of the MCP, after independence, the CCAP was aligned closely with the government and became so assimilated with the government's activities that the Synod was often invited to pray and participate as a Church at various government functions. However, because of this assimilation and alignment with the MCP, the Church gradually lost its ability to admonish or speak pastorally to the government. We do not want to make the same mistake at this time to ensure that the Church retains its prophetic voice throughout the coming years of our country's history. (Quoted in Ross 1996:19)

Ross (1996:20) observes that, since most of the MCP freedom fighters were products of various mission schools and remained active church members, it became difficult for the church in Malawi to offer an independent critical stance against the gross human rights violations and lack of good governance prevalent in the country. The church's silence was costly to thousands of Malawians whose right to life and other human rights were greatly compromised. In other words, the church was complicit in Dr. Banda's totalitarian regime by offering unquestioning legitimacy to the one-party system of government and by failing to raise a prophetic voice against the socio-economic injustices prevalent in the country.

## **The Jehovah's Witnesses as Victims of Violent Religio-Political Extremism in Malawi**

Kaiya (2013:37) argues that the nexus between politics, religion, and violent extremism in Malawi can further be elaborated through Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda's persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi. They were persecuted for their refusal to buy the Malawi Congress Party's (MCP) membership card due to their belief that they had pledged their loyalty to Jehovah alone and not to a political party. They were also accused of refusing to vote because of their claim of being apolitical, which necessitated that they denounce the kingdoms of the world in pursuit of God's kingdom. Moreover, their refusal to engage in various political and developmental activities in Malawi frustrated the MCP's developmental vision for the country.

According to Vera Chirwa (2007:23), in one of Dr. Banda's speeches, he vented his anger against the Jehovah's Witnesses by describing them in the following way:

I am disappointed with the revival of fanatical sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. The truth is that they are not Jehovah's Witnesses but the Devil's Witnesses or Satan's Witnesses. I will tell you why. Wherever they are, they cause trouble. They say they don't believe in government, they don't want to pay tax, and they don't want to engage in any political activity because they believe in God above in heaven. But, the moment they are in trouble, they run to the police, to the

District Commissioner (D.C.), or the chief who are all part of the government. If the Young Pioneer or the Youth League just pinch them, they run to the police. If they were true Jehovah's Witnesses, then they should run to their church to pray to God and not run to the government. If you do not want to respect the government and only believe in God above, when you're in trouble go to the church and pray to God. Don't go to public school, hospital, or police. These people are stupid; don't let them trouble you. They are foolish, stupid. (Chirwa, 2007:23)

Banda (2024:6) writes that the MCP's annual convention, held on 10-18 September 1967 in Mzuzu, resolved to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses. They declared that:

We the delegates and representatives of all the people of Malawi in congress assembled, recommend strongly that the Jehovah's Witnesses denomination be declared illegal in this country as the attitude of its adherents is not only inimical to the progress of this country but also so negative in every way that it endangers the stability of peace and calm which is essential for the smooth running of our state. (Banda 2024:6)

The Jehovah's Witnesses yearbook of 1999 (Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses 1999:179) stated that:

The Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization has been declared 'dangerous to the good government of Malawi' and is therefore now an unlawful society. This announcement is made in a special Government Gazette Supplement published at the weekend. The notice No. 235 is signed personally by President Dr. Banda and declares that the action is taken under Section 70 (2) (ii) of the Malawi Penal Code. The effect of the announcement is that the Jehovah's Witnesses may no longer hold meetings, sell or distribute literature, or collect money [...] The law affecting unlawful societies states that anyone who manages or assists in the management of an unlawful society is guilty of an offense and is liable to

imprisonment for 14 years. Other sections of the law state that no member may allow a meeting of the society or of members of the society to be held in 'any house, building or place' belonging to him or occupied by him. The penalty here is a jail term of seven years. The Penal Code also provides for the search by police of any premises belonging to or occupied by the society or its members. No member may display signs, 'shout or utter any slogan,' or make any sign associated with the society. The law also provides for the appointment of an officer to wind up the affairs of an unlawful society.

Kaiya (2013:37) explains that an unprecedented wave of violence was unleashed against the Jehovah's Witnesses, including detention, torture, confiscation of their property, burning of their homes, and destruction of their crops in the fields. According to the *Awake!* magazine, the violent extremism against the Jehovah's Witnesses continued unabated. Since this is the way the Witnesses of Jehovah conduct themselves, why, then, all this violent persecution of them in Malawi? One of the main reasons is that the Witnesses refuse to buy membership cards for Malawi's Congress Party and refuse to buy and wear badges with the picture of President Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda. Other religious organizations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim groups, have all yielded to pressure in these respects, but Jehovah's Witnesses have not. Why? Because of their strict adherence to the Word of God (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society 1968:71, 72).

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to buy the Malawi Congress Party card, which declares the holder to be a member of the ruling political party of Malawi. For Jehovah's Witnesses, to buy a political card and thus join a political party would be an open denial of what they believe and stand for (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society 1976:5). Banda (2014:30) states that, as of January 1976, there were reportedly 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in detention centers at Dzaleka and Kanjedza prisons. Carver (1990:65) notes that the persecution was both economic and physical, and it intensified after a September 1972 Malawi Congress Party meeting in Zomba, which stated that "all Jehovah's Witnesses should be dismissed from their employment; any firm which failed to comply would have its license cancelled."

Tengatenga (2006:113) writes that by November 1973, approximately 21,000 Jehovah's Witnesses had fled into exile in Zambia, with most housed at the Sinda Misale refugee camp. Other reports indicate that about 12,500 members of the Jehovah's Witnesses sought refuge in Mozambique. Banda (2024:7) observes that chiefs were empowered to expel Jehovah's Witnesses who resided in their jurisdictions. For instance, Chief Mabulabo of Mzimba reportedly expelled twenty-two Jehovah's Witnesses in October 1972 for hampering Malawi's developmental initiatives.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses yearbook (Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses 1999:188), the violent extremism also entailed discrimination at the community level:

Another one of the resolutions adopted at the convention stated that 'all Jehovah's Witnesses who live in the villages should be chased away from there.' This effectively called for Jehovah's Witnesses to be cast out of human society! Thousands of their homes were burned or pulled down. Their crops and animals destroyed. They were forbidden to draw water from the village wells. They lost everything they owned in looting sprees all over the country.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses yearbook (Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses 1999:172), the violent extremism against Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi was horrific, as exemplified by the following narrative:

During this period, reports were received at the branch office showing that more than 100 Kingdom Halls and well over 1,000 homes of our brothers had been burned or torn down. Hundreds of fields and food stores were torched. Sadly, as a result, many families of Jehovah's Witnesses now found themselves without food or shelter. Some fled for their lives into neighbouring Mozambique. Many suffered severe beatings. Among these was Kenneth Chimbaza, a traveling overseer. Not many years after experiencing such mistreatment, he died, evidently as a result of injuries that he had sustained.

Banda (2024) writes that Jehovah's Witnesses who fled Malawi also experienced persecution in their countries of refuge. For instance, in Zambia, they were harassed by members of the then-ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) because of their refusal to salute the Zambian flag and stand when the national anthem was played. In Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique, Jehovah's Witnesses were also persecuted for their refusal to serve in the military and pledge allegiance to the government. In Tanzania, the then-president, Julius Nyerere, banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1968 because they had challenged his political and socio-economic ideologies anchored under the so-called Ujamaa (Cross 1978:307).

Fiedler (1996:150) states that the government's ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi was lifted in August 1993 during the country's political transition from a one-party state to a multi-party system of government. Banda (2024:7) states that the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania was legally registered in Malawi on 15 November 1993, granting Jehovah's Witnesses legal recognition to practice their religion in the country, in conformity with the freedom of worship.

## **The 2003 Muslim Violent Religio-Political Extremism in Malawi**

According to CBS News (2003), the Muslim violent religio-political extremism in Malawi was precipitated by the arrest of five suspected Al Qaeda members. They were all foreign nationals but resident in Malawi and were suspected of running charities that laundered money to finance Al Qaeda terrorist activities. The suspects were arrested sparking protests. Mchombo (2005:1-2) reports how the resultant Muslim violent religio-political extremism in Malawi was witnessed in Blantyre, Kasungu, and Mangochi after Friday prayers (Salatul-Jumu'ah) on 27 June 2003. In Blantyre, the Muslims went on the rampage in the city streets interrupting traffic, vandalising the offices of the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM).

In Mangochi, the predominantly Muslim district in Malawi, the situation was completely out of control. The Muslims strategically attacked institutions with Christian links. For instance, they burned down churches of the following denominations: Assemblies of God, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian

(CCAP), Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. They assailed a Roman Catholic priest, Father Gilevulo, and went on to overturn and burn his vehicle. They also went to attack the residence of Bishop Alessandro Assolari of the Mangochi Diocese; nonetheless, the police rushed swiftly to ensure safety and security. Save the Children offices as well as staff were attacked while the offices of the United Democratic Front (UDF), then the ruling party, were burnt. Some Muslim protesters were heard shouting that 'Mangochi is a Muslim district and has no place for Christianity and its American sponsorship' (Mchombo 2005:2).

Mchombo (2005:4) argues that the Muslims in Malawi interpreted the arrest of the five foreign nationals as an attack against their fellow Muslim brothers and Islam in general. They further alleged that this was a manifestation of the Islamophobia found in Western nations. Therefore, they engaged in violent religio-political extremism targeting Christian and American institutions in order to send a warning that they were prepared for a holy war (*jihad*) in defence of Islam.

Mchombo (2005:14) intimates that the protesting Muslims vandalised the offices of the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) because of its perceived failure to influence the then president of Malawi, Bakili Muluzi, who is also a Muslim, to act against the arrest of the five suspected Al Qaeda operatives. Meanwhile, the United Democratic Front (UDF) offices were attacked as an expression of anger at the UDF government and President Bakili Muluzi's failure to protect the five suspected Al Qaeda operatives. Thus, the Muslim unrest in Malawi was against the backdrop of global geo-political developments exemplifying the nexus of politics, religion, and violent extremism.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that religion in Malawi plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing political discourses and violent extremism. The complex intersectionality between religion, politics, and violent extremism in Malawi has the potential to either positively promote socio-economic development or negatively impede it. The article argues that the nexus of politics and religion serves as a linchpin and justification for violent extremism

in Malawi. Furthermore, political fanaticism and religious fundamentalism exacerbate, legitimize, and inflame various forms of violent extremism, essentially characterizing the beliefs and actions of people who use violence to achieve their goals. The article draws attention to the urgent need to disengage from violent religio-political extremism in Malawi by fostering reconciliation, peacebuilding, safety and security, mutual tolerance, coexistence, development, and overall well-being of the people.



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## **A Contention for the Separation of Church and State in Kenya**

Samuel Mwangi  
samgbrux@gmail.com  
Presbyterian Church of East Africa

### **Abstract**

The separation of church and state in Kenya has always been a polarizing issue due to its contentious nature. A significant problem, often overlooked in research, is the misunderstanding of the wording in the 2010 Constitution and the interpretation of High Court judgments concerning the separation issue. The interactions between political processes and the church in Kenya exacerbate this problem. If researchers fail to address the separation issue, Kenya may face similar challenges to those seen in the Western world. On one hand, if separation is not understood as a division of institutional jurisdictions rather than an extreme separatist view, the expression of religious beliefs could be severely restricted. Furthermore, without institutional separation, the church is likely to lose its moral authority and voice, especially if it becomes too closely aligned with the state. Lastly, without separation, the state may end up dictating religious expression if it assumes control over religious directions within the country. This study employed a qualitative research methodology through a literature review to understand the necessity of the separation of church and state. The literature review included an examination of the wording in both the revised 2008 and the 2010 Constitutions concerning relevant sections. Additionally, scholarly works discussing the involvement of the Kenyan church in the political process, Protestant Reformation views on separation, and the separation of politics and the state were reviewed. This paper aims to demonstrate that there should be a separation of church and state, provided it does not imply a separation of church and politics.

## Introduction

The Kenyan political regime inaugurated in 2022 brought to light the question of the separation of church and state, due to what many perceive as close relations between the government and evangelicals in the country. Notably, when the incumbent was declared the President of the Republic of Kenya, much of the international media referred to him as the 'evangelical president.' However, such observations may have been influenced by non-Kenyan concerns, reflecting his similar views to right-wing evangelicals in the US (Njoya 2023). Immediately after the president's victory, the state invited approximately forty evangelical pastors to 'purify' the State House (Hochet-Bodin 2022). Furthermore, the Office of the First Lady, which partly focuses on 'faith diplomacy,' has notably invited several Pentecostal leaders and instituted prayer services in the State House, causing some pushback from certain quarters of the populace (Kimari 2023).

The seeming politicization of religion, which stretches far back and is intertwined with the conduct of state affairs under the current regime, raises concerns about the separation of church and state. A further challenge to this issue is the misunderstanding of the constitutional underpinning and wording. The 2010 Constitution of Kenya implies a secular state, specifically under Article 8, which explicitly states that there shall be no state religion (Laws of Kenya: The Constitution of Kenya 2010). This interpretation has led to much contention. Moreover, the constitution, through the wording in certain sections, is perceived to suggest that the state prefers some religions over others, although this is not the case. Thus, there is an impression that Kenya seems to operate on a religiously-minded constitution that blurs the lines of separation.

Over time, there have been many different opinions concerning the separation of church and state. Bishop Oginde, one of the leading clergy, has argued that the church cannot be wholly separated from the state, contending that both entities are concerned with the affairs of their populace and that any leader who wants to lead must take into account the holistic nature of the people, which includes religion (Ng'ang'a 2020). On the other hand, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, one of the leading political figures in Kenya, has stated

that Kenya is a 'secular state' (Kimari 2023), a sentiment echoed by the leader of the atheist movement, Mr. Harrison Mumia (Mumia 2015).

Additionally, both individuals and institutions have, in the past, lodged several cases in Kenyan courts over religious beliefs. Notably, there was a case lodged in the High Court by several clergy who argued that Section 66 of the 2008 revised Kenyan constitution, which established the Kadhi Courts (a constitutional court limited to determining Islamic law in matters of marriage, divorce, personal status, and inheritance), was unconstitutional because it violated the principle of separation between church and state ('Jesse Kamau & 25 others v Attorney General' 2010). The High Court ruled in their favor and stated that Kenya was a secular state (Mujuzi 201:316). Thus, the problem of the church's involvement in political processes and the misunderstanding of the constitution's wording form the primary grounds on which the question of the separation between the church and the state exists.

## **Political History and its Influence on the Question of Separation**

As is evident from the many divergent views, whether the Kenyan constitution envisages a separation between church and state is crucial to Kenyan society. The fundamental reason is that it cannot be denied that religion, particularly the church in Kenya, played a crucial role in the country's democratization (Kodia 2014:64). Prior to the current Kenyan constitution, the interactions between the church and the state had a long history from the time Kenya was declared an independent state, post-independence. The interactions between the church and state are to be considered with the understanding that both entities actively participate in politics.

From post-independence up to 1992, Kenya was under one-party rule by KANU (Kenya African National Union - a longstanding political party that ruled Kenya for nearly forty years). Under this closed political system, the church sometimes proved to be a challenge to the state. After independence, there was church and state cooperation to consolidate the gains that came with the emancipation of Kenya's people (Githiga 2001). Under President Jomo Kenyatta's regime (1963-1978), some ecclesial bodies agreed to act as society's conscience (Orobator 2009:183). The then-president had asked the church to



help with nation-building efforts, primarily to create a cohesive society. Some of the efforts by churches included issuing exhortations and pastoral letters to public office bearers (Orobator 2009:183).

Nonetheless, the regime's failings became evident over time, and the church began to break its silence over the seemingly authoritarian rule. Through the umbrella body, the National Christian Council of Kenya, the church was called to show concern for politics. It was vocal, especially regarding the assassination of leading politicians such as Tom Mboya and J. M. Kariuki (Kamau 2023). The one-party regime continued under President Daniel Moi (1978-2002), a period many termed as dictatorial and retrogressive (Murunga 2014:151). During President Moi's rule, there was increased enthusiasm for the struggle for liberation, and both the church and the 'Civil Society' were at the forefront of the reforms. Some researchers (Chacha 2010; Parsitau 2012) have extensively examined the relationship between Moi and the church during his twenty-four-year rule. Between 1986 and 1992, the main contention was about civil liberties, which the church, through the National Christian Council of Kenya and the Catholic Church, earnestly contended for as the government infringed on citizens' civil rights. One way the umbrella body criticized the government's electoral practices was through its publication "Beyond," whose editor, Bedan Mbugua, was jailed for criticizing the government, leading to its publications being banned entirely (Perlez 1988). The publication criticized the newly introduced queuing system in 1988.

However, the most iconic moment occurred during the 1990 struggle for multi-party democracy, when notable clergymen from the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches were at the forefront of the reforms. These reforms involved calling for constitutional changes, particularly the repeal of Section 2A of the contemporary constitution, which entrenched one-party rule. The call for constitutional reform bore fruit, making Kenya a multi-party state. During this period, the church declared, primarily through the NCKC, that it was the only establishment capable of speaking on behalf of the people, thus establishing itself as an active player in the political arena (Sabar-Friedman 1997:25). The church asserted itself as the people's spokesperson by sponsoring civil society, forming conventions, and actively participating in demonstrations. Additionally, the move towards constitutional reform was also spearheaded by the church between 1994 and 2002. Several outfits driven

by both the church umbrella body and the Catholic Church helped advocate for successful constitutional reform (David and Katola 2016:47).

During President Mwai Kibaki's era (2002-2013), the relationship between the church and the state took a turn. In the run-up to the elections from which Mwai Kibaki would emerge victorious, it was evident that the majority of the mainline churches were in solidarity with the opposition to which he belonged, as they were keen on ousting then-President Moi. The strong resolve to end Moi's regime was fueled by widespread public clamor for constitutional change and reform of his evidently oppressive and corrupt government. When President Kibaki came to power, one researcher suggests there was a 'worrisome trend' among the churches regarding their voice on the moral ills of the government and their active participation in civic and public engagements (Kinas 2018:28). The church's silence and reluctance to criticize the then-regime were evident. It is also noted that the resurgence of Pentecostal and evangelical Christians, especially their activism in the socio-political arena, posed severe challenges to the public roles assumed by the mainline churches as they largely remained silent on bad governance (Kinas 2018:30). At a critical point in Kenya's political history, when the church was expected to call for peace and reconciliation, particularly during the 2007-2008 post-election violence, the church's silence (among both Pentecostal and mainline churches) was manifest as it took a partisan stand and failed to negotiate for peace (Maupeu 2013:41). By the time Mwai Kibaki left office, the church had largely lost its credibility and legitimacy, and there was now a developing division between the mainline and Pentecostal churches with the latter's influence being more prominent.

The backdrop of the Pentecostal churches' influence stems from the post-election violence period when the country sought justice for the crimes committed against its populace. Among the people mentioned as those who led the post-election violence were Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, who were subsequently prosecuted by the International Criminal Court. Despite many efforts to halt the process, all failed, and, as one researcher puts it, the two would turn to prayers for their acquittal (Maupeu 2013:39). Eventually, the two entered a political marriage of convenience, eying the presidency, and traversed the country conducting 'prayer meetings' led mainly by Pentecostal clergy. Notably, neither of them belonged to the churches that led the prayer

rallies. A leading daily pointed out that there was a ‘re-consolidation of Christianity as a state religion’ (Macharia 2013). The impression created was that Kenya favored a particular religion over all others, and both of them expressed that the state’s mandate was to provide an environment where the will of God could be expressed (Maupeu 2013:41). Uhuru and Ruto announced their joint presidential candidacies to succeed President Mwai Kibaki, within the confines of religious gatherings—Uhuru at the National Council of Churches of Kenya premises and Ruto at a Catholic church in Eldoret. The intertwine between politics and Christianity re-emerged as the church took a stance that the duo had been falsely accused (David and Katola 2016:53). The duo won the elections, and their regime was termed a ‘Christianized’ government.

When President Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-2022) took over from Mwai Kibaki, the church became central in the political life of the country, but this time there was a clear division between mainline churches and Pentecostal churches. The church did not speak with one voice, and it became evident that the Pentecostal churches supported the government. During the Jubilee government era (the ruling party during President Uhuru Kenyatta’s regime), the Pentecostal movement had significant influence over the political life of the country. Their influence had started when the historical mainline churches were conspicuously left out of the campaigns when Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto vied for the presidency (Maupeu 2013). Consequently, the voice of the church, now divided, was never taken seriously by the regime whenever it spoke out against the extensive corruption in the government.

The current regime, led by President William Ruto, has been under scrutiny due to the continued close relationship with the church, primarily the Pentecostal churches. However, the president’s relationship with the church did not begin with his ascent to the country’s highest office. This relationship was evident when he campaigned with former President Uhuru Kenyatta in the run-up to the 2013 elections. During the run-up to the constitutional referendum in 2010, William Ruto was one of the most prominent figures opposing the new constitution. As the Minister for Higher Education, he led the ‘No’ camp that opposed the new constitution. The evangelical churches were also opposed to the new constitution. Although each had different reasons for their opposition—the former on political issues such as the

excessive powers of the presidency and land issues, and the latter on moral issues and the Kadhi courts—they were aligned in a relationship of convenience. In the end, Kenyans ratified the new constitution, and the church failed to convince the populace based on their moral stance.

Fast forward to the 2022 elections, President Ruto leveraged his relationship with the church to bolster his victory. He aligned himself with Pentecostal churches, especially those led by clergy who had risen from humble beginnings to lead mega-churches. His choice to align with the Pentecostals is evident, especially considering that both the First Lady and the Deputy President’s wife have deep roots in the movement.

Historical evidence sheds light on the church’s involvement with the state and its presentation as a political entity. It is evident that religion has been an integral part of the political process in Kenya. Moreover, religion has a significant influence on Kenyan politics, which subsequently blurs the lines of interaction between church and state. Many political actors in state offices often associate themselves with various religious organizations. It is well-known that the church has often received many handouts from politicians, an act often interpreted as politicians buying the church and its clergy. As a result, it has been observed that the church is frequently compromised due to political affiliations. These affiliations often rob the church of its moral strength to stand up to the state whenever atrocities are committed against the people, a mandate expected of the church as the moral voice of society. Thus, the complexity of these interactions continues to blur the question of the separation of church and state.

## **The Constitutional Dilemma Regarding its View of Religion**

Apart from the church’s involvement in politics concerning the question of the separation of church and state, there is the challenge of understanding the true nature of the Kenyan state insofar as it is a religious or secular state. Part of this challenge lies in the misunderstanding of the intention behind the wording in the current 2010 constitution. In the earlier mentioned judgment passed by the Kenyan High Court regarding Section 66 of the 2008 revised constitution, the judges stated that Kenya, as a republic, is a secular state (*‘Jesse Kamau and 25 others v Attorney General’* 2010). Under the current

constitution, the impression that there shall be no state religion (Laws of Kenya: The Constitution of Kenya 2010) has therefore been interpreted to mean that the country is a secular state, but a part of the populace sees a problem with that interpretation. However, the reference to Kenya being a secular state brings about contention because of differing understandings of the term 'secular.'

It is essential to note that the interactions between the church and the state have occurred under almost similar pronouncements across various constitutional dispensations. However, the previous revised constitution and the current constitutional dispensation are more pronounced. In the previous constitution of Kenya, revised in 2008, Section 78 under the Bill of Rights entrenched freedom of conscience, which included religious freedom (National Council for Law Reporting, 2008). The constitution provided that every person had the right to change their religion or belief and manifest and propagate their religion or belief, whether in private or public. Further, under Section 82, the constitution provided that no person should be discriminated against. It clearly emphasized that the constitution sought to treat all religions equally without favoring any particular belief.

In the current constitutional dispensation, the interaction between the state and the church has two faces. First, the Kenyan constitution promulgated in 2010 envisages a state where there is no favoritism towards any religious entity, as stated in Chapter Two, Article 8: 'There shall be no state religion.' Consequently, Chapter Four, which details the Bill of Rights, promotes freedom of conscience, religion, belief, and opinion under Article 32. Thus, the state is not bound or confined to any religious institution or entity, as is the will of the people enshrined in the Kenyan constitution. Although this is the case, a realistic examination of the interaction between religion and the state reveals a blurred line. A closer look at the constitution reveals many hints of religious inclination illustrated by certain wordings. The preamble contains the words: 'We, the people of Kenya... acknowledging the supremacy of the Almighty God of all creation.'

Additionally, the national anthem and the oaths of office for public servants include religious declarations, ending with the words 'so help me God.' Lastly, there is the contentious issue of establishing Kadhi courts in the 2010

constitution under Article 169 (1)(b), with provisions set out in Article 170. The constitution provides Muslims with their own judicial system, though limited to determining questions regarding Muslim law. The Kadhi courts are funded by the state, which led to a case brought forward by Christian clergy seeking an interpretation of the separation of state and religion during the voting process for the new 2010 constitution.

Furthermore, the state appears to advance religious causes within its institutions, particularly by employing clergy in both the army and police force. Schools in Kenya also require religious education, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu. It is evident that religion plays a critical role in the political space, as traced through various regimes that have ruled the country. It is estimated that approximately 85.5% of the Kenyan population is Christian, while 11% is Muslim (Office of International Religious Freedom 2023). Hence, the state does not seem to have a clear notion of separation between itself and religion as envisaged in the constitution. It is correct to conclude that religion is a significant component of Kenyan society, and there is a clear interaction between them. Although the constitution pronounces the separation of state and religion, it is dotted with religious language. As prescribed by the constitution, both the state and religion (of which the church is an entity) provide for the proper functioning of Kenyan society. However, there remains contention on the question of the separation of church and state, making it necessary to delineate the meaning and intentions of the constitution regarding this issue.

## **Historicity of the Contentions**

It is essential to understand that the contention for the separation between the church and state exists not only in Kenya but also across other contexts, to better understand the contestation. Researchers have reported that the relationship between the church and the state on the African continent has been characterized by complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty (Orobator 2009:182). While Kenyan law implies the existence of a secular state, an explicit pronouncement was made through the 2010 ruling provided by the High Court. Nonetheless, to many, its principles remain obscure and blurred by the realities evident in society. Therefore, the separation model between the church and the state in Kenya appears theoretical rather than practical

when examined in real-life contexts. This blurred distinction is not unique to Kenya; the question of the separation between church and state has been raised in the past, especially during the Reformation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Notably, two significant voices in the Protestant faith, Martin Luther and John Calvin, were prominent in their pronouncements on the relationship between the church and the state.

According to Luther, the church was primarily a spiritual entity, characterized by spiritual relationships among its members (Gane 1970:120). Thus, he argued that the church was not superior to the state in temporal (earthly) matters, and the clergy were not a special class exempt from the state's secular control. Luther declared that all Christians were subject to secular authority. He further stated that the church's domain was limited to matters of faith and morals, while secular judges dealt with issues of money, property, life, and honor. Luther also maintained the autonomy of the local church. He believed that human government was secular but not separate from God's rule and was restricted to temporal matters. Secular law was to be firmly established, and human government had the right to exercise the sword's power because it was ordained by God. For him, any rebellion against the divinely established secular rule was a rebellion against God, and all people, including believers, were to obey secular authority unless commanded to sin (Gane 1970:134).

On the other hand, John Calvin espoused the separation of church and state but not the separation of religion and state (Gatgounis 1996:60). Calvin, like Luther, believed that God ruled over both the church and the state, but he saw both as spiritual entities though distinct organizations. Calvin argued that the church and state were mutually inclined: the state was to provide an environment that enabled the church to carry out its evangelism and mission mandate, while the church had the duty of producing model citizens. Similarly, Calvin agreed with Luther that the state should exercise jurisdiction over temporal matters while the church assumed jurisdiction over doctrinal and spiritual matters. However, Calvin emphasized that the church and state were distinct yet overlapping spheres. He believed both shared a unity of purpose in opposing evil, whether spiritual, social, doctrinal, or moral. Calvin envisioned a religious republic where the church and state, as two divinely instituted bodies, were united in their opposition to evil. Calvin also forbade any form of rebellion against the civil government, as he believed it was rightly ordained

by God (Gatgounis 1996:70, 72). Thus, according to Calvin, there was no distinction between religious life and other aspects of life, including politics, meaning religion was apparent and present throughout life.

## **The Issue of Secularism**

It is imperative to address the issue of secularism as implied in the High Court case of *Jesse Kamau and twenty-five others versus the Attorney General*, which asserted that Kenya is a secular state as interpreted from the constitution ('*Jesse Kamau & 25 others v Attorney General*' 2010). When the High Court declared Kenya to be a secular state based on the constitution, the pronouncement brought challenges and contentions. The word secularism, in any context with a majority of religious adherents, creates a significant schism between the religious and non-religious, and even among the religious populace. Depending on the interpretation adopted, the term evokes many divergent and emotive responses. However, the meaning of the term is not as many modern people think it is. As one writer puts it, secularism is not necessarily an unreligious or un-Christian term and must be distinguished from modern thinking (Headley 1987:23). Historically, especially during the Reformation, secularism referred to matters not under the authority of the church, i.e., temporal matters relating to the natural world as contrasted with those that are eternal in the Christian faith.

Nonetheless, it is evident that much of the emotive response associated with the term stems from its association with 'godlessness'. This was evident during Kenya's 2022 elections when former Prime Minister Raila Odinga reiterated that Kenya is a secular state. He was subsequently branded an atheist, and his political party was primarily associated with people who did not 'fear the Lord' or were perceived as non-religious. Such sentiments continue to exist among the modern-day populace, making the issue of separation of church and state more contentious.

Ogbu (2014), in his research paper, provides a comprehensive overview of secularism, placing it in a historical perspective. According to the article, the term secularism has evolved over the ages. When first used in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the term was understood spiritually. The distinction between the secular and spiritual was never construed as a separation of



religious and political affairs. In the modern era, Ogbu posits that secularism aims to separate religion and politics to ensure that the state's existence is not founded on theology. The modern stance on secularism can be traced to the Renaissance and Reformation, where the sovereign state that assumed secularism emerged supreme over religious claims, forcing the church to subordinate its authority to the secular state. He explains that it is based on this philosophy that many modern states adopted secularism.

The contemporary meaning of secularism presents a challenge. Ogbu posits that, while many people associate secularism with godlessness because some atheists openly condemn religious practices and doctrines, that is not the meaning conveyed by secularism. He suggests that, in reality, a secular state is meant to create an enabling environment for the freedom of religion. Ogbu also notes various spectrums associated with secularism, arguing that a state cannot be deemed less secular because it accommodates religious life in a non-discriminatory manner, whether in favor of or against any religion (Ogbu 2014:11). Thus, the association of secularism with godlessness is a modern misinterpretation, especially contrasting with the Reformation era when the separation of state and church was a significant concern.

In the previously mentioned High Court case that clarified Kenya as a secular state, the judges used several criteria to declare the Kenyan state secular (Mujuzi 2011:316), none of which indicate 'godlessness'. The opinions of the High Court judges align with similar views regarding Nigeria, which has nearly identical language in its constitutional wording and historical views (International Centre for Nigerian Law, 1999). It is provided that the state of Nigeria practices egalitarian and protective secularism marked by no official state religion. However, the state is obligated to offer protection and encouragement to all religions based on their equality under the law (Ogbu 2014). Thus, according to such interpretations, secularism refers to the fact that a state has no preference for one religion over another.

## **The State and Politics**

Finally, it is essential to make a valid distinction between the state and politics. Research has shown that John Calvin contemplated no distinction between religious life and politics because religion permeated all aspects of life,

including politics. One researcher who studied the interaction of religion and politics posits that both are closely linked and that it is difficult to draw a line of separation, especially if we widen the scope of the term politics (Levine 1979). According to the author, if we consider issues such as calling out injustice as political, then even religion addresses these matters (Levine 1979:8). Researchers have demonstrated that the church in Kenya is actively involved in contemporary politics.

Another researcher who distinguishes between the state and politics uses Islam as the basis of his argument. He posits that it is essential for Islam as a religious outfit and the state to be institutionally separate to safeguard individuals' religious choice, in this case, being a Muslim as a matter of conviction rather than coercion (An-Na'im 2000:1). According to this researcher, this separation is only possible within a secular state, where Sharia law does not rule the state. The researcher contends that Islam and the state should remain separated, but not Islam and politics. The premise of the argument is that Sharia law can only be observed freely by believers. If the state tries to enforce it, the principles and values of the religion are compromised. Similarly, the practice of Christianity or any other religion should be left to the believer, who should practice the religion freely without state coercion to preserve the principles and values of their faith.

Furthermore, the researcher states that we should not interpret the functions of the state that ensure the exercise of religion in a secure environment to mean that the state has authority over religion (An-Na'im 2000:2). The state's actions are secular since those who occupy state offices are not under the authority of any religion, such that, based on human judgments, they develop official policies and formal legislation. Consequently, these functions cannot be deemed religious. Therefore, based on this premise, the researcher points out that this is what it means to have the separation of Islam and the state. The state is responsible for carrying out functions that ensure the proper functioning of society through policies and legislation, which are secular functions. These functions enable the continuity of other institutions, such as the judiciary and administrative agencies, which we can distinguish from the ruling regime instituted democratically through a political process. In a democratic environment, we expect the state to advance policies and legislation for the good of its people while also creating an enabling

environment for competing political views. Thus, we expect the state to exercise power legitimately, using instruments of power to ensure that policies and legislation are adhered to by the populace for the proper functioning of society. However, as the law provides, the use of power by the state must be neutral and not violate the law, which is why there is a need for constant checks through active political engagement that religious institutions are welcome to participate in, and through balances as provided by the law.

Based on such a view, it is evident that there will always be a constant interaction between the state and politics, as those who advance politics are actors with competing views aimed at the public good. The distinction is necessary because of the risks associated with the state's necessary and legitimate use of force. As the entity mandated to ensure the proper functioning of society, the state must strike a balance with its activeness in politics since there is a need for mediation in the case of competing views. The truth is that a complete separation of politics and the state is not possible because political actors are concerned with the running of the state. Nonetheless, a division must be advocated for; one researcher describes it as a dichotomy, although he found the term too strict (Overeem 2021:14). According to the researcher, there should be a division between public administration, considered a function of the state, and politics (Overeem 2021). John Calvin had similar thoughts, contemplating that while the magisterium and the princes in authority were still members of the spiritual estate and part of the church, religion, including politics, could never be completely separated (Gatgounis 1996). However, a separation between the state and the church is necessary because many circumstances exclude people from the political process, and they need to trust that the state will protect them whenever their rights are violated.

During the one-party rule in Kenyan society, the state acted as the immediate agent of the ruling party, which was the political arm of the state. This political climate trapped Kenyans between the state and the ruling party. When the state violated their rights, there was no redress because no administrative or legal remedy existed outside of its control. The lack of distinction between the state and politics severely undermined the nation's peace, stability, and development. When citizens are denied protection from the state and an opportunity to air their views through active political participation, resistance

is inevitable, as witnessed in the early 1990s. Active citizens, including Christians, should be allowed to have and express their political views, which fall under the purview of religion, openly and under the state's safeguard. This ensures that, in exercising their rights, they do not violate others' rights. Therefore, it is necessary that the constitution and the rule of law, which protect people's rights, exist. These instruments ensure and enable active citizen participation, especially in democratic governance through organized political action, which is often highly influenced by religious beliefs. On this basis, the separation of the church and politics is not a realistic possibility because politics remains within the scope of religious activity. It is upon this understanding that the interaction between the church and politics occurs. However, a distinction should be made between the interaction of the church and the state, and by extension, the state and politics.

## **Conclusion**

It has become evident that, now more than ever, the Kenyan people deeply value religion and politics in their lives. Christianity and other religious affiliations, along with active participation in politics, form the cornerstone of their national identity. While it is prudent to recognize that other religions are part of Kenyan society, Christianity plays a significant role. Nonetheless, concerning the interactions between the church and the state, one thing is clear: both religion and politics remain integral to Kenyan society. As established, the interactions of religion, including the church, with the state should not be conflated. The distinction means that religion, the state, and politics should not be confused. It is evident that we cannot separate religion from public life, which includes politics, as it impacts many aspects of the populace in social, economic, and political spheres. Thus, we need to advocate for a separation between the church and state as long as it does not imply the separation of religion and politics.

Further, it is important to clarify that a secular state does not mean godlessness or the absence of religion; rather, it entails providing an enabling environment for all faiths. Kenyan society exists in a religio-political context, where politics, under the purview of religion, remains integral to the populace's lives. The constitution presumes the separation of the state and church, ensuring no favoritism towards the Christian religion over others. This

separation affirms a distinction in function and jurisdiction: the state controls temporal affairs, while the church handles religious matters associated with faith, as defined by Martin Luther. The church should not overstep its jurisdiction in state functions, just as the state should not overstep its jurisdiction in religious matters. The constitution's wording, as interpreted by the courts, aims to create an environment where both religion and the state can interact for the citizenry's good.

To avoid contention, it is crucial that the state does not employ its resources for religious purposes, specifically Christian matters, as this could curtail religious freedoms. The church should also avoid being part of the state machinery in executing its mandate. Misunderstanding the constitution can lead to significant challenges, as shown by the interpretation of Section 8, which implies Kenya is a secular state. If we understand secularism to mean a jurisdiction not under the church's authority, we can see that the state has no preference for one religion over another. This aligns with the Kenyan High Court's interpretation, where the state operates as a secular institution not under church authority but mandated to provide an enabling environment for the church, as seen in the Court of Appeal case 'Seventh Day Adventist Church (East Africa) Limited v Minister for Education & 3 others' (2017). Therefore, the term secular should not be associated with godlessness but rather with ensuring no favoritism towards any religion.

In advocating for the separation of church and state, we must avoid pushing for a permanent wall of separation. Advocates for a permanent wall aim to exclude religion from public life, which could lead to the state becoming overly anti-religious and repressing religion's moral conscience. Christians, considered the 'church', must be allowed to participate in politics. However, the state should not adopt a state religion, as this would curtail religious liberty. There is a need for separation between the church and the state to safeguard religious liberty.

In the current regime, it is difficult to distinguish whether there is a separation of church and state. While the largely Christian populace may find the state's close relationship with the church reasonable, the lack of defined limits and jurisdictions is dangerous. It weakens the church's voice when the government abuses its power. The church can use its political voice to check the state's

conscience and pursue the people's good, but without separation, its political voice is lost. Kenya must separate religion from state affairs. Monetary handouts to the clergy and conducting religious services in State House under state diplomacy have curtailed the church's voice. The office of the first lady should not be involved in faith diplomacy, as it constitutes the state overstepping its jurisdiction in religion. Therefore, we should advocate for the separation of church and state, meaning a separation of powers and jurisdiction in temporal and religious matters, but not to the extent of separating religion and politics.

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## **The Role of the Church in Political Reform : Lessons from Ethiopian History on the Relationship between Church and State**

Yimenu Adimass Belay  
yimenu2015@gmail.com  
PhD candidate at VU Amsterdam

### **Abstract**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a profound historical connection with the state, which facilitated the development of Ethiopian education, judicial systems, medical practices, and literature within its context. It was impossible to separate the Ethiopian church from the Ethiopian state until the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. The two entities were united from 325 AD to 1974 due to the widespread adoption of Christianity, with the kings being the main actors. However, since 1974, the government has been secular, and there is now a clear division between church and state, even though the relationship between state law and religion is not widely addressed in the Ethiopian context. This paper explores the impact of religious law on Ethiopian state law during the Middle Ages and its influence on Ethiopian identity. It also discusses the adoption of modern codified state law and the development of the current constitution in 1995. Although the Ethiopian use of religious laws in the public domain has inadequacies, the Fetha Nagast (Ethiopian king's law) has contributed to the modern codified law of the state by acknowledging religious plurality and cultural diversity. The Fetha Nagast, as the law of religion and the state, held a significant place in Ethiopian history until 1974, making no distinction between church and state. This paper posits that, despite the replacement of religious laws with modern codified state laws aimed at unifying the Ethiopian population, insufficient consideration of Ethiopia's religious contexts persists. Therefore, the

church's involvement in political reform is essential for developing a legal framework that transcends the ethnic ideology of the current situation and considers the religious history and context of Ethiopia. The positive influence of presenting the country's laws from a Christian perspective is often overlooked due to the current constitution's Article 11:3, which states that the state and religion shall not interfere with each other. While the current constitution is inclusive and progressive, the ethnic-based ideological codification has left Ethiopia a fractured nation-state. Therefore, the church's role in political reform is crucial in the current Ethiopian context.

## **Introduction**

Ethiopian legal history dates back to the country's origins and is closely tied to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahādo Church. Ethiopia is ancient with regard to both its national and religious history, as Christianity was introduced early, preceded by the presence of Judaism (Batu 2021:151-153; Rogers 1982:8). Islam was also introduced during its early years of emergence in Arabia (Ahmed 1992:16-17). Since its establishment in AD 325, the Christian Orthodox religion has maintained a strong connection to the state, a bond that persisted until the fall of the emperor in 1974 (Esler 2019:36-37). Religious law functioned as state law for a long period (from the tenth to the nineteenth century in medieval Ethiopian history), which sometimes triggered social unrest, such as the conflict between the Islamic leader Gagn Mohamod and the Ethiopian Christian state. This is because it did not accommodate the diverse people under the nation-state (Abbink 2011:253).

Religious law was eventually replaced by modern codified law through three different eras: the era of King Haile Selassie, the military Derg regime, and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). However, the current constitutional law, despite its progress in accommodating various groups within the country, is based on an ethnic framework that does not fully address the needs of the people. These needs include the unity of the nation with its various religious groups. This paper aims to critically evaluate the relationship between religious law and state law in Ethiopian history.

First, this paper begins with a literature review on how religious law (the Fetha Nagast) has been treated as state law and later transformed into modern codified law, integrating modern Ethiopian and church traditional writings to fill the academic gap on this topic. Second, the paper addresses the role of religious law as state law in Ethiopian tradition. Third, it examines how the state law in Ethiopian political history focused on the essential elements of the Fetha Nagast and how codified law functioned in the modern era until 1974. Following this, the paper explores the relationship between state law and religious law in the two constitutions before and after 1991. Finally, the paper provides a critical evaluation of the interplay between law and religion in Ethiopian history, in both the pre-modern and modern eras.

This research uses critical discourse analysis, a technique utilized by various scholars to analyse Ethiopian writings and the country's religious, social, and political contexts. According to Titus Hjelm (2022:135), discourse analysis is "the study of how to do things with words" and the "process of social construction". Discourse analysis involves studying the use of language to identify constructed identities, relationships, beliefs, and knowledge systems. In textual interpretation, discourse analysis combines social theory and linguistic analysis, while critical discourse analysis focuses on ideology as a discourse, which involves the reproduction and transformation of relations between domains (Fairclough 2013:6, 11-12, 15-18). This analysis is crucial for examining the production and reception of texts that can be applied in varied contexts.

Although there are multiple methods of critical discourse analysis, I will employ Norman Fairclough's (2003:2-3) model, which analyses texts through the interconnection of description, interpretation, and application. Fairclough (2013:132-134) highlights three interconnected dimensions of discourse: text analysis at the description level, processing analysis at the interpretation level, and social analysis at the discussion level.

## **Literature Review**

The Ethiopian church and state have been closely linked and intertwined since the introduction of Christianity, facilitated by the royal court of King Ezana in 325 AD (Binns 2017:43; Esler 2019:31). Due to this close connection, Christian

religious law has historically served as the state law (Binns 2017:102). While various scholars have examined the roles of religious and state law in Ethiopian history, this review focuses on highlighting the academic gap that remains unaddressed by others.

In his book "Church and the State in Ethiopia," prolific Ethiopian historian Tadesse Tamrat (2009:80-82) attests to the relationship between the state and the church in Ethiopian history, emphasizing the years 1270-1527. His primary focus is on how religious law was converted into Ethiopian state law, contributing to both the formation and reformation of the state. This conversion indicates the significant role played by the church in the formation of the state, influencing both its existence and political sphere.

By examining historical records, Wallis Budge (2014:151) argued that Ezana, the Abyssinian king, was the first to declare Christianity as the official religion of his country. Ezana granted Christian merchants' permission to trade without limitations and allowed the construction of churches and houses of prayer in his kingdom. Budge also states that Abyssinians (Ethiopians) consider the Bible the primary authority on matters of faith. Christian kings ruled in Abyssinia during the fourth century, and their descendants continued to rule as Christians until the tenth century and beyond (Budge 2014:156, 179).

The main guiding principle that established religious law as state law and unified the state and the church is the "Kebra Nagast." It claims that God's glory was transferred from Zion of Israel to Ethiopia (Budge 2000:198). This writing has played a significant role in shaping the country's epic narrative by portraying Ethiopia as a Christian nation. This narrative led Ethiopians to believe that they were a chosen nation, replacing Israel, and it helped to promote the church's position in the political system. The interpretation of Ethiopia as the new Israel has significant historical value, as it enabled the church to have a profound impact on the shape of the state.

Another important writing in Ethiopian tradition is the "Fetha Nagast," the law of Ethiopia's kings. It is believed that the "Fetha Nagast" was originally written in Greek, translated into Arabic by Abraham, and later into Ge'ez (Ethiopic) by Petros Abda Sayd during the reign of Emperor Zara Yacob from 1434 to 1468 (Domnic 2010:17). The document was set in an Ethiopian context, based on

the "Kebra Nagast," and was acknowledged by both the Ethiopian government and church, serving as the authoritative rule in the domains of both church and state.

According to Dominic, the use of the Fetha Nagast illustrates how Ethiopian tradition is intertwined with the law that governs social and religious affairs. He asserts:

"If one wishes to be a Christian, he/she must follow the law of God and cast off the hold of evil" (Dominic 2010:62).

Dominic also proposes that the Fetha Nagast has significantly impacted Ethiopian studies and the function of law within broader frameworks (Dominic 2010:157). The place of the Fetha Nagast as both religious and legal law is well established in Ethiopian tradition and emphasizes using God's law in social, political, and religious affairs due to the impact of the Christian faith on the country and its history. Until the modern codification was completed in 1931, the Fetha Nagast served as the law for both the church and the state. However, it continues to govern the affairs of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahədo Church. Its function in the state ceased as Ethiopia became secular, putting all religious groups on an equal footing.

Richard Pankhurst argued that Ethiopian kings ruled the country using the medieval Christian code of law, the Fetha Nagast, which originated from a thirteenth-century Arabic text written by Abu-l Fada-il Ibn al-'Assal, a Coptic scholar (Pankhurst 2011:33). In Ethiopian tradition, the Fetha Nagast served as the legal code for various affairs of the country and, according to Pankhurst (2011:34), includes considerable discussion on the moral justification for slavery, including the relationship between slaves and freemen. Another aspect of the Fetha Nagast is that it permits Christians to own and purchase slaves, despite prohibiting the sale of believers to other faiths (Pankhurst 2011:35). Therefore, the Fetha Nagast significantly contributed to the slave trade before the rise of abolition. It served as a legal document guiding ancient Ethiopia's social and political structure, given that slavery was a significant aspect of Ethiopian society.

The relationship between law and religion is not unique to Ethiopia but is also present in Western, Protestant contexts. Harold J. Berman (1983:17) attested to the connection between law and Christian religion from a Lutheran perspective, noting how Lutheran doctrine perceives the two kingdoms (the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world) with the concept of a Christian calling. This indicates that politics and law are not the means to grace and faith; rather, grace and faith are the means to the right politics and law. Hammer (2021:6) also observed that the revealed law of God was considered superior to human reason uplifted by natural law, prompting Christians to use religious law in societal affairs.

Even though law and religion are connected in the history of the global church, as evidenced in current law codes, two extremes have surfaced. The first is the complete exclusion of the law from religion despite people's religious practices. The other extreme is the total secularization of the law, detaching it from religion. The areas that the above scholars did not address in their research include the significance of former laws in nation-building and the needs of the people for which the law was produced. Consequently, the role of the church in political reform is often ignored. Moreover, the role of modern law codification in unifying different ethnic groups in Ethiopia has shortcomings in addressing the diverse needs of the current situation. There is a discrepancy between the government's policy of ignoring religion and its practical interventions in various ways. Furthermore, the church's involvement in current affairs has not effectively brought about positive change in the country's policy formation and implementation.

## **The Religious Law and the State in Ethiopian Political History**

Ethiopia's church and legal history clearly illustrate that the law of the church has been used as the law of the state because there has been no distinction between the church and state since its official establishment in 325 AD (Esler 2019:40-41). Although there is no clear written documentation before the thirteenth century regarding Ethiopia's legal history, after this period, the Fetha Nagast has been used as the law for both the church and the state (Tzadua 2009:xvi). The Fetha Nagast is composed of fifty-one chapters in two parts: the first twenty-two chapters address the law of the church, while the remaining chapters discuss the law of the state.



The origin of the Fetha Nagast is understood differently by various scholars. However, according to Abba Paulos Tzadua, the Fetha Nagast (the law of the kings) is a translation from an Arabic version adapted for use in the Christian nation of Ethiopia (2009:xvi). It is also believed that the Fetha Nagast is the foundation of the Ethiopian state constitution. It might be the earliest written law of religion and the state in sub-Saharan Africa, influenced by Roman law and the canons of the Eastern Rite Church (Strauss 2009:xxxiii).

Ethiopian legal history has been significantly influenced by the Ethiopian epic narrative known as the Kebra Nagast. According to this document, God's glory moved from Israel to Ethiopia, resulting in the idea that Ethiopia replaced Israel. Despite this, the Ethiopian legal system continues to be influenced by the Kebra Nagast. Both the Kebra Nagast and the Fetha Nagast are crucial documents in Ethiopian church and state history. They have played a significant role in establishing the divine origin of the kings, contributing to the unification of church and state in Ethiopia, a legacy that lasted until the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie. These documents helped solidify the divine authority of the kings in Ethiopia's history.

The use of the Kebra Nagast and the Fetha Nagast in Ethiopian church history was fundamental in unifying the church and state, a union that persisted until the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie. The church and state unity in Ethiopian history manifests in various ways. Since the ordination of kings took place in the church, kings were often regarded as keepers of the church. Additionally, the development of a Christian army further exemplified the relationship between the church and state, as they often engaged in battles within and beyond Ethiopian territory.

The impact of the Kebra Nagast and the Fetha Nagast in the Ethiopian context has been both positive and negative. Positively, these writings have shaped the Ethiopian state based on biblical norms, contextualizing them for the Ethiopian setting. Negatively, they did not accommodate other religions, despite their presence in Ethiopia. Furthermore, Ethiopian history has been deeply entwined with warfare, sometimes aimed at protecting the country from foreign invaders and at other times manifesting in internal conflicts. Istratii and Laamann (2024:139) observed an interesting phenomenon in the Ethiopian church context: they argue that many members of the Ethiopian Orthodox

community use religious language to frame state-led military action as patriotic.

The relationship between religious laws and the state in Ethiopian history manifests in various ways. Religious laws function as state laws through the division of the Fetha Nagast, which addresses both the physical and spiritual aspects of humanity. The first part contains regulations related to spiritual matters and church activities, while the second part focuses on secular matters, including governance, civil laws, and regulations. Ethiopian tradition is highly law-oriented, considering these laws as divine in origin. Swearing by the term "the God of law" is common (Domnic 2010:16). The tradition places significant emphasis on the law, acknowledging both written and unwritten laws as having a divine origin (Domnic 2010:17).

In Ethiopian tradition, the law of God addresses the whole person, encompassing both spiritual and secular aspects. Although there is a dichotomy, it is not a Platonic division, as Mennasemay articulates, but rather a unity between the secular and spiritual, the physical and the internal. It represents an internally complex unity without mixture or separation (Mennasemay 2021:83). Mohammed Girma argues that in the Ethiopian context, it is impossible to separate the political and religious history of the country from its present and future because they are inseparable (Girma 2012:81). This suggests that any political strategy in Ethiopia cannot overlook its religious past due to the deep connection between religion and politics. This perspective enabled the application of religious law to the secular world in Ethiopia. Consequently, Ethiopia was considered a Christian island, as Ethiopian culture is strongly shaped and interwoven with biblical narratives and traditions (Ullendorff 1997:73-75).

## **The Relationship Between Religious Laws and the State Before and After 1991**

With the arrival of the socialist regime (the Derg) in 1974, Ethiopia's religious landscape underwent significant changes, including amendments to the incorporation of religious elements in government laws. However, the Derg regime governed for only seventeen years, after which it was replaced by the Ethiopian People's Democratic Resistance Front (EPDRF), which adopted an

ethnic-based constitution. Before the EPDRF's ascension to power, the Ethiopian constitution evolved in three distinct phases. Initially, the Fetha Nagast was used before the development of the imperial constitution. Later, Emperor Haile Selassie established an Ethiopian constitution in 1931, which was subsequently amended in 1955. After the imperial kingship was overthrown by the Derg, the socialist regime created its own constitution in 1978. This was then replaced by the current ethnic-based constitution in 1994, following the EPDRF's takeover (Habtu 2005:313). The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, established by the 1994 constitution, comprises nine ethnically-based regional states: Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region), Gambela, Harari; and two chartered cities: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Cohen 1995:163).

Regarding religious matters, the Ethiopian constitution is complex and does not fully address the country's extensive history. The initial law, known as the Fetha Nagast, encompassed both secular and religious aspects, exclusively oriented towards Christianity, and viewed the church and state as inseparable. In medieval Ethiopian society, the Fetha Nagast contributed positively to the modernization of the country and served as comprehensive law guiding the community. The Fetha Nagast claims that Ethiopia is a model of Israel because God's glory was transferred from Israel to Ethiopia (Woldeyes 2017:109). Despite the questionable nature of this claim, the formulation of well-developed religious laws to guide the community in a manner beneficial for humanity and conducive to proper living before God can be considered a positive initial step towards Ethiopia's development and modernization (Ponodath 2024:155). However, it should have been more inclusive, addressing the needs of all inhabitants to live in freedom and dignity. The shortcomings of this classical law stem from its favouring of members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahādo Church since Orthodox Christianity was the state religion.

Habtu highlighted four important factors influencing the development of the Ethiopian constitution: the country's religious history, its geography, its internal wars, and the advent of Islam (Selassie 1966:74). Emperor Haile Selassie aimed to centralize nationalism, favouring Orthodox Christianity over other religions and subordinating heterogeneity to a central power and

identity (Borruso 2013:104). The 1931 imperial constitution acknowledged other religions as religious sects and respected religion as an individual choice within a shared country (Selassie 1966:76). However, this constitution remained predominantly Orthodox Christian-oriented, as it was centered on the monarchy, the religious ideology of Christendom, and the myths of the Solomonic line of descent, which were sources of legitimacy (Selassie 1966:74). Consequently, the Ethiopian monarchy was long regarded as the protector of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which was declared the state church. This also served as a stronghold for Emperor Haile Selassie's regime (Ponodath 2024:155). Although the imperial constitution was an improvement over the Fetha Nagast, it did not adequately consider the diverse inhabitants and people groups of Ethiopia, as it did not grant the right to practice religious beliefs outside the Orthodox Christian tradition. As Woldeyes (2017:107) pointed out, "the new regimes of laws introduced since Haile Selassie did not consider the importance of these and other traditional laws". He insisted that the new laws were primarily adopted through imitation rather than interpretation.

Twenty years later, the first constitution was revised in 1955, but no major changes were made except for strengthening the king's power (Ponodath 2024:156). Even though Article III:37 states that no one shall be denied equal protection of the law, in practice, different religious groups did not receive the same treatment as the Orthodox Christian religion (Revised Constitution of Ethiopia 1955). Social unrest erupted following the official declaration of this constitution. Various armed struggles began in different parts of the country (Kibret 2024:87), and several revolutionary movements against the imperial king emerged, such as the farmers' revolutions in Bale and Gojjam and the student revolution in Addis Ababa (Lemma, 1979:34; Schwab 1970:250-251; Wodajo and Digile 2021:7-8). Ultimately, a successful military coup led to the establishment of the socialist regime known as the Derg, which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 (Zewde 2008:254).

The era of Haile Selassie was challenging as Ethiopia stood at a crossroads, with the emperor torn between modernization and tradition. Mennasemay observed that the Ethiopian intellectual tradition experienced tension between adopting Western modernization and modernizing the existing Ethiopian intellectual tradition (Mennasemay 2021:31). Woldeyes pointed out

that Ethiopian laws were often articulated by foreign writers or sources that failed to address the needs of the Ethiopian people (Woldeyes 2017:107). The argument is that the complete disregard for traditional Ethiopian laws and customs had a colonial character. This is because the new regime of laws ignored the interests of the majority of Ethiopians and instead served those who wished to maintain the status quo—the Westernized, landed, and urbanized elite (Woldeyes 2017:108).

The constitution during the socialist regime from 1974 to 1991 differed significantly from previous constitutions due to the influence of Marx-Lenin socialist ideologies (Woldeyes 2017:144). The Derg regime emphasized a complete separation of state and religion. This separation was evident in the equal status afforded to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and African religions, as well as in the abandonment of Ethiopia's traditional Christian image (Friedman 1989:249). In practice, the regime exhibited anti-religious elements due to its adoption of the socialist ideology modeled after Russia's. There was no religious freedom during this era; as a result, many individuals were executed for belonging to religious groups. Notably, prominent members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the leader of the Ethiopian Lutheran Church (Mekane Yesus) were executed because they were religious leaders and thus perceived as threats to the socialist regime (Daniel 2019:77-79).

The EPRDF's constitution of 1994 is still in effect today, despite ideological changes over the past four to six years. Jon Abbink argues that the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia continued the secular state tradition established by the 1987 Derg constitution. He points out that the 1994 constitution decentralized religion, allowing faith communities to self-organize in ways that were similar with how it handled ethnicity (Abbink 2014:349). Article 11 of the constitution defines the 'secular state' as a separation of religion and state, with no state religion. Importantly, it states that the state shall not interfere in religious matters, and religion shall not interfere in state affairs.

Since 1991, the EPRDF has been implementing ethnic federalism and 'revolutionary democracy' (Abbink 2014:348). Because the constitution is ethnic-based, it does not adequately address the existing problems and needs of the people. In terms of religious matters, many scholars argue that it

requires amendment. For instance, Gebreselassie (2015:18-20) strongly contends that the current constitution needs to be amended because it does not bring peace and stability to the country in a holistic manner. Gebreselassie (2015:17) also argued that: "In the process of drafting, debating, and ratifying the new constitution, the EPRDF/TGE lacked the most basic agreement necessary—the agreement to disagree".

The problematic aspects of the current Ethiopian constitution have persisted without any amendments for the past twenty-eight years, and religious and social unrest is becoming increasingly common in various parts of the country. Jon Abbink correctly points out that the Ethiopian model of managing the relationship between the state and religion contains several paradoxes. Notably, the government, rather than an independent court, decides what constitutes a violation of the secular order. Furthermore, the specifics and limits of expressing religious identity in the public sphere are unclear, leading to ambiguity and conflict within the pluralist polity (Abbink 2014:359).

## **Critical Evaluation and Lessons from the Relationship between Church and State in Ethiopian History**

A critical evaluation of the historical relationship between the church and state in Ethiopia offers important lessons. For many years, both entities used religious law to govern the country. Ethiopian Christianity was established in the fourth century, and from that time until the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie by the military socialist regime in 1974, the church and state were closely intertwined. The socialist military regime ruled Ethiopia for seventeen years before being overthrown by another military group, which organized itself along ethnic lines and developed a constitution in 1994 that considered religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Ponodath (2024:161) correctly observes that, despite claims of ethnic federalism and democracy, the EPRDF government functioned as a Tigrayan oligarchy. Additionally, the needs of the Ethiopian people were not adequately addressed, particularly concerning religious freedoms, as the government intervened in the affairs of various religious groups.

The contribution of Ethiopian religious law (the Fetha Nagast) to the development and stability of the country is significant, despite its

shortcomings in addressing the needs of minority groups and religious minorities in different regions. This section discusses two main points: the positive impact and the drawbacks of having laws concerning religious and social issues. On the positive side, such laws help guide the community in a beneficial direction, despite the challenges of addressing the needs of all demographic groups in the country (Hammer 2021:4). Furthermore, Hammer rightly suggests that expanding religious principles beyond religious contexts could modernize the interpretation of religious legal concepts to meet the needs of the secular domain of the country (Hammer 2021:8). Thus, integrating religious law into modern legal codification serves two important purposes: codifying secular laws and updating religious laws to meet contemporary societal needs.

However, the negative aspect is that, although the country's legal code (the Fetha Nagast) officially recognized slavery and claimed that all men were free by God's creation, the law of war allowed victors to enslave the defeated (Pankhurst 1992:64). The history of warfare in Ethiopia rarely stemmed from religious beliefs but rather from a willingness to defend the country, often supported by religious laws.

Moreover, the creation of religion-sensitive laws should also be viewed positively because God is seen as the creator of the world and cares for everyone. However, these laws should be approached with curiosity and creativity to ensure they do not serve solely as religious documents, given that religion and the state are not a single entity. The Fetha Nagast was derived from biblical laws, utilizing both external and internal sources (Tzadua 2009: xxviii-xxix). Until the modern codification of the law, its contribution was significant, as it influenced and contributed to modern constitutional law. All legal codes in Ethiopia up to the socialist era were greatly influenced by the Fetha Nagast, the laws of the Ethiopian kings (Domnic 2010:2). In this way codification of constitutional law before the modern era displays positive aspects, as noted by Domnic (2010:30).

However, the traditional Ethiopian constitutional law has significant negative aspects, primarily due to its lack of inclusivity and favoritism towards the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, positioning Ethiopians as the heirs of the biblical portrayal of ancient Israel (Belay 2022:46; Budge 2000:6-7). Other religious

groups in Ethiopia, such as Muslims, Ethiopian Jews, and various minority faiths, were not treated equally with Orthodox Christians (Daniel 2019). Believers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were regarded as the authoritative religious community with the power to share authority with the government. Laws originating from biblical and theological contexts can apply to all people if they are expressed within a contemporary framework of freedom and equality, rather than dividing people based on ethnicity, religion, or other criteria.

The modern codified constitutional state law began in 1931 and was amended in 1955, but as it was an imperial law, it primarily represented the emperor rather than the country's inhabitants.

Additionally, given the emperor's loyalty to the Orthodox faith, one religion was privileged over other minority religious groups. The claim was that Ethiopia's Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian state were inseparable during the emperor's reign, as Daniel (2019:68) correctly stated: "Ethiopian means Orthodox Tewahədo, and Orthodox Tewahədo means Ethiopia". This notion strongly favoured one religion over others despite the presence of diverse religious groups throughout the country. This reality has persisted in contemporary Ethiopia, even though the constitution claims that all religions are equal before the law. These two imperial constitutional laws have both positive aspects and drawbacks.

The positive aspect is the modernization effort, which transformed former religious laws. However, this process was influenced by Western methods of creating state laws without adequately considering other traditional laws (Woldeyes 2017:107). The socialist regime spent seventeen years codifying the state's constitutional law, focusing on national unity by opposing religious activities. Although the socialist government of Ethiopia resisted religious institutions, it did not specifically target individual clergy and religious leaders (Daniel 2019). The Derg era was considered a time of persecution, particularly against Protestant churches, which were viewed as being connected to the Western world. Evangelical churches in Ethiopia were closed, their properties confiscated, and religious freedoms curtailed. Even the largest and oldest Ethiopian Orthodox Church properties were seized, and its prominent leader was executed (Tessema 2018:26).



While there was no clear persecution of Islam, Christianity, especially the evangelical sector, was under assault. Many evangelical leaders were imprisoned, and a significant number fled the country. Numerous killings were registered and investigated, with justification being that these religious groups were aligned with foreign national interests (Tessema 2018:27). During the socialist regime, laws incorporating religious elements were effectively sidelined in favour of secular laws focusing on national unity grounded in socialist ideology. The Derg era was marked by a harsh approach toward religious laws and freedoms. However, the socialists initially contributed to national unification by not adhering to an ethnic-based political system, which, despite setbacks, helped unify the country.

The current Ethiopian constitution, enacted in 1994, aimed to grant ethnic and religious rights to the inhabitants of Ethiopia (Abebe 2014:124). Even though this constitution established a federal system based on ethnicity, numerous setbacks have been observed. Abebe correctly argued that, "[t]he most serious challenge to the stability of federations is the absence of a common sense of nationality"—a situation apparent in Ethiopia, where stability is compromised by ethnic and religious conflicts (Abebe 2014:16).

Despite Article 11:3 of the 1994 constitution asserting religious freedom by stating, "[t]he State shall not interfere in religious matters, and religion shall not interfere in state affairs" (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995:4), government intervention in religious affairs has been common over the past thirty years. The recent conflict involving the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the government, and the Ethiopian Islamic community highlights governmental interference in religious matters (Lee 2021). The government's actions have also impacted Ethiopian evangelical believers by enforcing unification without doctrinal agreement (Ostebo 2023). Karbo (2013:51) noted the contribution of the new constitution, stating that: "Since 1995, the new federalist constitution of Ethiopia has sought to distance the state from religion, making Ethiopia a secular state by law".

The drawbacks of the current Ethiopian constitutional law are adduced by Abbink, who indicates that the specifics and limits of expressing religious identity in the public sphere are unclear, leading to ambiguity and conflict in the pluralist polity (Abbink 2014:359). The historical relationship between the

church and state in Ethiopia offers several important lessons. The interplay between law and religion in Ethiopian history has had both positive contributions and drawbacks. The incorporation of biblical and religious norms into Ethiopian constitutions before the modern era is noteworthy, as the codification of laws began in various religious contexts around the world. The era of Emperor Haile Selassie marked the beginning of modern codification of the law, although it preferred the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Despite this favouritism, the positive contribution is significant because it initiated modern codification considerate of the diverse religious groups.

The latter two codifications of the law differ in their approaches: the first, during the socialist regime, was anti-religious and thus disconnected from positive religious contributions, while the second attests positively to the separation of state and religion, despite having practical shortcomings. This underscores the need to amend the current constitution to better address the needs of the people in religious matters and to critique the ethnic-based constitution, which has not brought peace to the different ethnic and religious groups in Ethiopia. In summary, the church's contribution to political reform is substantial, as it has both influenced and been influenced by the state in various ways. This highlights the necessity for churches in Ethiopia to actively participate in shaping the country's political landscape.

## **Conclusion**

This article discusses the significance of religious law in Ethiopian history and provides a critical analysis of its potential contribution to the political reform of the country. Religious law has played an instrumental role in shaping the modern codification of Ethiopia's laws, but it has not been adequately addressed by contemporary scholars. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the connection between religious law and the development of Ethiopian constitutional law. Despite limitations in addressing the needs of the people, Ethiopian constitutional law has evolved from a religious context and transformed into the law of the state. The article examines various aspects of the law with a particular emphasis on the relationship between state law and religion in Ethiopia. The connection between religion and the state in Ethiopia was strong until the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime.

The influence of religious law in Ethiopian political history began with the development of the Fetha Nagast, which impacted both the secular and religious domains of the country until the advent of the socialist military regime in 1974. The military regime was opposed to all religions, and during its time, the country's laws did not accommodate the country's religions, resisting the church's role in state activities. As a result, Ethiopian religious groups suffered in numerous ways. The current constitution of Ethiopia appears progressive, incorporating the equality of religions as an aspect of modern codification. Article 11:3 of the 1995 constitution provides a well-articulated section on the separation of state and religion (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995:6). However, instances of social unrest and religious conflicts have occurred, partly due to religious issues in the constitution being developed along ethnic lines.

Therefore, it is necessary to amend the current constitution to address these issues and promote peace and harmony in the country. Ethiopian churches, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahādo Church and Evangelical (Protestant) Christianity, should work towards positive reforms in the country's political laws, considering the religious aspect of Ethiopian history. Ignoring the religious element in the development of constitutional law may not be beneficial given the strong religious culture of the country.

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## **The Interface Between the Christian Concept of the Common Good, the African Concept of Ubuntu, and Politics**

Paul Abudulai Yelinje  
pabudulai@yahoo.com

Department of Religious Studies, Savannah College of Education, Daboya,  
Ghana

### **Abstract**

The subject of Christianity and politics has generated numerous debates with varying scholarly strands. This centuries-long contention has resulted in three main perspectives on how Christians should engage in politics. One viewpoint advocates total involvement of Christians in politics (the involvement view), another supports a complete separation between Christianity and politics (the separation view), and the third promotes transformation (the transformation view). This work does not cover these main strands, as the paper aims to avoid entering into existing controversies. Instead, this paper explores the intricate interplay between the Christian concept of the Common Good, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and their intersection within the realm of politics. Both concepts emphasize communal well-being, social harmony, and ethical responsibility towards others. The Christian understanding of the common good highlights the importance of promoting justice, solidarity, stewardship, and the well-being of all members of society. Ubuntu, deeply rooted in African tradition, stresses interconnectedness, compassion, and the intrinsic value of every individual within the community. This paper delves into how these philosophical frameworks converge and diverge in their approaches to addressing societal challenges and shaping political discourse. It examines how Christian teachings on love, justice, and service can inform political

decision-making and policy formulation to advance the common good. Likewise, it explores how Ubuntu's emphasis on empathy, inclusivity, and human dignity can influence governance structures and foster a sense of shared humanity in political processes.

By analyzing the compatibility and tensions between these ideologies within political contexts, this paper sheds light on how combining Christian principles and Ubuntu philosophy can contribute to more ethical, inclusive, and people-centered governance practices. Ultimately, this exploration seeks to inspire dialogue and reflection on how diverse cultural and religious perspectives can enrich political theory and practice, towards building more just and compassionate societies. The paper advances four points to enhance a holistic integration of these concepts to mitigate tensions between religion and African politics. Although the context of this paper is Ghana, the author views it as applicable across Africa and the globe, primarily within jurisdictions experiencing conflict regarding Christian involvement in politics.

## **Introduction**

For many years, debates have arisen regarding Christians' involvement in politics within both academic and theological circles. The discourse about Christians' participation in politics has resulted in three divergent perspectives: separation, involvement, and transformation (Asante 2014:61-66). Some advocate for a strict separation between Christianity and politics, others promote complete involvement of Christians in politics, and yet others call for Christians' participation in political leadership to transform politics, as they believe politics is inherently corrupt (Ayankeye & Odeleye 2017:3-4; Tshaka & Senokoane 2020:4). However, an African perspective is notably absent in these arguments, which is the focus of this paper.

This paper primarily proposes a fourth perspective termed "Holistic Integration," which aims to incorporate an African perspective into the discourse on Christian involvement in politics. It seeks to unite politics, Christianity, and the African anthropological philosophy of Ubuntu. The holistic integration approach is distinct from the current approaches, although it may have some overlaps with the transformation view. Unlike the transformation

view, which strongly regards politics as malevolent, holistic integration does not view politics as inherently evil. Instead, it perceives politics in Africa as a domain that should operate with the Christian notion of the common good alongside the African concept of Ubuntu.

This paper discusses the Christian concept of the common good, Ubuntu, and how these two concepts can be integrated with politics for more beneficial political engagement. This inquiry is especially significant for Christians in the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, who have desired to engage in political leadership but have had limited understanding of the process. Christians, being in the minority in the West Gonja Municipality, face a dilemma as the notion of 'politics is evil' appears dominant among them. This sentiment is evidenced by the few Christians who attempted to engage in politics being disowned by their denominations and labeled as carnal (Mohammed 2023). Therefore, this paper also aims to provide a better perspective regarding Christians' involvement in politics. The usage of religion in this work is limited to the Christian faith, defined as the religious persuasion that follows Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, with the Bible as their scripture.

A general observation of politics and religion (Christianity) reveals a prominent claim that both seek the best for humanity. Beneath this claim lies a yearning for human well-being, whether temporally or eternally. For instance, politics targets the here and now, while "religion (Christianity), apart from worshipping God, also emphasizes individual salvation attainable in the afterlife as its second most important purpose" (Swinburne 2005:177). Swinburne further posits that "The Christian doctrine, like that of various other religions, is that salvation after this life is to be found in Heaven; 'the good' will go to Heaven where they will have an everlasting life" (Swinburne 2005:177). He asserts that the life of Heaven offered by the Christian religion is greatly worth pursuing and will bring immense happiness to those who attain it.

Scholars such as Galek et al. (2015:2) affirm the aim of religion by stating that "among other goals, an explicit religious goal concerns life after death. Christianity and other religions frame life experiences in the context of future spiritual salvation, which provides a sense of purpose in life." This suggests that while religion may have other aims, the afterlife stands out as the ultimate goal and focus since it is eternal. Thus, religion may present many benefits to its

adherents, but every benefit short of eternity is considered vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21). This implies that the way of life and actions of religious adherents are motivated by the rewards they anticipate in the afterlife, as everyone has an appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27).

Furthermore, Galek et al. (2015:2) posit that all religions, including Christianity, believe in a certain spiritual reality where salvation will be attained, a belief that gives hope and meaning to the lives of adherents. To substantiate the view that religion's main aim is the afterlife, this paper references several biblical texts. For example, Mark 8:36 states, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (KJV). These words of Jesus Christ to his followers were meant to discourage them from pursuing worldly things and instead focus on the well-being of their souls. Moreover, in Matthew 6:19-20 (repeated in Luke 12:33-34), Jesus Christ stated,

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

As indicated in the cited biblical text above, the Lord did not place any value on earthly possessions or efforts that lead to a so-called "fulfilled" life on earth. For Jesus Christ, all the achievements individuals may attain on this earth are useless compared to what will be obtained in the afterlife. Consequently, He admonished His followers to focus and aim at selling all they possess, including their political positions and ambitions, to pursue eternal ambition, as this is the ultimate reason for following Him. On this earth, thieves and moths destroy all achievements, so why chase after them? Therefore, their hearts should be in heaven, where their treasures of eternity are stored, rather than on earth.

This reality is evident in contemporary Africa, where political upheavals and widespread destruction of lives and property occur frequently. People are often robbed at gunpoint of their possessions, with numerous incidents resulting in deaths in some African cities. Such incidents are not peculiar to

Africa but occur globally. Moreover, it is a truth that whether humans like it or not, they will someday die, leaving behind all their possessions. This fact can be denied but not escaped when the time comes. To this end, Jesus Christ mentioned in another context that He was going to prepare a place in His Father's house, where there are many mansions, and would return to take His followers there (John 14:2-3). As a matter of fact, all true followers of Christ daily anticipate the Lord Jesus's return to take them to occupy these mansions prepared for them, because the hour of His return is unknown. Why then should they be preoccupied with building houses and acquiring possessions on earth, which will eventually be destroyed? Hence, religion advocates that humans must acquire assets with eternal value, rather than focusing on things that will be left behind on earth. In simple terms, religion fundamentally aims at saving a person's soul by cultivating eternal virtues. From the religious perspective, humans will eventually attain a certain level of bliss beyond this earth.

Politics, on the other hand, is more centered on the earthly well-being of human beings within the polis. The term "politics" is derived from the Greek word "polis," which means city-state (Mar Athanasius College, n.d.). According to Cherry (2012:12), Aristotle teaches that "the primary purpose of 'politics' is pursuing the good life" in the polis. Moreover, the general view holds that politics aims to preserve life, as handled by duty-bearers in the state. In this context, life refers to human life, and it is basic knowledge that life exists on earth where humans live. It implies that politics is to preserve human life on earth by those entrusted with state power. This means that the main aim of politics is earthly. Politics concerns itself with all that happens to humans in the earthly realm without concern for the afterlife, as religion explicitly holds. Politics aims to ensure that humans are well taken care of while they live in the city-state. Essentially, the point being made here is that whatever happens to humans after death is not a concern of politics. Instead, what happens to humans in this lifetime is the focus of politics, with efforts to ensure that humans live well in the polis.

From this discussion, the paper highlights the primary purpose of religion (Christianity) and politics. Admittedly, both religion and politics focus on the well-being of human beings. However, it is unfounded to see severe tension between these two domains (politics and religion) with diverse stands,

although they both primarily claim to have the well-being of humankind as their focus. The tensions with divergent strands are not the focus of this paper. The existing tension between the domains of politics and religion calls for an inquiry aimed at a peaceful integration of religion and politics, as the well-being of humankind is the focus of both. Such integration means that the human being, who is at the center of both religion and politics, will have the best on earth provided by politics and the best in the hereafter as provided by religion. This is particularly relevant in the context of Africa, where religion intersects with all aspects of human life, just as governance and politics do.

Moreover, politics and religion occur within a context, and in this paper, the context is African; thus, religion and politics in Africa cannot exclude African culture, particularly the notion of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is an African anthropological philosophy that simply means, 'I am because you are' (Ifejika 2006). Politics and religion are integral aspects of daily life in Africa and, therefore, cannot be separated from African culture. Any form of politics and religion in Africa that disregards African culture cannot be accepted by Africans. This implies that any form of politics and religion must be imbued with the African value of Ubuntu on the foundation of the common good to be fully accepted on the continent. According to this paper, this is the sole way to resolve the tensions between religion and politics.

The paper proposes a new approach that can serve as a universal foundation upon which Christians' involvement in political leadership can revolve, particularly in Africa. This approach is especially intended for Christians in similar jurisdictions, such as the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, which is the focus of this paper. Unlike the current approaches that address the issue from the top down, this new political-religious framework, termed 'holistic integration,' takes a bottom-up approach. The approach considers the grassroots by examining it from an African worldview perspective. This is accomplished by engaging the thoughts of ordinary Ghanaian Christians who wish to be involved in political leadership and need to learn how to do so.

Christians, especially those in the West Gonja Municipality of Ghana, face numerous uncertainties and misinformation about Christian involvement in politics. The notions that politics is evil, meaning Christians should completely abstain, or that Christians should be involved with the skepticism of changing

politics, and that politics is acceptable, implying Christians should engage without question, will be addressed by this paper.

## **The Christian Concept of the Common Good**

This section of the paper discusses the Christian concept of the common good by first highlighting its foundations in Christian theology, specifically through the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas and the influences on his work. The section concludes by drawing meaning from the Bible, which forms the basis of Christian doctrine.

Thomas Aquinas, a 13th-century Dominican friar, is notable for propounding a comprehensive Christian perspective on the common good. As a Christian theologian, Aquinas saw the aim of the common good in God's universal redemption plan and divine providence (Garland 2013). Aquinas' concept of the common good is central to his political philosophy and ethical thought. He defines the common good as a singular good that is shared by many without being diminished, emphasizing that it is a common end pursued by the community (Hollenbach 2002:4). Goyette (2013:137) notes that his understanding is deeply rooted in both Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology. The influence of Aristotle on Aquinas' thoughts on the common good is evident in Hollenbach (2002:4).

Besides Aristotle's influence, it is worth highlighting some biblical foundations that the paper believes influenced Aquinas' teaching on the common good. This position is supported by examining works such as "The Summa Contra Gentiles," "The Summa Theologica," Hollenbach (2002), Keys (2006), and Goyette (2013). After studying these works in light of the scriptures, it is conclusive that Aquinas' teachings on the common good have a strong Christian basis, rooted in biblical principles.

Firstly, Aquinas saw the common good as an expression of the greatest commandment to 'love God with all your heart' and 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37-40). He believed that the universal love of God must be demonstrated by all and for all, regardless of race. For Aquinas, God Himself is the common good, and He expresses that to humans through love in Christ. In the "Summa Contra Gentiles," Aquinas posits that "the very goodness that

is in God is no other than His own very self, and hence the scriptures say none is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). This implies that if God is the origin of all good, then God's people must be good and demonstrate the same to others unconditionally, as God has done through Christ.

Secondly, Aquinas built upon Augustine's concept of the City of God, where the common good is pursued in the light of God's eternal kingdom. This means that humans on earth must pursue the common good with eternity in mind. Eternity must be the goal of people who dwell in the city of man, outside of the city of God, since God dwells there with absolute perfection (St. Augustine, "Confessions," Book I). Aquinas believed that God is the Alpha and Omega, enthroned on an eternal throne, and will judge all humans (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Nonetheless, Aquinas viewed the earthly city as a necessary structure for human governance, emphasizing that while humans live in the City of Man, they are ultimately oriented toward the City of God. This perspective allowed Aquinas to argue for a harmonious relationship between faith and reason, suggesting that secular authority should align with divine will (Hatch 2023).

Aquinas also believed that natural law, inscribed on human hearts (Romans 2:15), guides us toward the common good. This means that every human has an innate awareness of the common good, regardless of their religious beliefs. Therefore, no one has an excuse not to express or uphold the common good. Everyone has the intrinsic ability to both express and receive the common good. Aquinas believed that by following natural law, humans participate in God's purpose for them in the Eternal Law (Dimock and Fisher 2017). He further held that Divine Law, derived from God, guides humans to perform acts that lead to their ultimate end, which is 'eternal happiness.' Divine Law includes the Scriptures, which reveal elements of the Eternal Law to humanity (Romans 1:20). Aquinas argued that man's natural inclination is toward virtue or goodness, and by acting according to reason, man acts in accordance with virtue (Vieru 2010).

Furthermore, Aquinas applied the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), to social and political life. Thus, whatever treatment you desire to receive from others, you must first be willing



to offer to them. This aligns with the principle in physics that actions and reactions are equal but opposite. Jesus Christ further emphasized this point in another context, stating that the measure you give is the measure you receive back in full (Luke 6:38).

By integrating these Christian principles, Aquinas developed a comprehensive understanding of the common good, emphasizing the importance of promoting the flourishing of all members of society in harmony with God's will. For Aquinas, it is God's perfect will for all humans in the polis to flourish and be treated well without discrimination (Hosea 14:5-6, 3 John 1:3). These convictions have influenced and provided a basis for contemporary theological reflections held by the church today.

While Aquinas' theology is grounded in Scripture, he also incorporates Aristotelian philosophy to explain and defend Christian doctrine. Aquinas was drawn to Aristotle's philosophy because it acknowledged the reality of the material world, which Aquinas found useful in validating Christian doctrine (Vieru 2010). Aristotle's ideas on causality, substance, and the soul provided conceptual tools for Aquinas. For example, Aquinas uses Aristotle's distinction between potentiality and actuality to explain how the human soul is perfected by grace. He also employs Aristotelian logic to demonstrate God's existence and attributes through philosophical arguments. To prove the existence of God, Aquinas posits that God's existence cannot be inferred from any concept but rather from some other existence (Liu 2024:9). Thus, Aquinas abandons Avicenna's metaphysical proof by the concept of the existent and returns to Aristotle's cosmological proof by causality. Aquinas follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring cause from effect in his five-way proof of the existence of God in *Summa Theologiae* I (Liu 2024:9).

However, Aquinas does not merely adopt Aristotelian concepts; he critically appropriates them to serve theological ends. His synthesis of biblical and Aristotelian thought is a hallmark of his theological method. After examining the works of Aquinas, such as "The Summa Contra Gentiles" and "The Summa Theologica," and reviewing literature by Hollenbach (2002), Goyette (2013), and Vieru (2010), this paper concurs that Aquinas propounded an ever-effective religious and Christian explanation of the common good by drawing from the ideas of both Aristotle and Cicero. Following Aristotle, Aquinas

argued that pursuing self-interest leads to a deviant form of rule (Padarsov 2021). For Aquinas, a tyrannical government is unjust because it is directed not to the common good (*bonum commune*) but to the private good (*bonum privatum*) of the ruler (Padarsov 2021). However, Aquinas was not only concerned with the flourishing of particular political societies; he also conceived of humans as part of a universal moral order. Aquinas, as a theologian, maintained a consistent universal view of humans influenced by his belief in a universal God who desires the common good for all of creation.

In contrast to Greek and Roman theorists who did not necessarily have monotheistic persuasions, Aquinas united the concept of the common good with God. In his understanding, Christian believers could, through divine revelation, have access to the common good (Padarsov 2021). Aquinas believed that God comprehends the good of the entire universe, being the Maker and Governor of all things (Bouchard 1999). This implies that for Christians, the motivation for the common good must originate from a divine burden for the holistic transformation of the universe. It further signifies that the common good reflects God's vision and heart for His creation. This context includes the responsible and sustainable exploration and usage of natural resources, with no exception to the environment, in light of the alarming rate of global warming and geopolitical tensions in recent times.

From this perspective, this work defines the common good as the recognition and response to the truth that all humans are created in the image of God (*imago dei*) (McNair & Nichols 2018), as stated in the scriptures (Genesis 1:26-27). All humans, therefore, deserve equal opportunities and treatment, with the well-being of all deemed paramount. By implication, whatever is done in society by anyone at any level, the primary motive must be how that engagement benefits everyone, including in the realm of politics and all aspects of public life for Christians. It stands to reason that the common good does not discriminate but recognizes every human being as equal, regardless of color or creed.

The discussion on the common good presented in this work points to two main perspectives: a secular conception and a religious conception, primarily led by Christian theologians, with Aquinas being a prominent figure. In the context of this paper, it is crucial to note that all notions of the common good originate

from the supreme good, which is the God of the Bible, the creator of all things (Colossians 1:16-20). According to the Bible, all good and perfect things come from God (James 1:17). Furthermore, God demonstrated His universal unconditional love to the entire world by giving His only begotten son for the common good of humanity (John 3:16). He did this because humans are created in His image, and He is determined to restore this image, which was corrupted by sin (Genesis 1:26-27, 3:6-24). Throughout the scriptures, God is shown as the source of all good concerning humans, culminating in the sacrificial death of His only son on a Roman cross (John 19:30). God demonstrated His love selflessly, for the benefit of all humans without exception (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 5:18; 1 Timothy 4:10). The apostle Paul admonishes Christians to do good to all people without discrimination (Galatians 6:10), and various scriptural texts show that God's goodness is intended for all humans, not just a select few.

As emphasized by this paper, the critical point is that any conception of the common good should be for the benefit of all. Whether derived from secular or Christian conceptions, it should aim for the general well-being of society. For Christians, pursuing general well-being brings glory to God, the Creator of society, as the scriptures enjoin them to demonstrate their good works so that others will glorify God (Matthew 5:16 and John 10:32). This does not mean that everyone must necessarily realize this fact, but their good works should be visibly geared towards the general well-being of all humans, regardless of their background (1 Timothy 3:12, 5:15).

## **The African Concept of Ubuntu**

This section of the paper examines the concept of being human, which is significantly influenced by the African anthropological concept of Ubuntu. It will highlight the views of several African authors on the subject of Ubuntu. To begin with, it is worth pointing out that Gade (2011:306) notes that the term 'Ubuntu' "was first used in South African writing in an address to a conference held in Durban in 1960." Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:199) observe that "during colonialism and the apartheid era, black people and their values were greatly undermined. The discourse on Ubuntu was therefore aimed at restoring human dignity and the values of humanness." Although Ubuntu is

rooted in Southern Africa, it lies at the heart of the entire African way of life and impacts every aspect of people's well-being (Bhengu 2019).

Ubuntu refers to the soul force that drives almost every facet of societal life in African communities, creating relationships within the African community (Masuku & Mathe 2022). In the African context, Ubuntu means being human, caring, showing sympathy, empathy, forgiveness, and other values of humanness toward others. Ubuntu is a capacity in African culture that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity to build and maintain a community with justice and mutual caring (Senokoane 2014).

The fundamental conceptual understanding of Ubuntu means "I am because you are" (Ifejika 2006). According to Ifejika (2006), Ubuntu is part of the Zulu phrase "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," which means a person is a person through others. Furthermore, some hold that Ubuntu has its roots in humanist African philosophy, where the idea of community is one of the building blocks of society (Fotherby 2008; Ifejika 2006). Ubuntu embodies the concept of a common humanity and oneness: humanity, you, and me (Fotherby 2008; Ifejika 2006). Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a concerted effort to revive the notion of Ubuntu (Matolino & Kwindigwi 2013:197). Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) believe that Ubuntu is an authentic African ethical concept, a way of life, an authentic mode of being African, an individual ideal, the appropriate public spirit, a definition of life itself, and the preferred manner of conducting public and private business.

Shutte (2001) views Ubuntu as an ethic for a new South Africa, attempting to marry European and African ethical thinking. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:199) maintain that, for Shutte, the idea is not just an explanation of the ethic of Ubuntu but that Ubuntu must give direction and inspiration in contemporary South Africa. For him, Ubuntu could fill the moral vacuum that threatens South African society and serve as a remedy for the increasing levels of callous and gratuitous violence, corruption in public office, and materialistic consumerism. At the core of Ubuntu is the idea that 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' meaning a person depends on others to be truly human (Matolino & Kwindigwi 2013:199). Although Shutte's context addresses South Africa, his ideas are equally relevant and applicable to the entire African continent, including Ghana in West Africa, which is the context of this paper.

Similarly, Dandala (1996:71) asserts that Ubuntu is a statement about being and cannot be reduced merely to a methodology of doing something. Ubuntu is about what qualifies a person to be a person. Mkhize (2008:36), affirming Karenga (2004), sees Ubuntu as a process of becoming an ethical human being, which means it is the process by which balance or 'orderedness of being' is affirmed. This orderedness is realized through relationships characterized by interdependence, justice, solidarity of humankind, respect, empathy, and care (Mkhize 2008:36).

Furthermore, Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013:199) posit that the Moral Regeneration Movement, launched in 2002, has Ubuntu as its foundation. This movement advocates for moral revival, envisioning a society whose moral fabric is fully restored, where selfishness and greed give way to the promotion of the common good. In this Ubuntu-renewed society, mutual respect, respect for life, respect for the elderly, respect for fellow citizens' property, and sound work ethics are shared values and driving forces. In this instance, Ubuntu is invoked for the reconstruction of moral values and the reconceptualization of society and its morals (Matolino & Kwindingwi 2013:199). This vision of regenerating Ubuntu in society aligns closely with the objectives of this paper.

Moreover, Ubuntu values are deeply embedded in the attitudes and subjectivity of individuals in Africa. A symbiotic relationship exists between individual agency and the social institutions that enhance adherence to Ubuntu's ethical guidance. Metz (2007) contends that the Ubuntu ethic, which emphasizes communal and harmonious relations among human beings, is fundamentally incompatible with individualism that prioritizes the individual over the community. Another definition worth considering is, "Ubuntu, a human engagement that allows for critical thinking, non-domination, and the optimal development of human relationships" (Mbigi 2011:13, quoted in Bhengu 2019:46; see also Letseka 2013). From these conceptions, Ubuntu means that each individual's humanity is manifested in relationships with others. Ubuntu thus calls for awareness of individual being and individual duties toward one's neighbor.

From this background, Ubuntu can be defined as an individual's life lived and celebrated through meaningful relationships and actions that bring well-being to all members of society. For this paper, a person who lives according to the

principles of Ubuntu must add value to society and positively impact everyone they encounter in their daily lives. This paper, therefore, agrees with Dandala (1996:70) and Mthembu (1996:218) that Ubuntu rests on core values such as humaneness, caring, sharing, respect, and compassion. Furthermore, this paper asserts the understanding that:

- The spirit of Ubuntu is essentially about being humane and ensuring that human dignity is always at the core of one's actions, thoughts, and deeds when interacting with others (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).
- Having Ubuntu means showing care and concern for one's neighbor, lending a helping hand, and displaying an understanding of the dignity with which human beings should treat one another because they are human (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).
- Simply put, Ubuntu exists because human beings exist and seek to provide a code of conduct for the co-existence of human beings (Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022).

This understanding is echoed by Tutu (1997: Chapter 8), who expounds on this “human connectedness” in his definition of Ubuntu. He defined Ubuntu as “my humanity being caught up, inextricably bound up, in what is yours” (Tutu 1997; Nakiso Borehole Drilling 2022). This means that humans are interconnected, and in this network of interdependence and togetherness, what happens to one, in an authentic sense, happens to all. Therefore, in Ubuntu, your pain is my pain, your success is mine, and your failure is my failure, and vice versa. It suggests that if one is driven by Ubuntu, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do harm to one's neighbor in any aspect of life. Every wrong done to my neighbor also affects me. The notion of Ubuntu further underscores the African concept of community and communalism, resonating with both political and social dimensions. Before integrating the concepts of the common good, Ubuntu, and politics for a better perspective, the paper will deliberate on the concepts of community and communalism.

## **The Concept of Community and Communalism as They Resonate With Politics and the Political**

One of the most vital features of African heritage is the sense of community. The community has a religious foundation and goes beyond its visible members to include God, who is often regarded as the first grand ancestor or the overlord or chief (Uzukwu and Omenka 2006), the ancestors who are forebears of the community and uphold communal unity and cooperation, as well as those yet to be born. The divinities, who sustain social institutions as part of their responsibilities from the Creator, also form part of the community (Opoku 1990; Uzukwu and Omenka 2006).

The invisible members of the community wield a sacred influence in guiding every living person towards righteousness and justice (Opoku 1990). Traditional education prioritizes personal relationships, emphasizing that to be human is to be in relation not only with one's family, ethnic group, clan, or community but also with the spiritual beings and realities in the community and nature (Opoku 1990). In Africa, relationships are vital because each person shares common familyhood with others, including the dead, the living, and those yet to be born (Opoku 1990).

The community is thus an integrated entity underpinned by extended relationships aimed at enhancing unity and promoting greater cooperation. The community's structure is divinely given, and community loyalty has a religious dimension. Everyone is obliged to be loyal to their family or clan, and this loyalty has significant social implications.

For example, the Gonja people of northern Ghana and the Akan in southern Ghana emphasize cooperation, mutual helpfulness, generosity, and concern for group welfare as fundamental virtues of the community ideal and worthy of pursuit. These values are instilled in the individual, as it is assumed that life's meaning is realized through membership in a group (Nbonwura 2023). Busia aptly stated: "The individual [in Africa] is brought up to think of himself in relation to his group and to behave consistently in such a way as to bring honor and not disgrace to its members. The ideal set before him is mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the group of kinsfolk. Each member should help the

other in health or sickness, success or failure, poverty or plenty" (Busia 1962:33; see also Sarbah 2010).

According to Opoku (1990), the ideal person reaches beyond himself, moving from self-interest to selflessness to impact the lives of other community members. The quality of a person's life is measured by what they do for others rather than what they do for themselves. A person fulfills their obligation not by what they accumulate for themselves but by what they give to others (Bhusumane 2007). The emphasis is clearly on group life and what each member can do for the community (Opoku 1990). This focus on group life may seem to threaten individualism, suggesting that individual interests are subordinate to group interests. Nevertheless, in the African worldview, communalism best addresses the needs and interests of all community members and promotes the general welfare. Promoting group interests does not necessarily negate individual interests; the Gonja and Akan people of Ghana believe that individual well-being is intertwined with that of the group.

From these discussions, it is evident that African communalism and community concepts are imperative for politics, particularly in Ghana and Africa. In contemporary African politics, individualism, greed, and selfishness have supplanted the African spirit of communalism. Consequently, politics often fails to meet expectations. Ghana and the broader African continent frequently grapple with allegations of corruption, as individuals misappropriate public funds without guilt. This mismanagement affects ordinary citizens, leading to a high cost of living and lack of access to quality education, electricity, healthcare, and other public services.

Ironically, Ghana boasts an abundance of natural resources such as gold, diamonds, iron, bauxite, manganese, timber, cocoa, arable lands, and oil. However, these resources are not adequately harnessed to benefit the citizens and communities, evidenced by much of the population still living in abject poverty. For instance, about 5,400 schools in Ghana lack proper classrooms and desks, forcing children to attend classes under trees (Welsing 2021); preventable diseases claim the lives of children, and mothers die during childbirth due to lack of access to proper medical facilities (World Bank 2000-2003).



The paper found that many of the challenges confronting a country like Ghana stem from the abandonment of the African concept of community and communalism in relation to politics. Instead, concepts and ideologies alien to African society have been warmly embraced. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a retrospective look, especially in light of the Christian concept of the common good. It seems that politics in contemporary Africa has adopted foreign ideologies to the detriment of the ordinary African. This phenomenon necessitates that politics in Africa be stripped of its current alien elements and be given an African foundation, whereby politics in Africa will serve all people in the community, not just a privileged few.

The paper established from the discussions that, fundamentally, politics seeks the public good, the common good aims for the well-being of all in society, and Ubuntu, in tandem with the African concepts of community and communalism, emphasizes interdependence and collective well-being. This means that all these domains—common good, Ubuntu, and politics—are focused on the well-being of the human person. If this is the understanding, then there should be no reason for tensions among these domains. The question then is: how can these three concepts be integrated for more beneficial political leadership in Ghana and Africa? This question forms the discussion of the next section.

## **Common Good, Ubuntu, and Politics: a Path of Reconciliation and Integration**

This section of the paper seeks to answer the question: Can the common good, Ubuntu, and politics be integrated? This work responds affirmatively, terming this reconciliation "holistic integration." An analysis of Aristotle's concept of the common good yields the same result as studying his idea of a social whole. From this, one can surmise that Aristotle's endorsement of the service conception of political authority posits that political authority exists for the well-being of its subjects. As highlighted in this paper, Aristotle, unlike Aquinas, did not approach the common good from a religious perspective. However, his thesis maintains that politics exists to serve the common good, which resides among the people in the polis. Similarly, the African concept of Ubuntu interweaves the truth that a person lives for others in the community, meaning that one person's life impacts another's.

Therefore, these three concepts—common good, Ubuntu, and politics—converge on the well-being of the human being, who is central to the polis. This paper adopts and describes these three concepts as rooted in secular, Christian, and traditional/cultural perspectives. Despite their different origins, there is no fundamental conflict among these concepts when considering their core spirit, which promises a better life for human beings. For the religious person (Christians), this better life is conceived as the hereafter, while the secular perspective focuses on the here and now without considerations of eternity.

This paper posits that these differing perspectives need not cause tension, as evidenced by centuries of Christian involvement in politics. Tension arises when politics and religion are seen as irreconcilable enemies, as argued in the separation view. Tension also occurs when religious individuals engage in politics without questioning its excesses, as the involvement position suggests. Additionally, there is tension when religious individuals believe they must transform politics from an inherently evil practice into something holy, as held by the transformation view. This view, often driven by fundamentalism, leads religious individuals to think they should take over politics to make it holy, given the perception that politics is corrupt.

The question then is how to mitigate these existing tensions. This paper proposes an approach called holistic integration. This approach recognizes that politics, like all human institutions, is imperfect and might have excesses, but this does not mean it should be entirely replaced by religion, as the transformation view suggests. Nor should it be ignored and left to exist independently, as the separation view suggests. Neither should Christians engage in politics uncritically, as the involvement view suggests. Instead, there should be a method to address and prune the excesses in politics so that it can become beneficial to all members of society. In Africa, this integration can be achieved by exposing the limitations of both politics and religion and uniting them on the African anthropological platform of Ubuntu. Hence, this fourth approach is termed holistic integration.

To achieve this, the paper advances four propositions: First, every Christian entering politics must recognize that human beings are central to all politics. This central human has needs that must be met on Earth to enhance their well-

being in anticipation of the hereafter, as the religious person believes. Similarly, the secular mind must acknowledge that since the human being is central to politics, every aspect of the human must be considered, not in isolation from other humans in the polis, as seen in modern liberal democracies. The human being exists because of, and in relation to, others in the polis, as Ubuntu suggests. Without others, an individual's existence loses its worth—no person is an island. This belief hinges on the fundamental Christian notion that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Therefore, every Christian entering politics should use this core Christian belief as a guiding principle. The virtue of God's love is manifested in the common good of all humans (John 3:16).

Second, Christians involved in political leadership must accept that all resources originate from God for the benefit of humanity. If the essence of political leadership is to ensure that the polis' resources are managed prudently for the benefit of all, then a Christian politician should see themselves as a steward entrusted with the state's resources for the common good. The fundamental function of politics is to utilize resources for the common good. Furthermore, Ubuntu teaches us that what affects our neighbor in the community affects us and vice versa. Therefore, a Christian involved in politics must realize that prudent management of state resources will directly impact their neighbors. Consequently, they owe it to the community to fulfill the common good in the spirit of Ubuntu, with their eyes fixed on eternity in their management of state resources.

Third, Christians involved in political leadership must understand that their role is not to serve the interests of their political party or any other party, which has traditionally been the norm in Ghanaian political engagement. Partisanship must be discouraged at all political levels to achieve holistic integration. Christian politicians must avoid promoting their party or personal agenda over the common good. By implication, the purpose of politics cannot be achieved without reference to the virtues of Ubuntu. Politics, like Ubuntu, is tied to human well-being and the common good. If politics does not serve the common good in the spirit of Ubuntu, then it is meaningless in the African context. Unfortunately, contemporary African politics often sees individuals entering the political arena to serve parochial party interests rather than the public interest, despite their campaign promises. Therefore, to achieve holistic

integration where all people, regardless of background and status, can participate freely in political leadership, the practice of entering politics to promote party agendas must be eradicated. The goal should be to recalibrate the sense of political engagement from individualistic purposes to a sense of communalism.

Finally, every Christian has a calling and duty from God to fulfill on Earth. For some, this calling may be as evangelists, pastors, or apostles. Among these callings are also those called to serve in political leadership as part of their duty to God. This means that one enters politics with a divine mandate to be a voice for the unheard. This perspective is supported by Opuni-Frimpong (2015:8), director of Alliance for Christian Advocacy Africa (ACAA), who argues that there are several dimensions to the Christian calling and ministry. As God provides diverse gifts, He also assigns different services, including church-planting, prayer, and advocacy (Opuni-Frimpong 2015:9). Advocacy is an important ministry that God calls Christians into, and it should be embraced as fully as other callings (Opuni-Frimpong 2015:9). Such advocacy is especially needed in the political arena, where Christians can be a voice for the unheard and provide sight for those blinded by the polis. Simply put, every Christian entering politics must see it as a call to serve and not to dominate, which is often the case in contemporary Ghanaian politics.

This paper strongly agrees with Opuni-Frimpong and further asserts that the Church must create an environment where Christians who feel called to political leadership can pursue this calling without fear or uncertainty. Christians who understand their divine calling can serve more effectively in political leadership by following these four principles outlined in this work.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored the intricate interplay between the Christian concept of the common good, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and their intersection within the realm of politics. It discussed the concepts of the common good and Ubuntu, their relationship to politics, and the potential for their integration and reconciliation for beneficial political involvement by Christians. The paper proposed "holistic integration" as a fourth stand regarding Christian political involvement.

To achieve this without the usual tensions between religion and politics, the paper advanced four key points toward achieving holistic integration of politics, the common good, and Ubuntu. This fourth approach—holistic integration—is imperative because it brings politics and the common good onto the platform of Ubuntu, making it uniquely different from other approaches in this discourse. It is important that politics in Africa be infused with the spirit of the common good and the spirit of Ubuntu, as demonstrated in this work. An embrace of these concepts by Christians entering politics would greatly revolutionize contemporary African politics, which has often been marred by greed, self-interest, and corruption.

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## Contents

### Editorial Introduction

Christian “Dual Citizenship” and Civic Duty : Implications of the Accra Charter (2011) for Africa Today by Kevin Muriithi Ndereba, PhD and Kyama Mugambi, PhD.....p. 1

### Articles

Christianity and Democracy in Nigeria : Toward a Rethink of the Role of the Church for a Viable Democracy by Dr Hassan Musa .....p. 13

The Nexus of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism : The Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist and Militia Violent Groups on Peace and Development in Africa by Dr John Peter Bwire.....p. 25

The Nexus Of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism in Malawi by Dr Jones Hamburu Mawerenga .....p. 45

A Contention for the Separation of Church and State in Kenya by Samuel Mwangi .....p. 66

The Role of the Church in Political Reform : Lessons from Ethiopian History on the Relationship between Church and State by Yimenu Adimass Belay .....p. 87

The Interface Between the Christian Concept of the Common Good, the African Concept of Ubuntu, and Politics by Paul Abudulai Yelinje .....p. 109

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