



Church and politics: The conflict of Interests

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Abstract

The church and politics in Africa have a complex association it has virtually become a recognized consensus among African scholars of religion that politics and religion are associated in Africa, particularly from an early colonial perspective. It is unquestionably necessary to call into question the veracity of this claim and to investigate the link between religion and politics in Kenya. Despite the fact that Kenya is a secular state with no distinct national religion, Kenyans tend to employ their religious convictions in political matters. Kenya's central government, like many other political institutions, is controlled by Christians. Throughout Kenyan elections, the church plays a significant role in voter mobilization. Politicians are frequently seen at churches and religious congregations during the campaign time, making large gifts and overtly rallying congregants for votes. The same politicians are then implicated in election irregularities, which as in past general elections, leads to post-election turmoil in the country, negatively affecting the church and creating a conflict of interest between Christians and politics. People have turned to churches and religious leaders as a beacon of hope, championing their interests and exerting pressure on politicians to live up to their promises of good governance and credibility as the governing body and credibility have dwindled as a result of corrupt practices, economic decline, and state persecution. As a result, the purpose of this article is to assess the negative consequences and effects of politics and politicians on the church, as well as the church's involvement in politics.

Keywords; Politics, Church, Religion, political unrest, Christians

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The relationship between the Church and politics is a fundamentally problematic topic that has sparked debate throughout Church history and in contemporary politics (McBrien, 1984). Many academics have interpreted the relationship between Christianity and politics in a variety of ways, with some claiming that Christianity supports a certain political ideology explicitly. Some think that Christians should be uninterested in politics and government and should not engage in it (Hempton, 2013). The majority of Kenyans consider churches to be highly important in their lives. Many people will attend church to practice their faith as well as interact with their friends, relatives, and acquaintances. As a result, Kenyan churches are not always exclusive but may welcome one another's beliefs and activities. Christianity is the most popular religion in modern Kenya, and it has a significant effect on the country (Okullu, 1974).

Like the rest of Africa, Kenya's religious leaders are heavily involved in politics. Nonetheless, clergy seldom seek to enter politics, expecting that their enormous congregations would come out in great numbers and vote them into their desired parliamentary positions, but few succeed. As a result, religious leaders do not participate fully in politics. Their influence is felt in other places. Understanding Kenya's religious diversity can aid in comprehending this effect. The combined history of Christianity and the colonial period in Kenya has affected the relationship between politics and religion, as well as traditional communities. Following this is a postcolonial regime, which causes a sense of unease among Christians and political leaders about proximity, collaboration, rivalry, and a conflicting image of societal structure. The government used Christian operations to penetrate populations and establish itself during the colonial period. The relationship between politics and government on the one hand, and religion on the other, was tumultuous. On the other hand, Christians have long acknowledged a connection and complementarity between the two. Following independence, religious and government institutions began working together on a variety of projects. Furthermore, both accept a nation-building philosophy centred on the nation's progress and prosperity. Although religious and political leaders may have similar political values and work together for the good of the country, this does not adequately explain religious leaders' participation in national politics. Christian leaders are currently facing the negative effects of one of these cycles, in which clergy are having trouble properly establishing themselves in the eyes of political authorities, particularly politicians (Wafula, 2014). Churches are considered as players in a political game to investigate this connection. It does not mean that they are political participants in the same sense as everyone else in politics; rather, they are components of a political battle in which opposing interests exist, even if it is not always easy to tell who wins and who loses.

The 2007 General Elections were the only ones since the restoration of participatory democracy in which clergy were the most cautious or least influential in resolving post-poll issues. In succeeding elections, religious players tend to be marginalized. It may be said that Kenyan politics is catching up with its constitution, which provides a framework for an allegedly secular nation. Despite the implausible notion of separating religion from politics, it is vital to understand the evolution of Churches' political positions under President Kibaki's administration, as well as religious stakeholders' opinions on Kenyan politics (Kagema, 2019). President Moi's reign was marked by political schisms. Despite the opposition's evident moral standing, most religious leaders defended the mechanics of working with a duly elected administration with whom they had to work, regardless of disagreements. During President Kibaki's tenure, such distinctions were eliminated. Indeed, the active support of the most prominent churches enabled the political shift of 2002 (Mwaura, 2010). Following their ascension to power, the new ruling elite partnered with the Church. That was unsurprising, considering that religious institutions were in charge of a large number of government services, such as education and health care. This relationship grew tighter than it had been previously because churches chose to first verify the new government they had supported and in which they had great hopes. Regrettably, the ruling party split soon after being elected. Even though churches did not intend to choose between the two groups and therefore lose connections with the general public, their position was not readily apparent. The main religious institutions, which are the most involved in providing social services, continued to interact with the ruling class and appeared to back the Kibaki side of the divide. As the public's fears intensified, and the elections loomed closer, this trend became more apparent. As a result, in 2007, churches appeared to have chosen groups, as they did in previous polls. Their discourse regarding impartiality and protection of human fundamental freedoms were inexistent. Following the general election, the Kibaki government, and subsequently the Odinga party, engaged in political acts that were hardly Christian, causing political turmoil in the nation. It was impossible to claim that religious leaders were acting as a mediator or that they were impartial in discussions aimed at resolving the post-election violence situation; as a result, it became clear that religious leaders were unable to perform the roles that they were expected to perform daily, as a result, churches have had to re-evaluate their position in politics, particularly when devoted Christians may have had clear and tangible worries about their role in resolving the disputes at hand, and as a result, the number of congregations has declined significantly as a result of the polls. As a result, religious groups found themselves at a fork in the road, dealing with issues and challenges that human rights campaigners did not have to deal with. Similarly, representatives of these human rights organizations that assisted in the 2002 victory, such as religious leaders, often found it difficult to abandon their old allies (Wafula, 2014). Furthermore, some human rights organizations have failed to avoid using extreme ethnicity in politics. Kenya appeared to be blessed with a strong civil society throughout the "iron fist rule" of the 1990s, which presented a legitimate alternative agenda in the defence of human rights, as evidenced even during the "saba saba" demonstrations. During the post-election instability, the country sorely needed a unifying factor, such as a civic compact and respect for human dignity.

The problem statement

The relation involving Church and politics has traditionally been a cause of contention in Christian history and also in current politics amongst the Christian. Many philosophers have conceptualized the link connecting the Church and politics in several perspectives with many believing that Christianity explicitly promotes a specific political doctrine or ideology. Some religious leaders hold to the opinion that religion and politics do not mix, however, may be viewed as one of the most powerful instances of political propaganda used presently. It is apparent that there is no getting away from politics by the church because; refusing to take a political position is the same as taking one. The assumption that the church is above politics, for instance, underpins the divide among the public and the politicians, which works to consign strong views, especially if they are righteous. Furthermore, these righteous politicians are mostly viewed as fictive political actors, that is, those whose political beliefs must be honoured regardless of their content. Therefore this creates a conflict of interest, which the researcher seeks to explore in this study based on the past and present conflicts between the church and politics in Kenya.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to explore the conflict of interests between the church and Kenyan politics, based on the past and present political state of the country and to assess the consequences and effects of politics and politicians on the church, as well as the church's involvement in politics.

Research questions

The study answered the following research question;
Are there conflicting interests between the church and Kenyan politics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kenya's primary political culture is predominantly Christian, and other sects may be suppressed in terms of political participation. Nonetheless, the activities and ideas of the "Mungiki," a pseudo-tradition organization, were prominent in the 2007 electoral elections. Following the election, this organization became a prominent part of the post-election unrest. Nonetheless, ignoring Mungiki's religious component makes it impossible to comprehend its goals and breadth of actions. Another faith whose political significance was seen during the votes was Islam. Moreover, for politicians seeking to win voters, Muslim groups became increasingly crucial which was not previously the case due to the prominence of Christian engagement in the nation's politics. Churches appeared to be notably biased during political campaigns, and they did not act as mediators during the conflict (Roberts, 2009). The clergy appeared to be too close to the political establishment and not powerful enough to move them. As a result, Christian or-

ganizations became passive participants in the political debate. Despite the crisis, they did not fall out of favour with the people, as happened in Rwanda during the Genocide. They took in refugees during the political upheaval in the 1990s, when the administration appeared unwilling to intervene, the churches continued to operate with populations. Their political statements, particularly at the state scale, were not necessarily clear, and yet they never lost touch with the people, nor did they lose faith, which was not frequently true with national leaders.

The Catholic Church was, without a doubt, the most significant casualty of the political reshuffle. The Catholic Church has nearly a quarter of Kenya's population, making it the country's largest religious body. It had benefited from British land allotment to missionaries after independence, which was not supposed to compete but to disseminate Western civilization uniformly across Kenya. Until the 1980s, Catholics remained silent on state issues. The church's political behaviour changed after participatory democracy was restored. Along with mainline Christian denominations, it advocated for a functional democracy. Its politics became more intense during the first political unrest in the 1990s. In truth, Catholic churches performed a significant role in the reception of internal refugees. During the 1990s, Catholic Church's leaders backed a variety of campaigns calling for democratic change. It was obviously in favour of a political alternative devoted to human rights defenders and offering an alternative solution to Moi's "dictatorship" era. Meanwhile, beginning in 1992, Kibaki, a Catholic, appeared to be their preferred candidate. His conservative and progressive stance was seen as a buffer against the extremes that were seen as the hallmark of a ruling elite struggling to adapt to representative democracy norms. The ruling clerics were well-versed in the motivations and capabilities of the ruling leadership. As a result, the church pushed for the state's authority to be limited, and catholic religious leaders wielded significant social and cultural influence in local politics (Kagama, 2019).

Following the disputed general elections in 2007, the leadership of the Catholic Church adopted partisan positions. They urged both parties to communicate and divide government power. Without interfering, they endorsed all discussions. Church leaders courageously chastised those responsible in the crisis-plagued dioceses. As in the 1990s, Catholic churches took in a large number of homeless refugees (Gitari, 1991). Nonetheless, the church's reputation deteriorated because it was no longer seen as an institution above ethnicity, capable of speaking for everyone's best interests. This explains why its recommendations were largely ignored by the general public. The churches had already been deafeningly quiet when they were most required. Citizens became harder on religious leaders even though they were meant to be the individuals who spoke out for fairness and integrity in national issues. That was their purpose, and they neglected their masses to benefit the political establishment. Since there were fewer demands placed on other Christian denominations, they emerged from the political crises less politically disadvantaged than Catholics. Many of their followers were dissatisfied, but their conscience critique was severe than those of the Catholics. Throughout political campaigns leaders of churches founded by British missionaries asserted themselves politically along ethnic lines, despite national structures requiring political impartiality and adherence to democratic procedures. Different denominations aligned themselves with different political sides, this created conflicts within the interdenominational organization, as different denominations openly offered their support to different political sides without consulting other religious leaders, as it was seen where some religious institutions uniformly backed the PNU, whereas evangelical and Pentecostal churches backed the ODM side, occasionally others sided with Kalonzo Musyoka, who frequently proclaimed himself as "saved." Following the election, churches eschewed political language, with the exception of certain Methodist and Presbyterian leaders who backed the president's re-election without consulting other church leaders.

Following the political unrest in the country, religious leaders led by the National Council of Churches of Kenya' (NCCK), started a redemption process. They emphasized that the turmoil in Kenya had severely harmed their reputation. Committed to their ardent Christian ideals, they openly chastised themselves, whereas Catholics stayed mute on the subject, despite some of their clergy's blogs expressing their worries. Both Christian sects' debates also varied in character. While Protestants talk about values and morality, Catholics take a more technical method they seek administrative measures to prevent becoming mired in partisan viewpoints that may engulf them. The post-election upheaval caught Christian organizations off guard. Their answer was to urge for discussions and to accept atrocity victims, largely without prejudice. They also participated in a contemplation activity on their involvement in fostering the crisis origins. Their contribution was essentially fairly minimal. Religious players were just fairly marginal participants in the 2007 political campaigns and the crises that preceded the elections. This is likely regretful since it reflects a democratic structure that is confined by politicians who have few fresh concepts and prohibit religious leaders from partaking in political operations truly (Kagama, 2019). The political denial of Mungiki or at minimum the concerns that the group highlights indicate a structure that overlooks the bulk of the population who are mostly the young and, particularly, the severely impoverished portions of the nation. It is risky when the social system espouses the advantages of riches at the price of ideals of cooperation and social compact.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional research methodology was used in the study to better understand the conflict of interests between the church and politics. According to Kumar (2014), this strategy is effective for examining a subset of the total population in a short period. Kumar (2014) goes on to say that the design is used to acquire an overall image as it exists at the time of research and that it is incredibly simple to construct and relatively inexpensive to carry out. The study was carried out in Nairobi County, which has periodic confrontations, particularly around elections, and is the focus of nearly all political activity in Kenya due to its status as the country's capital. The clergy, including priests, pastors, church elders, and leaders of faith-based groups, as well as many politicians in Nairobi County, were targeted in the research. Purposive sampling was used in the study to choose a sample of 20 respondents from the intended population. The primary data was collected utilizing semi-structured interview guidelines that collected both

qualitative and quantitative data from the respondents. The study also used document analysis to gather secondary source information about the link between the church and politics. Literature resources from peer-reviewed journal papers, textbooks on the subject of religion and politics, and official documents from religious institutions and organizations were among the materials used. The material gathered provided the conceptual foundation for the conflict of interests between the church and politics, which validated the conclusions. The acquired qualitative data was examined and evaluated utilizing the content conceptual examination technique. The gathered data was utilized to convey the results, conclusions, and recommendations.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the post-election conflict in 2007, demonstrated the church powerlessness and incapacity to affect change in political conflicts. In the brief period following the dark times of the post-election violence in Kenya, their political voice was muffled. Although both general elections following the conflicted 2007 elections were disputed, there was very minimal involvement of the church in the politics that subdued those elections, of the 2013 and 2017 general elections; the latter was the most conflicted, resulting in political unrest in the country. The church during this period appeared more impartial and it advocated for peace in the country, after the court annulled the elections and called for presidential re-elections whose results, remaining the same, were still disputed, the church remained impartial calling for talks between both sides of the divide. The talks resulted in the "handshake" between President Uhuru and Raila who was the head of the opposition and consequently resulted in the formation of a task force "Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)" which is aimed at carrying out constitutional reforms, the credibility of the initiative remains an issue of contention, with the "handshake" partners highly pushing for it while other entities seem to be against it including the deputy president.

The most recent conflict of interests between the church and politics is solely as a result of the "Building Bridges Initiative" which is actively being led by the "handshake partners. Different Christian denominations seem to be having differing views concerning the initiative. The catholic church has offered their full support of the initiative, while other denominations seem to offer varying views concerning the same, but in general, the church is silent regarding the BBI, perhaps because they are pressured by political elites, maybe because they are pleased with some of or all of its suggestions, or because they would not want to be associated with it because of the partisan instability that it appears to generate in the nation. Some religious leaders have called on the Church and organizations such as the NCCK to "seize" the initiative from politics and turn it into a people-led effort, as it did during 1986 and 1992, where the Church had an essential role in building and managing a popular dialogue on democratization and transformation in Kenya, including its organized local political efforts before to the very first democratic elections in 1992.

According to the formulators of the Building Bridges Initiative, The initiative is based on political conflicts that arise just before or following national polls. From the first representative democratic polls in 1992, general elections have raised political heat, recurrent land battles and ethnic political affiliations centred on ethnic political groups have inflicted a great deal of grief. Therefore BBI is an endeavour to bring about constitutional national cohesiveness as their task forces, as well as the "handshake" partners, have put it. However contention arises as a part of the political divide claim that it is formulated for other political gains by the ruling class, this puts the church at the crossroads, therefore, explaining their reluctance in giving clear directions concerning it, as it was with the previous constitutional amendments. There is a very distinct line between rights and wrong in religion, however in politics, this line is mostly blurred, politicians seem to base their actions based on their political interests irrespective of the fact that some of their actions might be wrong. Notably, the apparent rift in the ruling party, partially fuelled by the "handshake" and the BBI, with supporters of the president on one hand and those of the deputy president, is another issue that has placed the church in the spotlight, the church is obliged to remain impartial in political rifts, however, different denominations seem to have inclined to a side of the divide. Churches at some point of the conflict had been the grounds on which the different factions hurled indirect abuses towards each other, with one side of the divide appearing to be very much inclined to the church, as a result of very generous donations given by them to various churches across the country.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, believers are concerned about the church's engagement in sociopolitical and economic matters in Kenya. Nonetheless, Theology and historical chronology pertaining to the Church and politics affirm the church's role in these issues. Prophets in the scriptures speak into sociopolitical concerns in Israel, and the neighbouring nations. During their time, John the Baptist and Jesus address the political issue as well. Both in the Old and New Testaments, God's spokesmen stood forth as opposed to political authority abuse and advocated for the fair use of authority. As a result, political activity doesn't quite subtract from religion; on contrary, a religion that is unattached to politics is suspect to credibility.

Recommendation

In as much as the church is encouraged to remain impartial in political conflicts, it is recommendable that the church remains steadfast in ensuring they call out the government in their atrocities and speak out for the common people as well as advocate for the ruling government to uphold justice and dignity.

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