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Church and Politics:

With Aspects Relating to Governance, Public Policy and Ethnicity¹

by Timothy M. Njoya

Introduction

Let me first define the Church as an assembly of believers dependent upon the help of the Holy Spirit, and where the Gospel is duly proclaimed, (Acts 9:31). Christianity adopted the term “church” from the pagan and Jewish worlds where the word meant temple (Acts 19:37-39) or assembly of citizens gathered for a common purpose. A political meeting was also called a church. The need then arose to distinguish the Christian Church gatherings in Christ's name and where the resurrected Christ is exalted from any other kind of assembly. Therefore, the Church defined itself as the Church of God, which he purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28, I Corinthians 1:2 and 12:27).

Today's meaning of the word Church is no longer Biblical. It is social, just like business corporations and political states. The only difference is that the Church practices religion and its main actors call themselves reverends, bishops, apostles, pastors, evangelists and other grandiose names. In Kenya, the religious values of the Church and the political values of the state are those of the market: material blessings and power relationships at the expense of the poor and powerless.

Covenant

The Biblical course of events that determined the development and differentiation of the Church and state are recorded in the book of Samuel. Prior to Samuel, the Church (House of Israel) was governed by certain values codified in God's covenant with Abraham and the Ten Commandments. Since the time of Moses, the Church was a nation led by the civil society without the state. It was the people of Israel, the Church itself, that agitated for Samuel, the main civil society actor, to appoint a king for them. Instead of continuing to be governed by the system of beliefs and values called the holy covenant, the Israelites wanted to also be ruled by means of law and force like other nations around them. God succumbed to their pressure and allowed Samuel to appoint Saul as their first head of the Government. Quite reluctantly, Samuel presided over the transition of Israel from a civil society to a society split into civil society and the monarchy (I Samuel 1-12). The failure of Saul and the subsequent kings to adhere to the ideology of God's covenant with Israel (I Samuel 15:1-31) led to the conflict between the kings and prophets.

The dichotomies and conflicts started to emerge between the Church whose authority was based on beliefs and values, and the State, whose

¹ Presented at the 2012 Conference of the Africa Society of Evangelical Theology on 28th April 2012.

authority was based on law and force. While the Church did not relinquish to the state its moral authority on enforcing observance of the covenant, it obeyed the king's commands if they were consistent with the word of God.

Samuel also did not relinquish his religious role of ensuring that the monarchy observed the holy covenant between God and Israel. Moses had divided the Covenant into two parts: the first defined the relationship between God and Israel, and the second part, containing the last six commandments, defined the moral obligations of the Israelites to one another. This latter part required Israel to relate with each other in the same degree of fidelity and care as they related with God. Thus, after their liberation, God required the Israelites to not treat each other as badly as they had been treated by their Egyptian masters. The people of Israel were given the Promised Land as tenants at God's will and on condition that they obeyed the covenant as their national constitution. Jesus recognized this contribution of Moses by summing up the first four commandments as kinship with God and the other six as kinship with one another.

The first part of the constitution obliged God to accept worship and service from the Israelites, while in the second part, God was to bless the Israelites if they worshiped him sincerely by obeying all the commandments. God's blessings included great posterity and great prosperity in terms of milk and honey as well as peace within their borders. Sometimes the Israelites found it easier to worship and serve God as an excuse not to serve one another. God got so tired of this dichotomy between worship and concern for one another and said, "Do you think I want all these sacrifices you keep offering to me? I have more than enough of the sheep you burn as sacrifice and of the fat of your fine animals (Is. 1:11) ... When you lift your hands in prayer, I will not look at you. No matter how much you pray, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with blood. Stop all this evil that I see you doing (1:15) and learn to do right. See that justice is done - help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights and defend the widows" (1:17). The Israelite leaders hoped that by bribing God with worship and sacrifices, God would bless them with more riches. And those riches would eventually reach the widows, orphans and the oppressed through the trickle down effect, by ethnic osmosis or by proxy. The Church and the State had thus converged and had lost their essential distinctions. The Church had become a function of the State.

Regardless of how one evaluates the religious-political history of Israel from Samuel through the 7th to 6th centuries B.C. to the beginning of the Christian era, it is evident that the alliance of religious and political leadership failed to meet the standards of God's covenant which is the ultimate law of divine-human governance.

After the end of the Israel northern monarchy in 721 BC and Jewish monarchy in 586 BC, God's covenant with Israel did not die. Instead it became universal. Instead of reading the failure of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as

the failure of God's reign on earth, the prophets expanded the lists of God's servants to the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Ptolemies of Egypt. Indeed, the prophetic tradition welcomed Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor, as God's instrument for punishing the errant dictators and considered King Cyrus of Persia as God's instrument for the liberation of the Jews. Cyrus appointed Nehemiah to revive the Jewish religious institutions that were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar but not the political establishment.

The forcible support of Hellenism by Antiochus IV 175-164 BC and conquest by Roman in 63 BC did not end the political influence of the priestly hierarchy centered at the temple in Jerusalem and development of synagogues throughout the Hellenistic empire. The Jewish ethnic and political need for survival during the Greek and Roman empires continued to the time of Jesus. The Sanhedrin acted as the political bridge between Roman power and Jewish community. The Romans appointed such leaders as Herod and Pilate to rule the Jews through a system of Dual Mandate within which the Sanhedrin imposed the Jewish Mosaic law (Torah) and had its own temple currency. Jesus considered this practice of dual currency as flawed and corrupt and played a prophetic role by whipping the money-changers.

The Audacity to Hope

But the Church is likely to meet obstacles from the State if it dares proclaim people's God-bestowed humanity, sovereignty, freedom and dignity. Both the Church and the State opposed me when I pegged my theology on the books of Habakkuk and Isaiah and preached for the transformation of Kenyans from property into humans and their nation from market into humane entity. My prophecy had arisen as a spiritual revolt within the rank and file of the Kenyan ruling class which constitutes 10% of the population. In the name of academic merit and elections, this class consumes 90% of Kenya's wealth. My point was not that educated Kenyans should not eat and mate more than their fellow Kenyans, but that the Kenyan elites consumed more than they produced.

I also pointed out that the Kenyan education produces consumers rather than producers resulting in parasites who make up the religious and political leadership. The majority of Kenyan youth who pass their exams with less than Grade C- toil picking flowers, tea and coffee and milking cows. They collect sand and quarry stones, shine shoes, cook and clean toilets for those who passed their exams with As, Bs and C+s but who produce virtually nothing.

The immediate result of this education system that rewarded passing examinations rather than rewarding production, was a top elite characterized by excessive consumption of fashionable clothes, cars, cosmetics, houses and posh private schools, coupled with high hospital bills for obesity, stress and related lifestyle diseases. However, Prof. Ng'eno, the then Minister for Education, avoided addressing this critique of the Kenyan success narratives

and instead defended the quota system by attacking me as one who “is not trained in matters of education and should stop using the pulpit to pontificate to this country on what should be done” (*The Standard*, January 18, 1987). Prof. Ng'eno missed my point that the Church and State should stop processing children like robotic products for sale into the job market. Children have rights to realize their God-given potential as good citizens regardless of their intellectual capacity.

When I called for the Lancaster constitution and the One-party state to be dismantled, the Minister of Livestock Development, Mr. Elijah Mwangale, said that Church leaders who attack the government for no reason should not be tolerated, and called for my arrest and subsequent detention. He warned: “Let me remind Njoya that the late Honorable Jean Marie Seroney and Martin Shikuku were both plucked out of inside Parliament in the '70s and taken to detention when the government felt that that could be the best way to safeguard the country's security and interests” (*Daily Nation*, January 8, 1990).

Clearly the State's expectation was that the Church should complement it rather than play its God-given role. In response to my sermon of July 7, 1984, Parliament was told that “the right to worship cannot be exercised in isolation and must be complimentary to the government policies and aspirations in the interests of law and order.” My preaching was characterized as having gone “beyond the limits and interfered with certain government action,” and as “not in keeping with the spirit of peace, love and unity” (*Daily Nation*, July 20, 1984, p. 1).

Some Kenyans attended my rallies because they wanted to defy the threats issued by the state, others to hear the message of liberation, others simply to be godly, while others came to identify themselves with someone different from a tribe, state or party. This spiritual phenomenon of driving people away from traditional loyalty to the State to loyalty to ideas affected even Moi himself. While Moi declared that it was not his duty to dictate what should be preached (*The Standard*, July 26, 1984), he wanted preaching to be done within certain parameters. He therefore said, “Christians who are claiming they are praying for others should go to their rooms and pray.”

The Imperial Church of the Market

Christianity of the market began in East Africa in 1498 when Vasco Da Gama arrived in Malindi accompanied by Roman Catholic Missionaries.² In 1567 the Portuguese Viceroy in India ordered the Gospel to be preached around Mombasa. An Augustinian monastery was built on the East African Coast of the Indian Ocean. By 1597, there were 600 African Christian slaves, Swahili and Bantu. The Church was part and parcel of the ideology that

² David B. Barrett, *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenyan Christianity, 1498-1973*; Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1973, p. 29.

pacified slaves with prayers and songs during the time of the Atlantic slave trade triangle. John Newton (1725-1807), who became one of the most prosperous English slave traffickers from Africa across the Atlantic, composed such songs as *Amazing Grace*, *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*, and *How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds* to console himself and the slaves as he buried a third of his human cargo into the sea because it could not make it to America due to heat strokes, suffocation, hunger and contagious diseases.

The industrial revolution also transformed every religious institution in Europe into an organ of the market. The values of the market, its stability, continuity and profitability overrode every other form of human value. Humanity was no longer defined by God's image but by consumption. The more knowledge, material goods and services one consumed, the more human one became. Similarly, the lesser the knowledge, material goods and services one consumed the less human one became.

It was at the peak of the Industrial revolution that Africa was incorporated to become part of the European overseas market with its ideology of survival of the fittest. This incorporation did not end with independence; instead, Kenya remained entrenched in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Herbert Spencer's theory of the survival for the fittest, both concepts of which are derived from the animal kingdom where the big fish eat small fish. Julius Nyerere used a similar animal metaphor in his assessment of Kenya, referring to our country as a "man eat man society". Despite their different perspectives, Darwin, Spencer and Nyerere were united in using the animal kingdom as a metaphor for describing a capitalist society. However, they were too generous: African totalitarianism is less natural than the animal kingdom. In the case of animals, the big fish are intelligent enough to eat small fish without interfering with their breeding cycle in case they miss future supplies. By contrast, the ruling classes assassinated their most intelligent, industrious and creative thinkers and in so doing destroyed their fitness to survive in the western market environment.

It was this suicidal class that I was trying to save from itself when, in 1986, I called on Kenyans to dismantle the Lancaster constitution and the One-party state. I joined prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Habakkuk, Micah and Hosea in exposing religion and politics as Kenyan elite self-reward systems. As mentioned above, I spoke out against the injustice of the fact that 10% of the population consume 90% of Kenya's wealth while the less educated serve them. The perspectives of Isaiah and Jesus had inspired me to critique the compromise of the church with the State in oppressing Kenyans.

Similarly, the Harambee ideology in Kenya is the ideology of the ruling class to deceive the masses that they need not eat and mate because their tribal figures would eat and mate on their behalf. This logic is commonly expressed in the argument that if the tribal leaders become rich, their followers become rich by proxy and osmosis. The religion of Israel had also carried out

the same deception of the poor, proposing that a few royal Israelites becoming rich meant that all Israelites became rich.

But the Kenyan ecclesiastical leadership joined forces with the Government to resist my call for dismantling the One-party totalitarianism because it was part and parcel of the same market. With reckless self-abandon, Church leaders defended the unholy unity of the Church-State identities which I questioned. At an annual general meeting of the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya (FGCK), for instance, leaders reaffirmed “their total support and confidence in president Daniel arap Moi’s leadership, the government and the ruling party, KANU” and declared that “since its foundation in 1949, the Full Gospel Churches in Kenya had remained faithful and loyal to the government and would continue to do so” (*Kenya Times*, August 25, 2006).

The FGCK was trying to have its cake and eat it; that is, believe in God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and at the same believe in President Daniel arap Moi’s leadership, the government and the ruling party, Kanu; or in the Trinitarian philosophy of Nyayo - Peace, Love and Unity “as expounded by the president.” Yet the KANU trinities and the Holy Trinity were mutually exclusive and diametrically incompatible, just as light and darkness or Jesus and Satan. This unholy trinity revealed African Christianity as more pagan and heathen than Christian. Because the Christianity as propagated by the missionaries during the slave trade and colonialism was not self-critical, it was incapable of preventing Church leaders like Rev Simon Kariuki from straying from the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Sprit to the self-revealed One-party manufactured trinities of Moi’s leadership, the government and KANU, and of the trinity of Peace, Love and Unity.

Instead of attacking the Church or replying to the FGCK, I had to attack the very foundations of the African Christianity; namely the market, as codified by the Lancaster constitution and the One-party state. The Church and the One-party state lived together in a *come-we-stay* marriage. Church leaders capitalized on this un-divinely recognized marriage to sell their followers as voters to politicians or to make them their own voters. The Starehe MP, Margaret Wanjiru, is a typical case in point that believers can be traded for votes to gain wealth and power.

Africa was also plagued by lack of clarity between spirituality and politics. Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana-a-Nzeki defines both Church and state as groups organized for a common cause - the Church to serve the spiritual needs and State the material needs. Ndingi says that, “Here in Kenya we stand in a very good position as far as the Church-State relationships and cooperation are concerned. This cooperation is in accordance with the African

traditional motto Harambee (Let us pull together).” Ndingi believed that the Government “guaranteed freedom of worship and religion in our constitution.”³

While Ndingi believed in the legitimacy of the Lancaster constitution and called it “our” and “ours” I wanted Kenya to have a new constitution that recognized the freedom of worship as something inherent in human beings and which existed before the existence of governments. I could not accept that any Kenyan owed his feet to walk, mouth to talk, hands to greet and **freedom to worship** from the Government. As I have already mentioned, the government was created by the market rather than by the people, and therefore it lacked valid authority to grant freedom to Kenyans. This is why I led the people to the streets to demand a new and legitimate constitution.

By contrast, the prevailing assumption of the Kenyan Church that Ndingi articulated was that sovereignty belonged to the State and the people were subjects. Yet in the New Testament, the State is God-given for the limited purpose of keeping order. The State is a tool of governance and management of public resources. It is not the source of order, peace and resource. These come from God. Ndingi also said, “A further proof of this Church-state relationship is the fact that today in our freely and democratically elected Parliament there is one Member who is also a church minister, something that is rare indeed, even in developed countries.”⁴ The MP that Ndingi referred to was Bishop Lawi Imathiu, the Methodist Church Minister who is now the chairman of the GEMA, an ethnic outfit.

The Unchristian Nature of the State Under the Lancaster Constitution

Since 1888 when Queen Victoria signed the charter that Kenya was part of her British overseas market, Kenya had never become a nation, nor governed as a nation. Therefore, instead of being governed, Kenya had always been dominated and abused. Kenyans do not have any experience of the rule of law but only the rule of force.

Rather than revoke the idea that the Kenyan people were overseas property, the Lancaster constitution reaffirmed people as property, laborers, taxpayers and voters and for the good of the market. The abolition of slavery and colonialism changed the collective and legalized ownership of local people by foreign people into the individual ownership of local people by local people (*sisi kwa sisi*). While during slavery people were free labor, during colonialism they were both cheap labor and taxes, while after independence they became cheap labor, taxes and votes.

Even as Britain wrote the Lancaster constitution, it did not respect the African delegates whom it had invited to the Lancaster Constitutional Conferences. It did not ask the delegates to test the legitimacy of the

³ Barrett, *Kenya Churches Handbook*, p. 44, 45.

⁴ Barrett, *Kenya Churches Handbook*, p. 45.

document through a referendum. Instead, Britain superimposed independence upon Kenyans in utter contempt of the universal doctrine of self-determination enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles.

This sabotage made African independence a blatant violation of God-given freedom, sovereignty and dignity of African people. Had Kenyans won their independence in a transformative way as the Americans won their independence, that is, on the battlefield, Kenyans would have had an opportunity to express themselves as the human beings that God created in his own image. Kenya is still lacking an informed spiritual analysis of what is to be human or property and for what reasons they can do with God and without a State. A country like Somalia decided to do with God and without the state.

Lest I be accused of being an anarchist, I refer to my going to a constitutional court (Njoya & Others -versus- Attorney-General, case No. 2004/1/ LR, 261) to argue that the state is a creature of the people, and as their creature, is subject to the authority of the people to unmake it and make another one if they so wished. The constitutional court ruled that WE THE PEOPLE of Kenya have inherent and inalienable God-given sovereignty, which we have the authority to exercise as follows:

1. The power and the right of overhauling the Constitution belongs to or is of the Kenyans and they are the ones who should say, through a referendum, what basic changes are to be effected in the current Constitution.
2. The Parliament has, under the current Constitution, only the power to make amendments to it without altering its basic structure.
3. The National Conference that drafted the Bomas document was fundamentally flawed and lacked the mandate.

The court's decision affirmed the Biblical theology that Kenyans are superior to and come before the State. I left the issue of whether believers are more important than their Churches to be decided by the believers themselves, but developed a theory of transformation as my contribution to the development of our philosophy of Kenyan jurisprudence. Without a new philosophy of jurisprudence, Kenyans would not have had a constitution that recognized God and the humanity of Kenyans. The greatest achievement of my Christian faith and theology is not that Kenyans have made a new constitution, but the fact that I convinced the court that God made each and every Kenyan *human, sovereign and equal*.

This landmark ruling confirmed that my theology has helped Kenya to become one of the most advanced constitutions on the planet. Kenya will however need another or other revolutionary theologians to conceptualize the level of the continuing transformation of Kenyans from property into humans and Kenya from a market into a nation.

The State as God's Stewards (Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:15)

A transformed Kenya would look like a necklace with so many intricate varieties, sizes and colors of beads, with medium size indigo beads like *Digo* and *Pokot*, with petite gold beads like *Indians* and *Ogiek*, with large and crystal beads like *Luhya* and *Somali*, and with delicate oversize beads like *Kikuyu*, *Kalenjin* and *Luo*. To crown it all, as a necklace Kenya would have some expressive beads like *Christians*, spices like *Hindus* and others levelheaded like *Muslims*. The Lancaster constitution could not withstand the weight of all these kinds of beads, and so it had snapped and spilled the beads to the ground where the lighter beads got trampled upon and were crushed by the heavier ones. That is how I came up with the idea of a new constitution to thread Kenyans together unbreakably based on values than on identities. I preached that the universe is God's word and body. When I partake in politics it is in God's body that I am partaking. It is in God's governance and public policy that I am participating.

When you introduce ethnicity into this body of God you are introducing a dichotomy for filtering and selecting who should partake and participate in God's body and who should not. The moment you introduce things like ethnicity, gender, race and class, you create conditions for some to be satisfied and others to be dissidents, malcontents and oppositionists. You are erecting biased criteria for some to eat and mate while others do not. Yet God told Peter not to "condemn what God made clean" (Acts 10:11-15).

God is the one who made tribes, and therefore while it is clean to be Kikuyu or Kalenjin, it would be unclean for a Christian to join GEMA or KAMATUSA, because these associations are exclusive, manmade ethnic associations. These cloths of *negative ethnicity* (politics of physical appearance) were cut and sold by the media to any elite who appealed to physical appearances for political support, following the proliferation of the media after KANU was forced to open a democratic space for radio and TV. This development gave the impression that the differences in wealth and poverty amongst the various tribal elites were caused by differences in their tribal complexion. The media did not make different sizes of dresses for *negative ethnicity*, short for the poor and long for the rich. The experts of *negative ethnicity* did not even venture to invent a vaccine for preventing tribes from developing the chromosomes of *negative ethnicity*. Unfortunately, newspaper articles by Makau Mutua and Koigi Wa Wamwere do not improve matters much; either mischievously or innocently, they provide politicians with materials for thinking that their abuse of ethnic identity for political gain has some scientific foundations. The myth of negative ethnicity, or tribalism, reflects a kind of pathological and intellectual decay that informs the Kenyan political parties on how to form alliances and coalitions without whose misadventures Kenya would not have invited the International Criminal Court.

Even during the trials of the genocide in Rwanda, not a single perpetrator called a physiologist to show DNA evidence of negative ethnicity in his body.

Therefore, God did not make any positive or negative ethnicity in Kenya. He made tribes as natural entities, just as he made trees and animals without making them negative and positive. The term negative ethnicity obscures the sin of unequal and broken material relationships. *Negative ethnicity* cannot be found in the DNA of any ethnic community. Only in the brains of greedy politicians can you find *negative ethnicity* as the DNA of power and wealth. On 25th August 1985 I preached a broadcast sermon entitled *What God Has Cleansed You Must Not Call Unclean*, based on Acts 11:1-18. My sermon of April 14, 1995 repeated that,

Nobody in the world should feel guilty because he happened to belong to one race, sex or tribe, but we must distinguish between race and racism, tribe and tribalism and sex and sexism. However, there is tribalism as another name for elitism which is the disease of elites competing with one another for power and business.

Conclusion

The marked significant turning point in Kenya's history was not prompted by politics, but by having good quality Church theology. If the Church wants to make a divine contribution to the governance of this world, it must be informed by the word of God but not by the imperatives of the market. It is possible that since human character is a product of the market environment, and is as much a social construct as is religion, tyranny, fascism, dictatorship and totalitarianism, one must educate children to grow into God-fearing citizens in order to have a better Church.

The divine criteria for governance are the same for the state as for the Church; namely, fidelity in God's covenant of love for the Creator and care for everything that God created. All religious beliefs, values and practices, as well as all state aspects relating to governance, public policy and ethnicity, should be judged by their faithfulness or lack of faithfulness to the divine covenant as God revealed to Moses and verified through God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. But as the prophetic tradition indicates, there shall always be a necessary ideological conflict between the Church and state, given that the state had inbuilt tendencies to own and control the people and act on the basis of self-preservation, while ideally the Church is called by God to act selflessly for the good of all. From the very beginning the Church acknowledged this ideological divergence by inserting in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus was "Crucified under Pontius Pilate". Any Church that ignores the inherent ideological variance between the state mandate to enforce the law and its divine mandate to "To bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" loses its very purpose of existence. Amen.