



The Christian Church and Education to truth, peace and reconciliation: Perspectives from *Africae Munus*

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Article History

Received: 22.02.2024

Accepted: 09.03.2024

Published: 30.03.2024

Abstract: It is not very uncommon to hear politicians requesting Church ministers to stay away from politics. Their arguments often hold that politics constitute hard facts and not good for men of God. Consequently, they should only preach the word of God as presented in the Bible and remain spectators of the political drama in their respective countries. Ecclesiastical statements on political issues gain a measure of public attention. There are several instances where religious questions have had a bearing on national politics. The letter of Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association” spells out a wall of separation between Church and politics. *Africae Munus* #23 argues that politics is out of the direct competence of the Church. However, this approach could be an evasion from her responsibility to teach on truth, peace and reconciliation. This poses a dialectical perspective with regard to the Church’s involvement in politics. What is therefore, the extent to which the Church has to interfere into political matters? What is the pedagogic role the Christian Church in teaching truth, peace and reconciliation within conflict regions.

Keywords: Church, religion, peace, reconciliation and State.

INTRODUCTION

A thought-provoking assertion in *Africae Munus*, (AM), revealing a dialectic in the intersection between church and state, religion and politics states that

The task we have set for ourselves is not an easy one, situated as it is, somewhere between immediate engagement in politics-which lies out of the church’s direct competence- and the potential for withdrawal or evasion-present in a theological and spiritual speculation, which could serve as an escape from concrete historical responsibility (A.M. 23).

Highlighting the above, one finds a critical situation faced by Church ministers with regard to their engagement in political matters. The debate on the church’s involvement in public life has not begun today. This controversy dates back to the medieval period as expressed in the thoughts of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. Canon Law and the doctrine of the Church define the boundaries within which the Church or religious questions have to interfere into politics. Despite these definitions, there is no satisfactory solution to conflicting opinions, tensions and controversies surrounding the role of religion in politics or the church’s interference in political issues. The teachings from Pope Benedict XVI as expressed above indicate that this is not an easy task. From a quick observation one wonders why there is continuous ambivalence/ambiguity in understanding this intersection. This paper sets out to analyze the assertion above and determine the extent to which religion/ the church has to interfere into political matters. Our findings are meant to seek clarity and define boundaries between the two institutions in order to educate people on the process of justice, peace and reconciliation within the socio-political crises in Cameroon.

Background and Problem

As initially indicated, questions surrounding the intersection between religion and politics, church and the state are not new. Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas had already reflected on these issues during the medieval period. In *Civitas Dei*, Augustine makes a distinction between two cities. These include; the temporal city of Babylon and the eternal city of Jerusalem. Babylon promises all the glories of Eden, without the presence of God. Jerusalem is a city that comes down from heaven. It represents God’s grace, contrary to the self-made monstrosity of Babylon. In this distinction he explains that the eternal city reflects the dwelling place of infinite and eternal God the creator and the temporal city reflects the finite and limited dwellings of mortals whose vocation is the return to God the creator. Rome, the new Babylon represented all that is worldly, and Jerusalem, (the city of heaven) represents Christian community. In our world, there is a mixture of two cities, but the temporal city, *civitas terrena* will eventually perish giving way to the eternal city. Envy, power, greed characterize earthly city. For Augustine, the two cities coexist as a “*corpus permixtum*” (mixed body). (Van ort, 1991: 93-163; 118-123) This sub-section examines two perspectives in order to provide a foundation for the dialectic of religion and politics. First, we consider politics as subordinate to religion with justifications of the Eternal law of Augustine and the Divine law of Aquinas. Second, the social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke serve as antitheses to the subordination of politics to religion/ State to the Church.

State as subordinate to the church

The State is an earthly institution concerned with the well-being of mortals in the temporal city, which is subordinate to the eternal and everlasting city of God. Within this framework of

thought, Augustine referred to the Eternal law of God, which puts in place the natural law that constitutes the basis for the positive laws governing affairs in the life of the city. Augustine traced political life in the oral law that governs persons or individuals in society. He argued that there is a single source of truth and this truth is not subject to changes of human life. All persons recognize this truth and know it as natural law or natural justice. For Augustine, the natural law is our intellectual sharing in God's truth; which is the eternal law. The notion of the eternal law was anticipated by the stoics in the concession of the principle of reason that governs nature. It is reason that rules and controls everything. Though the stoics conceived the principle of reason, as an impersonal force of rational principles in the universe, Augustine interpreted the eternal law as the reason and will of a personal God. He writes that the eternal law is the divine reason who is in control of the natural order of things in the universe (Stumpf, 2003)

With the equation of the eternal law and God's reason that commands order in the universe, the eternal principles therefore represent the natural law. This reinforces the fact that the laws of the state are temporal laws that must be subordinate to the natural law, which in turn is derived from the eternal law. The main point of Augustine is that the political state is not autonomous. The state is expected to follow the values of justice. Justice is conceived as a standard that precedes the state and is eternal. This is a novel meaning of justice, which distinguishes Augustine from other thinkers. Justice has to be discovered in human nature and one's relation to God. Augustine therefore makes the laws of the state subordinate to the natural law. Positive laws must be in harmony with natural laws and justice. The absence of this standard nullifies the character of laws, and the existence of a state. Considering this argument, it has to be retained that justice is not limited to relations between people. The primary relationship in justice is between a person and God. Augustine also rejects the separation of collective justice from individual justice. This Augustinian thesis could be traced in Plato's correlation between justice in the individual soul and justice in the State (Stumpf, 2003).

Moreover, Augustine observes that to serve God is to love God. This love of God is only manifested in the love we have for others in society. Augustine bases the concept of justice on love. Love which emanates from God should diffuse to the whole society. He therefore, places God's law, religion in a superior position to political institutions. However, he accords to the state the right to use coercive force. In this context, the origin of the state is traced in the sinful condition of human nature. It is a necessary agency to control human behaviour on earth. Augustine recognizes the importance of the state on earth. This state cannot manifest the full power of love, but her actions can limit the expression of evil in human society. On this count, he makes a distinction between two types of love. The first is the love of God, and second, the love of self and the world. These two conceptions accounts for the origin of two cities. The former refers to the city of God and the latter to the city of the world. Wherever those who love God are, this will be the city of God. Where there are those who love the world, this will be the city of the world. Augustine retains the facts that human beings can only attain happiness when love of God reigns in the State (Barr, 1962:pp.219-229).

Beside the Eternal law of Augustine, another important thinker is Aquinas who argued that the state is a natural institution. This means she has been derived from the intrinsic nature of human beings. This view traced back to the Aristotelian conception of the state which holds that "people are by nature (political) social animals. Aquinas' conception of the state becomes distinct from that of Aristotle because of their different views on human nature. Aristotle supposed that the state could provide for all the needs of man. This is because he limited all the needs to human and natural needs. Aquinas on the contrary widens these needs and includes the supernatural realm as part of human needs. For Aquinas, the state is not equipped to direct us to this end. It is the role of the church. However, instead of separating the two realms of human concern, Aquinas made a synthesis by tracing the origin of the state to God's creation.

For Aquinas, the State is willed by God and possesses God-given functions which address the solid components of human nature. Aquinas did not agree with Augustine that the State is a product of people's sinfulness. In the state of innocence, people would have to live as a society. There is a need for someone to control and establish the common good. The function of the State is to secure the common good by keeping peace, organizing the activities of the citizens, providing the resources to sustain life and preventing obstacles of good life where possible. The function to preserve a good life is our ultimate end and this accounts for the State's relation to the Church. In this context, Aquinas makes the State subordinate to the church. For Aquinas, there is no contradiction in according the State a sphere where she has her legitimate function and at the same time subordinate to the church. Within her own sphere, the state is autonomous, but the State cannot serve as an obstacle for persons to attain their supernatural end. She cannot hinder or frustrate the spiritual life of her citizens. The Church does not challenge the States' autonomy but she reminds the State that she is not absolutely autonomous. This is precisely because the State ensures the natural end of man, but our spiritual end cannot be achieved within the competence of the State. Therefore, the State has to be subordinate to the Church only to ensure that her ultimate spiritual needs has to be taken into account (Aquinas, *ST*, I-IIa.q19,a4.).

Again, Aquinas argues that the state is the source of human law. Each government has the task of putting up statutes to ensure a harmonious functioning of the society. Aquinas thought that Law making cannot be arbitrary, but must be founded on the natural law which involves human participation in (divine law) God's eternal law. Human-made laws must consist of particular values derived from the natural law (Aquinas, *ST*, Ia-IIa.q100,a5, ad.1). Any human law that violates the natural law loses its character as law, and loses its binding force in the conscience of humanity (Aquinas, *ST*, Ia-IIa.q100,a5, ad.1). The law maker has the authority to legislate from God and he is responsible to God. If the sovereign decrees an unjust law by violating God's divine law, Aquinas observes that such a law should not be obeyed. This is justified on the grounds that the *raison d'être* of the State is to ensure the common good. The political sovereign has the authority from God. Authority must not be used as an end in itself or for selfish interests. The common good must not be interpreted in such, a way as to lose sight of individual rights within a collective whole. For Aquinas, the common good has no meaning except it

ensures the good of individuals. The good of any part is taken in comparison with the whole.

Church as subordinate to and distinct from the State

The thesis of subordinating the State to the Church as seen with medieval thinkers of Augustine and Aquinas was contradicted by modern thinkers. This move was championed by Thomas Hobbes. This distinction and separation betrayed the tendencies of post-modernity. It was not only limited to politics but it extended to the republican tendencies of separating religion from science and technology. For Thomas Hobbes, the Leviathan, the body politic epitomized sovereignty. Consequently, religion, which was considered as one of the institutions of the State was subordinate to the State and controlled by the State. As opposed to medieval thoughts of Augustine and Aquinas, the State of Hobbes was autonomous and in control of all aspects including religion/church. This separation was later perpetuated by John Locke who made a distinction between the Church and the State. Locke's thesis hinged on religious tolerance, whereby plurality in religious worship was emphasized. In these perspectives of social contract thinkers, religion and politics, the Church and the State are placed as autonomous institutions. However, politics is more binding and autonomous since all the activities of the Church are subordinate to the laws of the State (Nde, 2020). This provides a secular perception of religion as the Church is presented as a human institution.

Despite efforts to separate the Church from the State, controversies, tensions, ambiguity, abuses of power on both realms and misrepresentations persist on the intersection between religion and politics. This is precisely because one wonders whether Church ministers could make moral pronouncements and at the same time avoid interference into politics. In such contexts, Church ministers are advised to stay away from politics by most politicians, especially when the discourses in Church obstruct their interests. Most often, politicians advise Church ministers to simply preach the good news stay away from politics and leave politics with its hard facts to politicians. At the same time, it is not uncommon to find an abuse of power by some Church ministers. Some may propound what they consider to be the truth with very sentimental and uncharitable language. These at times degenerate to hate speech and the compromise of the gospel of love the basis of peace and reconciliation. If one were to simply sample the socio-political crises in Cameroon, one would discern these tendencies in order to interpret conflicting roles, abuses of power and misrepresentation of the role of the Church in political matters. Owing to all these, what is the extent to which religion / Church is allowed to interfere in political matters given the contention in *Africae Munus*, #37 that "the Church wishes to be a sign and safeguard of the human person's transcendence. She must also enable people to seek the supreme truth regarding their deepest identity and their questions, so that just solutions can be found to their problems"? Who determines the extent and what are the critical issues to be addressed by religion in society? This paper argues that religion and politics are autonomous institutions. However, they have a common objective, which is the well-being of human beings. For this precise reason, any arbitrary separation is artificial and unacceptable. The gospel of love, which enhances the salvation of humans lies within the subject matter of both religion and politics/ Church and State.

Conceptual review

The Church refers to the body of Christ under the auspices of the Pope, the representative of Saint Peter. It is within this body that each and every Christian is a living stone. Thus, the church is an institution or formal organization with a particular objective. In popular minds the church is associated with buildings and missions. *Ekklesia* is the Greek word that provides the meaning of the Church. *Ek* is "out of" and "*kaleo*" to call, to invite. This refers to a group of people who are called. Religion refers to the expression of beliefs, feelings, rituals and practices that portray one's relationship to the supernatural creator, who is God (Van Ort, 1991). These concepts will be used interchangeably in the work, so the operational definitions indicate that the practice of religion is the duty of the church.

Politics derives its meaning to the Greek word "*polis*", meaning city. Socrates and Plato talked about Greek city-states, referring to *polis* in the *Republic* (Plato, 1968). Aristotle traces the origin of the State within the framework of the family where every individual is a political animal. In this context, politics serves the purpose of ensuring the well-being of the people. Justice is one of the principal virtues of governance in the *Republic* of Plato and it is within framework that happiness "*eudaimonia*" could be attained. Aristotle also identifies "*eudaimonia*" as the primary goal of every political action. Owing to these ancient perspectives, the meaning of politics is far from the mundane understanding of it as deception. The primary objective of politics is to ensure the well-being of the people in the life of the city (Maritain, 1951). This is only possible through the practice of virtues like wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.

Peace is more than armistice, more than the cessation of violence. Peace is unity and harmony. In a peaceful world, people are all pleased to cooperate with one another. When we have attained true peace, there will be no person who has any purpose that any other person seeks to thwart. In a peaceful world, everyone will feel the truth of justice and happiness. In this case, peace refers to a state of harmony that leads to communal living with the assurance of the well-being of all. It is a product of justice. Karl Peschke defines peace beyond the absence of war, terror and violence. He emphasizes the assurance of opportunities for self-realization, transcending conditions that limit human potential (2010; pp. 630-632). Peace amongst humans presupposes peace with God and His will. Prerequisite for peace include; solidarity and the promotion of justice, sensitivity to others, freedom from prejudice, tolerance, ability to compromise and readiness for reconciliation.

The egalitarian says that justice is equality. There is a conceptual difficulty in specifying how beings as different from each other as humans are could ever be equal, unless we create a society where all humans are female clones of one another. (This should be technologically feasible within a few decades, if it is not already.) But I do not think that egalitarians want a society of clones. Ackerman (1980:113-20) has offered a suggestion for determining whether any persons among a genetically diverse group are genetically disadvantaged. Ackerman also asserts that every person has a right to be genetically undominated. John Rawls (1973:338) has proposed that the talents that individuals possess be regarded as a common pool and that those who have more than an average share have an obligation to compensate those who have

less than an average share. Ronald Dworkin (1981:283-345) has made the contractarian suggestion that people can justly be required to pay an income tax that represents the insurance against being untalented that they would have desired to purchase before they knew what talents they would have. Ackerman (1980:132-33) suggests that each person who is genetically dominated is owed compensation by those who dominate him. All of these suggestions should be rejected. Talents are not a common pool from which some persons have taken more than their shares.

Another perspective considers justice as retributive. This refers to prosecution or criminal accountability. All these are extremes. Sustainable peace addresses the root causes. This is because most conflicts are outcomes of flagrant injustices and human rights abuses committed by elites and institutions. Where there is lack of harmony between the bodies involved, there is lack of justice. Consider the system theory. *Africae Munus*, # 41 defines justice as charity when it states that “solidarity is the guarantee of justice and peace and hence of unity, so that the abundance of some compensates for the want of others. Charity which ensures a bond with God goes beyond distributive justice. (...) anything that takes man away from God cannot be justice”.

Religion as politics

In this sub-section, I contend that the task of the church in establishing justice, peace and reconciliation in the society obliges her to be involved in political matters. The point one needs to explain is the extent to which religion, which is within the competence of the church has to intersect with politics. Following the assertion from *Africae Munus*, this task of the church is not an easy one. It is not easy because of the challenges involved in defining the boundaries within which the church has to be engaged in politics in order to distinguish it from what the church is not expected to do. It will be very simplistic to think that religion could be possibly separated from politics. This is because if the Church in its religious preoccupations has to render discourses on moral education, raising questions of justice, condemning evil practices like embezzlement, electoral manipulation and fraud, oppression and exploitation in repressive regimes, then the church has to be necessarily involved in politics (*Gaudium et Spes* 76). It is the Church’s duty to ensure the well-being of the citizens in the State, primarily because these citizens constitute the body of Christ, as members of the Church (*Rerum Novarum* 1891).

Considering politics in the real sense of the term as initially explained, the practice of politics within this understanding is justifiable. From the foregoing understanding of politics, what has religion got to offer to ensure the establishment of justice, peace and reconciliation in times of crises in the state? Should the Church simply stay away from all political discourses and preoccupy herself with preaching the good news for the salvation of souls? Should the preaching of good news not have a bearing to the practical experiences of the people? Is heavenly salvation possible without an appropriate healthy, happy and good life on earth? These questions are not meant to be answered, but simply to provoke thought and to present the Church/ religion as an institution capable of providing practical solutions to the daily problems of the citizens as well as Christians in the *Polis*. *Africae Munus*, #19 states that “Unless the power of reconciliation is created in people’s hearts, political commitment to peace lacks its inner premise.” Again, this text reads that “(AM # 25). It is only

through the grace of God, that reconciliation is guaranteed”. On the basis of this thesis, one is advocating for an “ecclesiastical politicking” to ensure peace and reconciliation in times of divisive politics and the oppression of the masses (*Quadragesimo Anno* 1931; *Mater et Magistra*, 1969; *Populorum Progressio*, 1967; *Laborem Exercens*, 1989; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987).

In order to buttress the above argument, it is imperative to refer to the impact of events and ideas from the 20th to the 21st centuries (Goldhagen, 1996). During this period, we experienced a paradigm shift to post-modernity. This period experienced an unjustifiable trust on science and the growth of the tendency to exclude religion, the divine, the church from the affairs of the world as well as science. The increase in the experiences of repressive regimes, militarization, fake news, deception in politics, the growing divide between the rich and the poor, destruction of rainforest, global warming, massive violation of human rights and lack of educational facilities provide the justification for religion to get involved in politics. These experiences sampled testify obstacles to the well-being of persons in the *polis*. These are acts of injustice betraying the absence of peace in the world (George, 1883; George, 1887; Clark, 1899). With the church’s primary commission to restore peace, religion is perceived as an invaluable means for the achievement of this goal. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you” says the Lord, and he adds “not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn14:27) 18. This commission to the church justifies its engagement in politics even if it is not an easy task.

The invaluable role of peace for the well-being of the citizens in the *polis* justifies the Church’s involvement in several political debates in the world today. Considering the present situation in the modern and post-modern world, human survival and the survival of the planet is dependent on peace (Shourmatoff, 1990). This peace can only be achieved between persons, families, tribes, cultures, nations as well as churches. Referring to Kung (2008), this peace is only possible within dialogue. Religion /Church is an archetype of dialogue. Consequently, dialogue is not possible without the capital role played by religion. The process of justice, peace and reconciliation has to be fostered within the framework of the church’s meaning of peace. “(...) Not as the world gives, do I give you” (Jn14:27). The socio-political crises in Cameroon betray a crisis of care, a crisis of love and a crisis of forgiveness. With the influence of Judaism, Martin Buber offers a therapy to these crises in his celebrated text *Ich und Du*. He asserts that “*Alles wirklich Leben ist Begegnung*” (Buber, 1923:11). In his thesis, encounter is at the basis of all relationships. The relationship we have with the other has to reflect our dialogue with God. From this understanding, religion appears as a very strong agent of peace in political practice. *Africae Munus*, #42 reiterates the justice of love. Jesus’s visit in the house of Zacchaeus in (LK 19:1-10) portrays a wider perspective of justice. It is therefore important for one to investigate the insights of religion that serve as the tradition for global ethics of justice, peace and reconciliation in the world and in Cameroon in particular (Maddox, 1999; Nicolaus 2001). How could religion serve as a prophylactic to future political crises in Cameroon and the world at large?

The practice of politics in the past has revealed unjust experiences of torture, assassinations and violation of human rights by repressive regimes. What is discernable is that post-modern times with the banishment of religion lack a sense of how to guide

changes that occur. These changes occur with very devastating effects (Collier, 1979). The misuse of scientific research and abuses of power justifies most of the political interventions of the Church in the world. Silence is the weapon of the oppressor and the Church has to understand that silence in the face of injustice is complicity to injustice (Freire, 1970; Romero, 1985; John Paul II, 1991). Moral questions regarding life and the suffering masses require rigorous interventions from religious bodies. In this light *Africae Munus*, #38 contends that “grave injustices abound in the world especially in Africa. This is because there is much that religion can contribute to the process of peace and reconciliation. First, the teachings of religion provide a consistent concern for human well-being viz; human dignity, freedom and respect for rights. Also, religion provides norms for basic human behaviour. Take the example of the Decalogue with all prohibitions to killing, stealing and immorality (Kung, 1999; Kung, 2008).

Religion is politics because it provides the bedrock for peace. Peace does not mean tranquility. In *The Republic*, peace entails harmony in all parts of the whole, where each and every part has to play its own function (Plato, 1968). The practice of democracy entails morality, whose foundation is religion. Dewey argues that democracy is primarily moral rather than political (Dewey, 1966). Within democracy, there must be transparency, checks and balances so that the massive interests of some individuals and groups are put under control. Scandals of corruption, embezzlement, human rights violations compromise the process of peace. The Church cannot search for peace in the face of such malpractices in the *polis*. The search for peace without justice is baseless. And true justice necessarily leads to peace. In the midst of political matters, the silence of the Church to address issues that are related to the well-being of her Christians who are the citizens of the State is complicity to injustice (Freire, 1970). This phenomenon becomes glaring when an individual plunders the whole nation of her resources leaving the poor masses to languish in abject poverty. At times these are members of the Church brandishing their ill-gotten wealth to enjoy high profile and a blessed status in the Church. Most often, they are referred to as blessed, lucky and persons who have experienced breakthrough (Plato, 1968). While this reality is common with politicians, they expect Church ministers to preach the beatitudes and shelve moral questions addressing issues of justice. Reading *Africae Munus*, #38 corroborates this argument “(...) the plundering of the goods of the earth by a minority to the detriment of entire peoples is unacceptable, because it is immoral. Justice obliges us to render to each his due, *ius suum unigue trubere*”. The search for peace cannot be attained by simply reciting the beatitudes to Christians. Hard facts and questions on morality have to be handled in order to ensure democratic values of life.

Again, religion is the foundation of education to good citizenship. Good citizenship entails proper respect for the rights and duties one is expected to observe. There can be no peace without good citizenship. *Africae Munus*, #34 states that “The Church is involved in civic formation of citizens and assisting in electoral process in a number of countries”. The education of the citizens is also the mission of the church and this is only possible with the Church’s engagement in politics. Citizenship education also entails participation in free and fair elections, respect for the rights of others and the performance of ones duties in the State. Religion gives grounds for all these and testifies to all persons that

every authority comes from God. The laws of the state are not arbitrary, but they owe their origins in the natural law- which is derived from Eternal and Divine law (Aquinas, ST, I-IIq.93.a3). At the same time the Church’s teachings on the well-being of persons in the *polis* provide grounds for protest and resistance to unjust living conditions (Romero, 1985). Justice and peace commission within the heart of the church ensures that there is concern for human well-being, dignity, freedom and respect of human rights even within Church institutions. Religion serves as the base for the principles of basic human behaviour, promoting the golden rule, offering genuine inspiration and motivation for living a moral life with samples of heroic virtues, and providing justification for suffering with the joyful hope of salvation (Kung, 1999; Kung, 2008).

Church as distinct from the State and politics

This sub-section offers grounds for the Church to keep away from politics. The interference of religion or the Church on some political issues raised here is unacceptable and against the autonomy of the State. The thesis to be developed here is that the State is secular and it is unacceptable for the church to interfere into certain political matters. *Africae Munus* asserts that politics “(...) lies out of the church’s direct competence- (...)”. Here, we are responding to the initial question which sought to limit the power of religion in politics. There are several arguments to be advanced here and these include; keeping away from partisan politics, holding office of responsibility in civic life without prior permission of the local ordinary, perpetuating electoral fraud through uncritical political discourses, abuse of the pulpit with sentimental politics and hate speech and hasty expression of motions of support.

First, the church has to stay off partisan politics. Partisan politics here refers to militant participation in a particular political party. Christians come to Church with diverse political opinions and it could be very scandalous for them to follow religious teachings that show sympathy to some political ideologies to the relative neglect of the other. There are several ways through which Church ministers could fall prey to this prohibition of the canon law. A Church minister whose sermons highlight the ideals of one political party at the dawn of elections to the relative neglect of the other is guilty of partisan politics. Canon law advocates neutrality on the part of Church ministers. Consequently, sermons have to serve as pedagogic pieces to enlighten Christians on right choices without necessarily expressing one’s sympathy for a particular political opinion. In this context, religion is a strong pedagogic means for good political choices without degenerating to partisan politics.

Second church ministers are not allowed to accept appointments in public life without the prior permission of their local ordinary. This perspective is also expressed in the spirit of Canon law 285 paras. 3-4 and it is argued that such permissions could only be granted in case of extreme necessity (The Code of Canon Law, 1983). This comes with the permission of the Bishop and one will not celebrate the Sacraments in public. For a Church minister who receives this appointment, he will be excluded from the exercise of religious duties. This is the context in which we argue for the distinction between the state and the church. When Joseph Owusu Agyemang- a catholic priest from Southern Ghana was sworn in as judge of High Court of justice, questions related to this canon law were raised. Also, Archbishop Ahouna of Bouake,

appointed President of the National Commission for reconciliation and compensation of victims (CONARCIV) in 2015 raised further questions because this was a structure to compensate victims of the 2010-2011 post-election violence. (<https://international.la-croix.com/religion/>). Here, the Church is clear that a priest is not allowed to run for political office and thus the intersection is not possible, and both bodies operate as autonomous.

Third, church ministers should be weary of being accomplices to electoral fraud. Here, sermons with political pronouncements on the day of elections are unacceptable. Church ministers are also advised not to tell the people of God who to vote for. They are not supposed to actively campaign, endorse or publicly support particular candidates or parties. This attitude could breed hatred and violence thus compromising transparent elections. This point is also discernable in a context where Church ministers use parish cars to escape with filled ballot boxes for egoistic interests. This direct participation in the political process is out of the direct competence of the church. This attitude could compromise the moral authority a church minister enjoys within the community. "The role of the Church is not political in nature. Her task is to open the world to the religious sense of proclaiming Christ" (*Africae Munus*, #36).

Fourth, sentimental political pronouncements and hate speech from the pulpit are unacceptable. The Church is critical and her ministers have to exercise sensitivity and a good sense of judgment within the political drama of a country. This is far from saying that they have to be silent in the face of injustice. The point is that truth is patient and gentle and it has to be expressed in the language of love "*Veritas in caritate*". Verbal violence begets more violence and this contradicts the very essence of God. God is rational and every discourse arising from His house has to promote peace and reconciliation. The word of God cannot be a source of violence. If God is order, then everything divine has to participate in the order set in place by God. Absolute reason cannot beget violence and disorder. This violates the principle of non-contradiction. Thus, the religion provides the basis for peace and reconciliation without the abuse of the practice of politics.

Lastly, hasty expression of motions of support on behalf of the Church has been very controversial even amongst Church ministers. It is not the place of the Church to express popular will on political matters especially within doubtful electoral proceedings. At times one wonders whether this is necessary or whether someone is speaking on behalf of others. This is not an attitude that promotes peace and unity but it is very divisive in its nature. Church ministers have to be neutral in making such pronouncements because this political experience is out of the direct competence of the Church. Religion, which is a unifying instrument, could be an agent of division if its members abuse its autonomy and dabble into issues that are not meant to ensure the well-being and happiness of the people of God. Hasty declaration from ministers of the Church on electoral matters could be guilty of *argumentum ad verecundiam* (misplaced authority).

Religion in dialogue with politics

In this sub-section, I argue that religion and politics are two sides of the same coin. The controversy that arises from the intersection between religion and politics is because of the abuses experienced and the misrepresentation of the role of religion for egoistic interest. A keen study of the objective of religion betrays

the practice of social life, which necessarily involves questions surrounding justice, peace, happiness, reconciliation and respect of the rights of all.

Considering the argument that every authority comes from God, one is justifiably correct to assert that all the laws of the State are subordinate to the laws of God. Aquinas argues that if the laws of the State contradict the natural law, which is derived from divine law, they should only be obeyed for the sake of peace (Aquinas, *ST*, Ia-IIae,q.100.a5,ad.1m). This is a rationalist approach to the respect of the law. Commands and actions here are not respected because they have been commanded, but rather because they concur to the dictates of reason. God is absolute reason and no rational instruction escapes the will of God. On the grounds of this argument, no representative of religion has the right to stir up prejudice, hatred and enmity towards any groups of persons, or even incite legitimate wars (Bernardin, 1991; Kung, 1999; Herman et al., 2008:29).

Consequently, the state is meant to foster the well-being of her citizens through political organization. The politics that compromises the happiness of its citizens compromises its primary objective. This will probably be politics for the interest of the stronger party perpetrated by repressive regimes and massive violations of human rights. This despotism is far from what is truly willed within the realm of political life. Politics in the true sense has to foster critical initiatives that protect life, ensure the well-being of all and deliver persons from all forms of oppression. An intersection between religion and politics commits to a culture of non-violence and respect for life, promotes a culture of solidarity and a just economic order and lastly a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness. "No woman or man, no State or Church or religious community has the right to speak lies to other human beings" (Bernardin, 1991; Kung, 1999; Herman et al., 2008:29). This assertion is true for journalists, media workers, artists, writers and scientists in their exercise of academic freedom. In addition, this is a prohibition to leaders of countries, politicians and political parties to whom we entrust our freedom. *Africae Munus*, #130 reinforces this argument by stating that "The church for her part is committed to promoting within her own ranks and within society a culture that respects the rule of law".

Conclusion

Owing to the preceding arguments on the role of religion in public life, one can discern the dialectic that characterizes the whole debate. However, it has to be retained that to a large extent, the practice of religion entails major political preoccupations. The role of the Church has to be balanced by her servants' engagement in public sphere. What remains very critical is that the Church has to learn how to phrase her religious presuppositions in secular reasoning and language. This is the only way she will capture the increasing secular worldview. The salvation of souls is the primary objective of the Church (Block, 1976). It has to be noted that this salvation begins on earth, for a miserable life and poor living conditions could compromise this mission. *Africae Munus*, #127 observes that the "Church in Africa must help to build up society in cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good" (#129). Through a systematic, sustained and collaborative approach involving ecclesiastical bodies, organizations and government, the happiness of Christians who are citizens of the

State will be achieved. Haphazard confrontational approach has to practical bearing to the well-being of the people of God (*Africae Munus*, #2). Peace and reconciliation cannot be attained with God (*Africae Munus*, #25).

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