



The church and politics today: cooperation and autonomy

The relationship between the Church and politics has from inception oscillated between mutual suspicion and conflict at one time; and complementarities and corporation at another.

The diverging motives in their origin and existence have accounted for their disagreements, while the social context of their interactions has accounted for their compatibility. In contemporary society, especially in Africa, where the merging states have come to be confronted by the Church in their developmental policies and endeavours (E. O Nyama, 2008, p.174), situations have arisen when it has become imperative to once again examine this ambivalent relationship between the Church and the sphere of politics. The burden of this article is to show the points of convergence and autonomy between the Church and politics.

THE CHURCH

The Church has had a dynamic image. The Church fathers gave its first picture. Justin the Martyr used the word Ecclesia- 'the called out ones'. From this perspective we understand why the Church is spoken of as 'the elect', 'the saints' and why Jesus asked Peter to 'build my Church' (Mt 16:18). In the wake of Greek neo-Platonism, the Church according to Hans Kung was seen as the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts. To Roman Stoicism, the Church is principally seen as a well ordered community governed by laws. In the early Church, they were referred to as 'the people of God' or 'the Church of God '. Vatican II speaks of the Church as 'the people of God' (Gaudium et Spes. 11), "Bearer of the message of salvation" (Ibid. 1), "Mystical Body of Christ" (Indulgentiarum Doctrina. 6). However, Jude Njoku (2008, p.60) understands the Church as the whole body of Christian believers or any division of this body in professing the same creed and acknowledging the same ecclesiastical authority. It includes among the Church any non-Christian religious society (like Islam, ATR etc.), organization or congregation. For the purpose of this study, this wider extension capacity is curtailed.

POLITICS

Politics ultimately comes from the Greek word polis meaning state or city. Politikos describes anything concerning the state or city affairs. In Latin, this was politicus and in French politique. Thus it became politics in the English language. The Wikipedia Encyclopedia defines politics as the process by which groups of people make decisions. The term is generally applied to behaviour within civil governments, but politics have been observed in all human group interaction, including corporate, academic and religious institutions. It consists of social



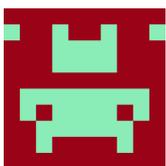
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relations involving authority and power, and refers to the regulation of a political unit and the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy. It involves the art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs. What consists in good politics has been the concern of philosophers right from the time of Plato to the present. Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics, St Augustine's City of God and City of Man, Cicero's Republic and The Laws, Aquinas' subordination of human laws to divine laws which logically places the Church above the state; Machiavelli's The Prince which reverses Aquinas' political theory by placing the state above the Church, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke's Contract, Montesquieu's perception of Liberty as the end of Government, Jean Jack Rousseau's General Will, Jeremy Bentham's Principle of utility, and many others is an indication that politics is a perennial concern for human beings.

From the above definitions of politics and church, it is obvious that they are two different and autonomous institutions. However, does their autonomy mean that there is no nexus between the two spheres, sometimes to an extent that the point of divide is difficult to trace?

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