

The Elusive Vision of the Common Good as a Challenge to Political Theology in Kenya

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Abstract

Political theology is about interpreting and applying the gospel to diverse aspects of public life, thus positively impacting society. Contrary to expectations, participation in Christian worship has not always produced transformational believers who uphold and spread positive Christian values, unlike the corrupting practices in the broader society. The result is that Christian impact on society is often less than expected. Existing scholarship on political theology suggests this is partly due to a lack of contextual and effective political theologies. Such contextual political theologies would entail Christians bringing their visions of the good life to shape various aspects of public life. This paper is based on a study of the political theology of the Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS), conducted using the pastoral circle method. The paper argues that the lack of a clear political vision within the church results in ambivalence when confronted with specific political issues of the day. Since the nation-state in Africa, as currently conceptualized, is unable to be or shape this vision of the common good, it is the responsibility of Christians to see what Africa is, discern from God what it can and should be, and work to bring this about. Unless this is done, efforts to achieve political transformation through an infusion of godly values into various sectors of society, as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, will not achieve meaningful missional results.

Keywords: Political Theology; Nation-State; Common Good; Public Life; Political Transformation; Contextual Theologies.

1.0. Introduction

Political theology refers to the interpretation and application of the gospel to diverse aspects of public life, such as civic, cultural, psychological, social, and economic (Kirwan: 2009, 2–5). James Smith (2017, 11) argues against the widespread confusion of politics with the narrowed-down aspect of elective politics in democratic situations. He says politics goes



beyond the law and relationships with the state to encompass a community's shared and habit-forming cravings, desires, longings, rites, and practices. Therefore, political theology informs the demands Christians perceive their faith puts on them as they relate to the public life around them. It influences the agenda and the engagement methods between the believers and the society in which they live, which is the arena of their mission.

This attempt to apply the gospel to public life often encounters concerns about an apparent disconnect between the prevalence of those who profess the Christian faith on the one hand and, on the other hand, the impact of this faith on diverse sectors of public life. As James Smith observes, participation in Christian worship has not always brought forth transformational believers who uphold and spread positive Christian values, contrary to the prevailing societal values (Smith: 2017, 201).

The Fellowship of Christian Unions (FOCUS) is a non-denominational Christian organization that serves as an umbrella body for Christian Unions (CUs) from different universities and colleges throughout Kenya. Upon their graduation, these former students continue to be associate members of FOCUS, spread out in seven regions across the country, as they encourage one another to fulfill the FOCUS goal of producing graduates who would positively impact the church and society (FOCUS, 2018). In its 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, FOCUS wanted to equip its members to “bear witness to the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ” in their personal lives and professions and engage in social justice issues. This desire, they noted, was informed by the following concern:

The large number of Kenyans who profess to be ‘Christian,’ as seen in the population census and church attendance across the country, paints Kenya as a Christian country. Yet, on the other hand, the entrenched corruption at all levels of society, inequality, ethnic hatred, and divisions point to a failure to significantly impact society with the gospel. This gap between the potential and actual impact raises questions about the 7,000 graduates from our Christian Unions every year. While there is broad consensus that the FOCUS ministry has had a good impact and influence in the ministry of the church in Kenya and abroad, and in the lives of individual Christians and their families, the same seems to be missing or is hardly noticeable in Kenya's political and socio-economic realms. Where is the influence of Christians in today's politics? Why is corruption continuing unabated when we have Christians in influential positions? (FOCUS, 2016)

The Fellowship of Christian Unions has extensively mobilized its members (students and graduates) towards political engagement. Part of this has been done through its triennial missions' mobilization and training conferences known as *Commission Conferences*. These have been held since 1988 and have been attended by tens of thousands of students and graduates. An essential theme in these conferences has been socio-political engagement as an



act of mission to society. The 2017 Commission Conference theme was *His Power, His Witnesses: Transforming the World*, attracted 3,050 students and graduates (FOCUS: 2017). It is, therefore, clear that if there is any deficiency in the impact of Christian University graduates on the socio-political terrain of the country, such deficiency would not be because of a lack of mobilization of Christians to engage society with the holistic message of the gospel.

The study titled *Towards a Contextual Political Theology: A Study of the Fellowship of Christian Unions* was based on the premise that this gap exists, at least in part, in the formulation and implementation of relevant political theologies. Several scholars have identified the lack of contextual political theologies as a significant hindrance to the church's socio-political influence. Oliver Kisaka (2019, 8–11) observed that while there is some scholarship on the role of the church in engaging with the state, there was a lack of a clear, contextual, experience-based theological foundation that would inform the reasons and manner of Christians' participation in the socio-economic and political processes. Christians lack civic competence. His study concluded that "Christianity in Kenya was heavily confession-based but had not worked out how the Bible's teaching could be harnessed to make them strong for their practical lives at home, work, public space, politics, and business."

In analyzing the history of the All-African Conference of Churches (AACC) as one of the most significant ecumenical structures on the African continent, Teddy Sakupapa discusses the role and significance of the ecumenical movement for social change. He traces the AACC's conversations around various political theologies, such as liberation theology, reconstruction theology, and the theology of development. Its various ecumenical conferences through the years have been marked by constant conversations about what theological models would work best for its context. Sakupapa, however, concludes that there has not been significant success in drawing on local theories to develop a contextual theological framework. Consequently, he argues that while the history of the AACC is replete with significant developmental and social transformation efforts, these efforts have "remained theologically ambiguous" (Sakupapa: 2018).

This theological ambiguity that constrains political transformation is occasioned, at least in part, by a lack of a clear vision of the common good. Emmanuel Katongole (Katongole: 2011, 33–40) argues that a great deficiency in attempts by African theologians and politicians to transform the continent is the lack of a fresh vision of what Africa ought to be.



This paper focuses on how developing a vision of the common good, a critical aspect of political theology, can bridge this gap, as pointed out in existing scholarship and observed in the experiences of members of the Fellowship Of Christians Unions.

2.0. Methodology

The Fellowship of Christian Unions brings together Christian Unions in universities and colleges in Kenya, equipping them to positively impact the church and society. The organization has been concerned about the apparent failure of its thousands of Christian graduates to influence Kenya's politics significantly. The study aimed to propose a contextual and relevant political theology, which can also provide lessons for the broader church in Kenya. A qualitative study approach and the pastoral cycle method were used.

The pastoral cycle method is also categorized as a method in action research. As its key characteristic, action research focuses on understanding the phenomenon under study to change and improve the situation (MacDougall et al.: 2006). It draws the researcher and the participants into collectively examining a problematic situation or action to improve it (Kindon et al.: 2007). This research aimed at ultimately improving the outcome of the Fellowship of Christian Unions' stated desire for greater, gospel-inspired, socio-political impact.

The study was conducted following the four steps of the pastoral cycle method: insertion, social analysis, faith reflection, and action. Insertion involves getting into the situation being studied and gathering the information, data, stories, and descriptions of what is happening. The researcher, at this stage, is informed by the question: "What is happening here?" (Wijsen et al.: 2006, 251) The researcher conducted an archival study, one-on-one interviews, and a questionnaire survey to establish how FOCUS has mobilized and equipped its members for political engagement and the theological underpinnings that have informed such mobilization and action. Social analysis entailed examining what scholars have said about the subject of political theology to gain a better understanding of the experiences observed. Theological reflection, the third step, involves reflecting on what Scripture has to say about political theology. The final step, action, involved drawing from all three previous steps to suggest an action that would make the situation observed to be better.



3.0. Insertion: The Desire for a Clearer Vision of the Common Good

The study established that the theological position of FOCUS is that Christians are called to infuse Christian values into various sectors of society as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. While this “salt and light” message has achieved significant results in the discipleship of Christians for holistic missions, FOCUS members still desire greater clarity of and consensus about its political theology. Fear of divisions, often along ethnic lines, has made the organization deliberately ambivalent when applying this “salt and light” teaching to specific political issues of the day. It has reduced its members’ ability to effectively participate in the country’s politics.

An examination of FOCUS’ political engagement from 1973 to 2020, as captured in various archival documents, reveals an enduring search for theological clarity. This clarity has been needed to inform members’ political engagement and to galvanize them for the same. In its initial years, the organization was wary of political engagement. As captured in the first constitution, its stated objectives were “entirely non-political.” They focused on promoting the formation of Christian Unions in institutions of higher learning and helping such Christian Unions in their efforts at evangelism and discipleship (FOCUS, 1977). This posture did not last long, as the members soon had to confront and respond to emerging political realities. On 13th December 1975, at an Associates’ Conference, the agenda was to discuss the “important issues of our time.” The three issues for discussion were the Moratorium, the Christian view on liberation movements, and how to share the “national cake” in Kenya. The ensuing discussions at the meeting reveal that the moratorium here refers to the 1971 call by John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, for a temporary halt for foreign missionaries and funds so that the African church could find its footing. The discussion on liberation movements involved a comparative analysis of the positions of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). The sharing of the national cake refers to the distribution of national resources (FOCUS, 1975).

This did not, however, mean openness to overt political engagement. At a meeting with then-President Moi in 1981, the organization’s leaders expressed their gratitude to God that he had laid on the President’s heart a determination to root out various social ills that plagued the nation, such as corruption, smuggling, nepotism, tribalism, and lawlessness. They, in turn, reiterated their commitment to proclaim Jesus Christ among students as the only power that could transform citizens and make their country better (FOCUS, 1981).



In subsequent years, FOCUS gradually moved to define the missional mandate of its members as a calling to be salt and light in society. They sought to challenge graduates not to be contented with only earning a living in their places of work or to compartmentalize life into the secular and spiritual. Instead, they were called to integrate faith in their careers and be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and yeast in the dough so that they could influence their societies for Christ (FOCUS, 1991).

Although there were efforts in subsequent years to pursue greater clarity about what exactly being salt and light of the society entailed, these were unsuccessful. According to Abraham Rugo, an Associate member and former coordinator of the FOCUS Associates Social Action Mobilisation Office, fear of polarization due to divergent political and ethnic affiliations of its members hindered FOCUS from crystalizing its political vision and commitment. Individuals were left to clarify what this entailed in light of the prevailing specific political issues and questions. Collectively, the organization remained silent or deliberately ambivalent, espousing values and convictions but unwilling to collaborate on them (A. Rugo, personal communication: September 31, 2021).

Discussions at an Associate Members' Easter retreat in 2015 led to the formation of the Hesabika Trust, launched in April 2016. "Hesabika" is a Swahili word meaning "to be counted," and it captures the organization's call for everyone to translate their concern for the country into action and to "stand up and be counted for the transformation of Kenya." Hesabika's mission is "to mobilize all Kenyans to stand up and be counted for the transformation of Kenya. We challenge each to take responsibility for their actions and not just point fingers or spectate when things are going wrong" (Hesabika Trust, 2022).

Interviews with FOCUS members revealed a desire for greater clarity and agreement about the vision and specific commitments embedded in this "salt and light" teaching. The deliberate silence or ambivalence on the specific political issues of the day has resulted in members who are well-disciplined and mobilized to be the salt and light of the society but who lack a collective vision and strategy of how to apply their faith to the pressing and specific political questions of the day. Informant 7 remarked:

I wish more was done to unpack what exactly being salt and light in our context looks like. We are willing to live up to the expectation, but sometimes, one just wishes for more clarity. For example, when I am extorted and forced to pay for a service I desperately need, am I a perpetrator of corruption or a victim of injustice? Would I have lost my saltiness? Then there are those times of elections or public debate on national policy issues when one wishes this salt-and-light message could be interpreted just a little further. (Informant 7, personal communication, November 2, 2021)



Informant 13, an associate member, sees FOCUS' unwillingness to craft a collective vision and agenda for its political engagement as a serious failure. He argues that shying away from taking precise positions implies subordinating the Christian agenda and position to the ethnic agenda and position. It means that Christians have no say on what Kenya should be and what its citizens should work towards. Like the rest of the church, the FOCUS is left in the unenviable position of responding to and providing commentaries on visions, agendas, and strategies set by others, who often have ulterior interests. In the process, God's vision and agenda are automatically forfeited, and his people have little to offer society. Even the church's teachings on morality are significantly tamed regarding political issues (Informant 13, personal communication, November 9, 2021).

Without such a God-given vision and agenda for political involvement, the tendency has been to call people to fulfill their citizenship responsibilities as defined by the state. Informant 20 (personal communication, November 15, 2021) and Informant 22 (Informant 22, personal communication, November 15, 2021) noted that Kenyans, including members of FOCUS, have very little allegiance to the nation-state called Kenya. They tend to have a stronger allegiance to their ethnic groups, and when ethnic interests clash with national goals, the former holds stronger. Informant 22 said, "Some of us are called upon to stand up for a nation-state we struggle to believe in. When this comes at significant personal cost, it is easier to look out for personal interests and let Kenya be" (Informant 22, personal communication, November 15, 2021). Informant 20 posited that this could be one of the greatest drivers of corruption and aloofness in civic participation in Kenya. The state seems to be a foreign entity, undeserving of any allegiance and commitment. The phrase "*mali ya umma*" (Kiswahili for public resources) has become synonymous with assets without an owner, available to be misused and looted when convenient. He said, "At the end of the day, the reality is that when the rubber meets the road, when the cost of civic participation is significantly high, many of us have resolved in our hearts that Kenya is not worth dying for" (Informant 20, personal communication, November 15, 2021).

Likewise, this call to national patriotism instead of ethnic patriotism does not sit well with some members of the Fellowship of Christian Unions. Informant 13 and Informant 24 questioned an apparent assumption that democracy and nationalism are the Christian way of doing politics. Informant 13 (Informant 13, personal communication, November 9, 2021) asked, "Where does it say in Scripture that feeling more Kenyan than Kamba (ethnic group) is more godly than the other way round? Aren't our ethnic groups more God inspired than the



idea of Kenya? Have we really reflected sufficiently to conclude that democratic elections are the best for us, or are we just taking everything we have been given at face value?”

In a related observation, Informant 24 (Informant 24, personal communication, November 19, 2021) noted an increase in the number of educated Christians, mostly university and Christian Union graduates, who are questioning some of the socio-political constructs that have hitherto been taken for granted, especially with regards to Kenya’s relationship with its colonial past and global partners. Such requires a level of theological engagement that the Fellowship of Christian Unions has not yet ventured into.

4.0. Social Analysis: A Vision of the Common Good as a Key Concept in Political Theology

The previous section has established that the Fellowship of Christian Unions members desire a clearer vision of what their political engagement should work towards. This section analyses what scholars have said about a vision of the common good in the context of political theology. It aims to understand better the experience of the members of FOCUS.

An examination of diverse literature on the subject suggests that one of the defining features of political theology is the pursuit of the common good. Since society is diverse in its composition and interests, it is, in many ways, a contested space. Political theology steps into this space to discern what God wills for society and what his people should pursue and work toward.

The church’s success in political engagement depends on formulating clear political theologies to inform such participation, clearly defining the common good towards which it rallies its members and society. Miroslav Volf (Volf, 2011, Kindle Location 70-150) points out that religious people have the freedom and mandate to contribute to public life by bringing their visions of the good life to shape politics and other aspects of public life. Christ does not seek to mend the world through coercion and, therefore, does not call his church to propagate a coercive faith. The main thing that the Christian faith brings into the discourse about public life is a clear, God-inspired vision of the common good and human flourishing. Christians are called to work for this human flourishing by bearing witness to Christ, who embodies the good life.

This idea of the common good inevitably encounters the challenge of competing interests inherent in divergent and pluralistic societies. Since Christians are not to force their views on others, this pursuit of the common good requires persuasion. Smith (Smith, 2017a,



p. 6) urges Christians to draw from the doctrine of the incarnation, inviting and journeying together with all creation toward a shared prosperity.

Emmanuel Katongole observes that many prescriptions for Christian influence against Africa's social ills reflect a conviction that socio-political challenges stem from an underlying spiritual and moral crisis. Therefore, the Christian mission begins with forming a spiritual identity through spiritual rebirth and progressive spiritual transformation. The strategy to positively impact society's material, social, and political processes is to get Christians elected into public office, hoping their Christian commitment will translate into a better society through relevant programs and policies. What these rushed expectations and prescriptions miss is the reality that the most determinative contribution Christianity can make in Africa is not in terms of advocacy for nation-state modalities but instead fresh visions of what Africa is and can be (Katongole, 2011a, pp. 33–40).

One of the realities scholars appreciate is that this vision of the common good is not resident in the nation-state. If the state were the shaper and embodiment of the common good, then the task of the Christians would be reasonably straightforward. However, it is not and approaches that assume that nation-state politics is the primary way to effect social change are bound to fail. This, according to Katongole (Katongole, 2011b, pp. 58–72), is the mistake the African nationalists of the 1950s made, which resulted in legal but superficial states that lack legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens and cannot inspire loyalty, commitment, service, and sacrifice, especially when they come into competition with ethnic loyalties. Consequently, citizens tend to have an extractive relationship with the state.

What often passes as 'corruption' in Africa, however, only makes sense within the peculiar history and chemistry of African modernity. For ... without legitimation by any transcendental dream or vision, nation-state politics soon turns into a dogfight of the ruling elite for the spoils of political power or a means for "eating." Within this politics of the state as a "national cake" (to be shared), corruption is just another form of "eating" (Katongole, 2011b, pp. 80–81).

Cavanaugh argues that the nation-state is not, as it pretends, a promoter and protector of the common good. Instead, by claiming to be a neutral arbiter between society's many divergent groupings, the nation-state seeks and succeeds in marginalizing all alternative voices. When the church, therefore, accepts the state as being responsible for the common good, the church ends up being muted and pushed into the margins, reduced to being a commentator on the agenda set by the all-consuming "Leviathan" to the extent that even its moral reasoning and formation is shaped by the nation-state and the market (Cavanaugh, 2011, p. Kindle Locations 236-279).



This is why looking up to the nation-state as the promoter of the common good can go wrong, especially when the nation-state is flawed. Paul Gifford captures this by analyzing Kenya's Christianity, politics, and public life. Much in agreement with Katongole, he argues that Kenya has, throughout its independent history, been a neo-patrimonial state in which the elite marshal and then use power and state resources to buy and retain the support of the masses. Tracing some of Kenya's socio-economic challenges, including corruption, insecurity, ethnic hostility, and clashes, he argues that these do not point towards failure by and of the state but rather towards a system designed to perpetuate disorder as a political instrument. In this case, the state perpetuates itself at the expense of the common good (Gifford, 2009).

This observation that the nation-state is not necessarily the embodiment of the common good and can, as presently constituted, work against the same raises the need for other alternative avenues. A critical political theology task is enabling the church to accomplish this.

5.0. Theological Reflection: That All People May See God's Salvation (Luke 3:1–20)

Having seen what the Fellowship of Christian Unions members say about their vision of the common good and examined what scholars say about the same, this section seeks to look at this issue in light of Scripture.

Luke introduces the ministry of John the Baptist by highlighting the whole array of the political and religious leadership of the day: Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, his brother Phillip, Lysanias, and the priests Annas and Caiaphas. The introduction of the Messiah did not happen in a vacuum but in a place with various powers and interests already at play. It was a complex political and religious setting, with many parties and concerns that needed acknowledgment and attention. Darrel Bock notes Roman rule, the allies of Rome, and religious Judaism as the key players in this context, with Israel under subjection to Roman rule, yet with cooperation on the inside (Bock, 1994, p. 284).

In this context, his forerunning role was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins so that the crooked paths could become straight and the rough ways smooth. In John's mind and messaging, whereas there were many forces at play, the greatest obstacle standing between God's people and their ability to see God's salvation was sin.



John is a good example of what Jonathan Leeman refers to as the “deputization mandate” of God’s people, extended from the life of the church to her relationship with the rest of the world. Leeman points out that the Lord of the church is also the Lord of all domains, and he sends his deputies into every territory to proclaim who the real King is. They are to pronounce his judgment against all that stands contrary to his righteousness and justice and invite people to yield to his lordship, marking them as his and teaching them to reflect this rule (Leeman, 2016, pp. 344–347).

John, therefore, stepped out with actions and teachings that were political as well as religious. Wright and Bird (Wright & Bird, 2019, p. 191) point to his confrontation with Herod, whose conduct was not worthy of one who claimed the title of King of the Jews. John’s proclamation threatened the continuity of his status, and he hated John for pronouncing God’s demands and judgment on him. In addition to this, John’s ministry was also a judgment against the religious order of the day. By calling people out into the wilderness and offering water baptism for the forgiveness of sin, John was making a statement about the traditional worship at the Temple. He was proclaiming the arrival of a new order.

Belonging to this new order would not come by mere confession. It would take some winnowing, and only those who produce the fruit of repentance would be considered part of it. Leeman points out this distinction as an indispensable principle of Christian political theology. He argues that God’s new covenant rule operates within his new covenant community. There should be no attempt to impose it on those whose hearts have not been renewed by the Holy Spirit, for that only leads to a false, outward mimicking of what God intended. Just as John was careful to distinguish between appearance and reality, political theology must differentiate between assenting and non-assenting individuals and aspects of creation and places where the Spirit has or has not yet done his work. This will ensure that God is properly identified, as he intended, through the righteous actions of his people. Otherwise, we risk baptizing things as marks of the righteousness and justice of God when they are not and pronouncing his name in places and on things where he is not (Leeman, 2016, pp. 262–266)

Merely belonging to the New Covenant community, however, is not enough. John’s goal that “all people may see God’s salvation” presents a vision of cosmic redemption, which moves from personal salvation that comes through repentance of sin to cosmic salvation that would be realized not immediately at the Messiah’s first coming but at the final consummation of his rule. In the fullness of time, when all mountains have been made low,



all valleys filled, all crooked paths straightened, and all rough ways smoothened; when the Christ will have baptized his own with his Spirit and gathered them into his barn, then the whole world will experience his salvation.

John's prescription for achieving this is threefold: First, it calls for people to repent from sin and turn back to God. Second, these people should show the fruits of repentance. This way, they can give the world around them a taste of God's coming salvation. Third, like John, God's covenant people should hold all public officeholders accountable to God's standards of justice and righteousness and call out their deviation from the same.

John's ministry is a good model of Christian political theology. The church calls out the world and pronounces God's judgment against its sin and idolatry. She invites individuals to repent of their sins and yield to the rule of Christ as part of his new covenant community, and she teaches them how to live out and model the righteousness and justice of the Kingdom to come. The Herods who reject God's rule are also not left without a witness that they stand judged and condemned before the King of kings. In doing all this, the church prepares the way for the experience of God's salvation now, as she anticipates its final realization at God's appointed time.

It is evident from the experiences of members of FOCUS highlighted above that the organization has done well in the first part of John's model but not in the second. It has called people to repentance and to live for God but has shied away from boldly spelling out the specific demands of this repentance and faith in their public life.

Discipleship for political engagement involves impacting believers with biblical convictions and answering specific questions that people are asking regarding how to apply their faith in society. When the crowd, the tax collectors, and the soldiers asked John what they should do to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, he was unequivocal in his answer, pointing out specific ways their new faith commitments should be applied to public life. John's vision of a world where all would experience God's salvation was broken down into smaller, specific calls and commitments for each audience category.

By choosing silence or deliberate ambivalence when faced with specific political questions of the day, the Fellowship of Christian Unions misses out on a great opportunity to empower its members with the contextual theology they need for effective political engagement. Its members, who are economists, educationists, theologians, security personnel, elected politicians, who work in the criminal justice system, among others, have missed an opportunity to hear God with clarity on what he is doing in his world and what exactly he expects of them, in their fields.



For these diverse categories of Christians, a vision of the common good would spell out what God seeks to do in the wider society and what he expects of those who belong to him in their specific and varied contexts.

6.0. Action: Strengthening Political Engagement Through a Vision of the Common Good

It is evident from the preceding discussions that the lack of a clear vision of the common good has negatively impacted Kenyans' participation in politics, as seen in the experiences of FOCUS members. With the nation-state constrained to inspire commitment, loyalty, and sacrifice, people are more prone to serve personal and sectarian interests at the expense of the collective, national interests. Consequently, participation in supposed nation-building exercises such as democratic elections and public service in various sectors ends up being little more than hunting expeditions, avenues through which to extract from the state whatever piece of the national cake one can in favor of personal, family, and ethnic group interests.

In this context, the political theology that focuses on equipping and mobilizing Christians to infuse godly values in society as the salt and light of the world has been negatively affected by a failure to pursue and shape a collective vision of exactly what needs to be done in the various sectors of society. This experience of the Fellowship of Christian Union members would apply similarly to the wider church. Not stating clearly and proactively what, in their understanding, God is calling Christians to work towards has limited their ability to translate their commitment into specific political actions. The infusion of godly values into society thus remains an individual endeavor, lacking clarity, a common rallying point, and an accountability framework. The assumption that this infusion of godly values should be deployed to build the nation is faulty unless and until the nation-state and its political processes are interrogated in the process of theological reflection and formulation.

Suppose political theology is about inviting believers and the wider society to submit to the rule of Christ. In that case, Christians must be able to state what that looks like in real life. This is the question that Christians ask: "What, exactly, does God expect of us in our places of influence?" While general statements like "be the salt and light" are good, they are not enough. The answer needs to be unequivocal, like John the Baptist's answers in response to similar questions in his day. In this way, the vast array of Christian professionals in Kenya will have clarity of what needs to be done in various sectors of public life.



Success in political participation by the church, or any specific unit of it, should thus start by refining its political theology with clarity of the common good, the goal which it discerns God is calling its members to work, sacrifice, and be accountable for. Each church unit that espouses political engagements must answer the question, “What does God want to do with Kenya, its economy, education, public health, criminal justice system etc.?” This will result in a more intentional deployment of the salt and light strategy and a greater ability to galvanize Christians toward political transformation. In this case, being proactive will also help the church avoid divisiveness when political engagement is limited to responses and commentaries on agendas canvassed by other interested parties.

This calls for embracing the “ascent and return” approach Miroslav Volf advocates. Ascent refers to the moments when “prophetic faith practitioners” encounter God and receive the message and the formation needed for their mission to society. Return, on the other hand, is when those who have received the message and been formed by it bring it home to the rest of the people through speech, liturgies, laws, and institutions (Volf, 2011, p. 168).

This kind of prophetic ministry in a pluralistic context is challenging, as there will always be legitimate divergences of opinion within and with outsiders about what the common good is, what the rule of Christ in a specific situation would look like, and how to bring it about. It must be recognized, however, that the answer to the challenge of doing political theology in the context of pluralism is neither silence nor deliberate ambivalence but the clarity that comes from discernment. Christians’ discipleship and practical political engagement will be impossible without this clarity. As Peter Berger (2014, 123) advises, believers must be willing to negotiate, working with and between various alternative views to find the best, albeit imperfect, option. Where the situation demands, as Jonathan Leeman advises, believers should lean on their non-moral competencies and an application of wisdom to decide what to do and how to do it in line with their biblical principles and values. While many situations will be this complex, there are also many situations with no moral or theological ambiguity where a direct line can be drawn from biblical text to political application. As such, what is needed is the boldness to speak God’s truth in guidance to his children and in rebuke to those who reject his rule (Leeman, 2016, pp. 207–209).

Whatever the case, the church in Kenya, and any of its units that embrace political engagement like the Fellowship of Christian Unions, needs to appreciate that an effective contextual political theology cannot afford to leave unanswered the questions of the individuals and the society it desires to see yielding to the rule of God. These answers should not be generic and collective but should emerge from conversations with people in every



sector. An institution like FOCUS is well placed to work with the various professional categories in its membership to formulate a contextual political theology that is biblical, one which presents a clear vision of what God desires to do among and with his people, and which emerges from and responds to the experiences of those who live it out.

7.0. Conclusion

Based on the experiences of the Fellowship of Christian Unions, this study has established that a political theology conceptualized around the biblical charge to be the salt and light of society through an infusion of Christian values in every sector has yielded some success. This success is seen especially in the spiritual formation essential for all missional engagement. Its impact has, however, been limited because it has deliberately avoided engaging with specific contextual political issues and realities and putting forward a clear vision of what society should be like, what change and transformation are desired in various sectors, and, therefore, what believers should work towards. In doing this, FOCUS has struggled to nurture the commitment and sacrifice required to bring about gospel-inspired transformation in society.

Existing scholarship suggests that effective political theology depends on nurturing a clear vision of the desired gospel-inspired transformation of society. This study has, however, established that FOCUS has acted on two faulty assumptions. First is the belief that all that is required is to place well-disciplined Christians in positions of influence, and they will be able to translate their faith into sociopolitical transformation. Without clear visions of what society could and should be, such believers struggle to rally together and cause meaningful impact. Second, assuming that such a collective vision will be found in the nation-state is faulty because the currently conceptualized nation-state does not embody the common good and sometimes works against the same. Additionally, when Christians reduce their political positions to commenting and acting on propositions of those in elective politics, they end up divided and unable to act.

Theological reflection based on a study of John 3:1–20 reveals that a shared, God-given vision of the common good would significantly enrich political theology. Such a vision of the common good, achieved through collective discernment and reasoning, will help believers see the big picture of what God seeks to do in their midst. They would also be able to see the specifics of how exactly this works out in their various spaces on a day-to-day basis. Such clarity would inform discipleship of believers, inspire their sacrificial commitment, inform their political engagement, and be a framework for individual and collective accountability.



The study proposes that FOCUS works with the various professional categories among its associate members to formulate a political theology that clearly spells out the vision of the good life God wills for his people. This will create a goal for FOCUS to guide and rally its members toward something inspiring their commitment and sacrifice in political engagement.

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