

EDITORIAL:

THEOLOGY, POLITICS AND SOCIAL LIFE

Ikenga K. E. ORAEBUNAM*¹

Abstract

The thread passing through the trio of theology, politics, and social life is a dynamic, sometimes tense, and deeply impactful nexus that shapes how societies view justice, order, and morality. Theology and socio-political life are deeply intertwined, with theology providing the foundational beliefs that shape social, political, and economic structures, while social life provides the context in which faith is practised and applied. This brief piece demonstrates the connection and challenges involved. In spite of these challenges, it sees the symbiosis as inevitable.

Keywords: *Theology, Politics, Social Life, Religion*

Theology provides ethical regime, narratives, and, sometimes, direct mandates for political action and social organization. Theology aims to make faith applicable to human experience, influencing community, relationships, and daily life. The connection between theology and socio-political life is made manifest in the following ways:

Theology, particularly liberation theology and social theology, acts as a catalyst for positive change by advocating for the marginalized, promoting equity, and addressing issues like poverty, discrimination, bigotry, intolerance, and violation of human rights, to say the least. Theology offers a moral basis for addressing intricate social issues, such as addiction, violence, and social breakdown, often founded on concepts like *imago Dei* (the image of God) and human dignity. Theology influences societal structures by emphasizing charity, reciprocal assistance, and collective accountability. Still more, religious beliefs and practices act as a form of ‘spiritual capital,’ providing resources, social networks, and a sense of belonging that affect social mobility, health outcomes, and community cohesion.

¹**Ikenga K. E. ORAEBUNAM, PhD (Religion and Society), PhD (Law), PhD (Jurisprudence), PhD (Edu Mgt), BTh, BL, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria, Email: ikengaken@gmail.com; ik.oraebunam@unizik.edu.ng. Tel: +2348034711211**

Historically, theology has served as a catalyst for political movements, providing the moral arguments for justice, equity, and human dignity. For example, abolition of slavery in the 19th century and the civil rights movement were products of theological enterprise. Theology often plays a crucial role in shaping political systems, from ancient theocracies to modern democratic, 'nation-building' efforts. In South Africa, the theology of 'ubuntu' was central to the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Emerging in the mid-20th century, this movement specifically aims to combine faith with political action to fight systemic injustices and poverty.

Theological ethics inform political leadership by emphasizing principles like compassion, justice, and responsibility to the public. Religious institutions are frequently involved in conflict resolution and social reconciliation, particularly in post-conflict societies. Theology continues to influence debates on social issues, providing a 'public theology' that engages with secular political systems.

Further, theology offers a critique of purely secular, materialist approaches to social life, arguing that such perspectives fail to fully account for the influence of spiritual elements on human behaviour. Theology in everyday life involves living out faith in concrete actions, such as serving the needy and working for a more just society. While some views, like Marxism, have viewed religion as a way to maintain submissive behaviour in the face of inequality, contemporary theology often emphasizes active engagement and the transformation of society.

Be that as it may, integrating theological perspectives in modern, diverse, and secular societies presents challenges, particularly when trying to balance different religious or non-religious views. The use of religion to serve political agenda can deepen social divisions rather than fostering unity. There is also the challenge of instability in the roles of theology. While some theologians argue for a move away from political theology, others suggest the use of it for addressing contemporary issues like eco-justice and social divisiveness. To mitigate these challenges, it is necessary to engage in inter-faith dialogues, foster religious tolerance, and ensure that theological advocacy stresses the universal values such as justice, human rights and the common good. This mitigation is profoundly necessary given the persistence of the mutual interpenetration between theology and socio-political life of humans.