

**“The Church and Politics: an unhappy marriage!**  
*(Should the Church be involved in Politics?)*

By

Canon Justice James Ogoola

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## Introduction

It is a profound pleasure and a poignant privilege to be back at Uganda Christian University a Church-founded University where lofty minds meet to triumph over base matter. I am enthused to be the key note Speaker at this *Janan Luwum Public Lecture*, the first ever of its kind. Janan Luwum was the third Archbishop of the Church Province of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire. His life and Episcopate was cut prematurely short, at the altar of politics. In speaking out boldly and courageously against the political excesses and iniquities of the dictator – Idi Amin’s regime. Luwum was brutally murdered by the butchers of that regime in standing up and speaking out passionately and persistently against tyranny of the time. Archbishop Martyr Luwum was recognized as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Saints, alongside other slain Churchmen the like the Baptist Minister, Martin Luther King Jr. for his legendary civil rights struggle in a colour coded United States of America and South America’s Archbishop Romero for his courageous choice of faith in the face of political distress for the oppressed.

Truly, the church in Politics is an unhappy marriage! A marriage of sorrows – unhappy because politicians across the planet hate the dictates of conscience and morality; unhappy because politics makes martyrs of the church. I am elated therefore, to have been asked by the organizers of Luwum public lecture to think about and to talk about the theme: ***“Should the Church Be Involved in Politics?”*** Within that theme, I have with poetic license carved out the particular topic of my discourse: “The Church in Politics; An Unhappy Marriage”.

Two fundamental postulates are intrinsic within the theme: “Should the church be involved in Politics?” First, “that the church may well talk about some things, but not about others”; and secondly, “that among the forbidden areas is the area of politics”. It is evident then that the Church is free to venture into economics, econometrics, demographics, agronomics, sociology, literature, culture/drama, song, dance, history, geography, gastronomy, astronomy, oceanography, hymnology/aviation, tourism, exploration, geology, biology, criminology, veterinary, medicine, engineering, lawyering, geometry, trigonometry, numeracy and of course Religion and Theology in all their multifarious dimensions and diverse manifestations.

But, by the time the Church has dabbled in all these and more, what else is left of the forbidden fruit of Politics? Is Politics so sacrosanct that it must be left exclusively and entirely to the Politicians? Where do we draw the line to separate the lofty heavens of the politics of the Politicians from the mundane earth of the Church preachers?

To take but one example, the issue of homosexuality is virulently current in Uganda and all around the World today. But, far from being new, it is as old as human history itself. It reared its controversial head in ancient Sodom and Gomorrah. Old Lot argued and pleaded with his town’s people to spare the male guests in his house that night, in exchange for his own virgin daughters. To a gay to listen to that sacrificial entreaty, the town stormed into the house for the gay rape. Fast forward, a quick shift to a different locality, a different town and a different seating. At the imperial court of Munyonyo, the year 1886 King David Mwanga, a well-known practitioner of sodomy, sought (among other royal perks) to have sex with his own young male palace pages. To a man, all the pages refused. They did so because of the chastity of their deep seated fidelity to their Christian faith. They chose to die, than recant their faith.

It was not for the love of martyrdom that they chose to die. It was rather for their faith that they stood stoic, even to the point of a horribly hideous death. Faced with a sovereign edict of a human

potentate (Mwanga) to do wrong, the pages chose fidelity to their God. Question; in doing so, were the pages engaging in politics (namely; sovereign disobedience, rebellion treason)? If they did, thank God they did. Their statement has hoisted Uganda and human kind from the controversy of sodomy, to the firm and solid pedestal whose inscription is: “Uganda, The Land of Martyrs”.

And that brings us to the testimony of Archbishop Janan Luwum. He lived in perilous times. Engagement in open public (or even private) disobedience by anyone at all to the mercurial sovereign lord: Field Marshall, President for life, Conqueror of the British Empire; Idi Amin Dada, was a sure death warrant. In the face of an orgy of State killings, murders, maiming and mayhem, interspersed with abductions and disappearances of uncountable citizens of this Country, the prince of the Church chose to speak out with his house of Bishops assembled. The Archbishop spoke out, wrote out and read out a bold statement against injustice, deprivation of liberty and the cold-blooded, State-inspired killing and murders. Question: was this a political statement? Or perhaps, whether “political” or not, was it his duty, and his Church’s obligation to engage the mortal issues of the day? Where does church involvement end; giving way to pure politics?

### **Contextual questions**

In this connection let us pose a couple of question to help us clear the fog:

- Should the Church speak about matters of marriage, divorce, teen pregnancies, etc.? Don’t these have a political angle, political dimension and a political cost? Wasn’t Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer martyred in office in 1556 precisely because of his stand over King Henry VIII’s marriage annulment / remarriage, conundrum?
- Should the Church speak out loud about the welfare of the citizens, that is, the widows, the fatherless and the vulnerable; their poverty, their earning capacity, their food and water (or lack of them), their deprivations, the state of their health and education, and the imparting of skills and training for their children? Don’t all these have a political content?
- Should the Church speak out loudly about the welfare of the Nation, the economics, the demographics, the infrastructure, the superstructure and indeed the whole architecture of the National well-being?
- Should the Church speak out about the safety of the motherland and the security of the fatherland?
- Should the Church speak out about human rights from the womb to the tomb? The founders of the American Nation put it succinctly and empathically when they proclaimed that: ***“All men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”*** If that indeed is the divine design of the Creator, should the Church not have a voice, (if not a seat), in the execution of God’s master plan?
- Should the church speak out about the Constitutional set up of the State? – that social contract that binds the State and her people in a durable bond of cement; that contract about which Article 1 of our Constitution waxes eloquent; thus: ***“All power belongs to the people”*** – The constitution says ***“All Power,”*** not just some; ***“All people,”*** not just some.

The Constitution makes no distinction between Political and other powers; indeed political people and church people. It vests all power in all the people-priests, the constitution discriminates not between prophets, preachers, pastors, prelates and pulpiteers – all included. Together, the people have the power and the duty; they have the privilege and the obligation to bring to fruition the expectations, the aspirations and the intentions of the Constitution. Together, they triumph in the success of the Constitution or together they sink in the quagmire of the failure of the Constitution.

This Divine template has been replicated in diverse places and times, all through the deep end of history. In the USA, it took a civil war between the states and a President, with a soft conscience but a backbone of steel (“honest” Abe Lincoln) to effect emancipation of slavery from the face of the USA. The Church played its role. Lincoln was soon assassinated in the United Kingdom for abolition of slavery the sweet fruit of the bitter struggle by William Wilberforce (a spiritual man with the heart of the Church). He was the strident voice of sanity in a worldwide sea raging with sin and abomination of human slavery. Wilberforce spoke up loud and clear, long and persistent, until the Queen and Parliament listened, gave heed and duly acted. From it, came an amazing prologue; the personal testimony of the Reverend John Newton, a former slave trader, slave owner, slave terror and slave rapist – who after embracing the Lord Christ as his own master composed the world’s famous, most popular tune of all time, dramatic hymn: “*Amazing Grace (that saved a wretch like me)*”. The slave trade, its abolition, and the testimony of the amazing hymn, were all acts of pure politics – all effected through the relentless struggle of the voice of the Church. Such are the designs and the construct of the Divine template for addressing the question of the day.

### **Biblical analysis/context**

It is wonderful and wholly edifying to speak about the Constitution. The national constitution is sacrosanct and sacred. Nonetheless, it is only temporal and secular. There is an even higher Law, a loftier Constitution: The Divine Constitution, written by the finger of God himself, and encrypted on two tablets of stone. I speak of the Holy Ten Commandments, whose author is the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Alpha and the Omega; God Eternal Everlasting. That Constitution has two grand Chapters: the first Chapter, governing the relations between man and God; and the second Chapter, governing relations between the humans and fellow-humans *inter-se*. The second Chapter encompasses the commands against adultery, murder, stealing, false evidence, envy and coveting (call it “greed, cheating, corruption”). This Divine Constitution places absolutely no restrictions on the Church from engaging in political questions. On the contrary, it is the Church which is the centerpiece and the quarter-pin of breathing life in to the standards and principles enunciated in the Ten Commandments. On this, consider Jesus’ last address to his disciples on the shores of Lake Galilee just before His ascension. Thrice, the Lord commanded Peter (the Church’s apostolic keeper of the keys to the gates to heaven and earth) to: “***Feed my sheep, care for /attend my sheep, feed my sheep***”.

This was a call, as clear as can be, for the Church (the shepherd) to make it its business and responsibility to nurture the everyday needs (physical and spiritual) of the flock. Earlier in his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus had underscored the duty to care for the flock – thus: ***When asked – “Lord, When did we give you food, or water, or clothing, or visit you when you were sick or in prison?” His answer was: “As much as you did it to anybody and somebody among you, you did it to me”.***

In short, the Church's gospel is a gospel of feeding the hungry, watering the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and fellowshiping with the prisoners, the detainee and the downtrodden. The welfare of humanity is the business of the Church.

Governments are formed and politics practiced to administer just, efficient, and effective service delivery to the citizenry i.e. the consumers of these public services. Among these consumers, are members of the Church comprising of both the ordained and the laity, the high and the low clerics, the frocked and the assistants, the corporate and the individual, the formal (Church) and the informal. As consumers, all these have a stake to promote, to uphold, and to protect. As consumers and as tax payers towards the funding of these services, they are all entitled to a voice in the design, deployment and disbursement of these national services. As leaders and as custodians of the people's welfare, the priests, the fathers, the sheikhs, the friars and the rabbis, pastors, apostles, prophets, bishops and mullahs – all have a mandate and a duty to speak up on issues that affect the welfare of the population.

This is because the supreme Shepherd, Jesus mandated the Church to: ***“Feed my sheep; tend my sheep; feed my flock”***.

Human history is replete with moments of monumental magnitude. One such was the emancipation of the slave. The most dramatic, most poignant and most ancient of one such moment was the liberation of the nation of Israel from 400 years of Egyptian bondage. This was a matter not of just mundane local or even national politics. It was a matter of grand, entrenched supra national inter-generational politics. This is not light weight politics; this is, truly heavy duty politics. The emancipation of the bondman required Divine Intervention. For His template, God devised a trinity of interlocutors.

For Phase one, God anointed Moses, a prophet and statesman to begin the job of tussling it out with the stone hearted Pharaoh. As the Bible makes it abundantly clear, Moses was not just a “prophet”, he was an extra ordinary super prophet; “a prophet like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face Deut.34.10 there has not arisen in Israel.”

For Phase two, (the Exodus through the desert wasteland) Moses leadership was supplemented by Aaron the Priest and his priestly sons.

For Phase three (the vanquishing of native nations resident in the Promised Land), God entrusted the job to Joshua, the military genius, fully complemented by the priestly clan/tribe of the Levites. Again here it's important to note that Joshua was not just a brilliant General, he was also a duly anointed man; “filled with the spirit of wisdom for Moses had laid his hands on him” – Deut.34.9. Like Moses, Joshua was born a slave in Egypt but became a conqueror in Canaan. He served as a personal assistant to Moses. His outstanding qualities were obedience, faith, courage, and dedication to God and God's word. How absolutely fitting that Joshua's name “Hoshea” means “salvation” (Num.13.8) and “Yehoshua” (Num.13.16) means “Yahweh Is Salvation”. Significant in this plan was the complete absence of a king or sovereign Executive, or even an involvement of the “Church” (namely Moses the Prophet and bearer of the Divine Law fully supplemented and complemented by Aaron the priest).

It is almost as if God was saying that national liberation from foreign bondage was too important a matter to entrust to the ordinary run of the political class. Indeed, once the freed bondmen settled in Canaan, the Nation had no place for a King. Leadership was left to the Priests; with the Chief

Priest as the epitome and fountain head of power and national leadership. This was the golden age for the Church to take the realms of power in all its full colors of the rainbow, power without restrictions whatsoever whether as to politics, or otherwise.

Biblical history is replete with chronicles of prophets who faced formidable Kings and Emperors eye ball to eye ball, a bold and courageous message of the Divine to deliver; without fear, without favour. Prophet Nathan faced King David to admonish him for adulterating beautiful Mrs. Bathsheba Uriah and then murdering hopeless Mr. Uriah. Fearless, John the Baptist confronted horrible Herod, the butcher king, over the matter of his incestuous marriage to Herodias, his own brother's wife. Prophet Amos, Elijah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Jeremiah and Isaiah squared off with equally powerful potentates concerning mega national issues of their day. How about the stoic trio of Shadrack, Meshack and Abed-Nego, who braved the white hot furnace to face the god-king Nebuchadnezzar the terrible, or Moses, the stammering prophet who armed with a frail stick, put Imperial Pharaoh to shame, burying his impregnable army of chariots, horses, infantry and all, in the watery grave of the Red Sea.

This was the Church at its best. The voice of the Church ringing shrill and unambiguous through the deaf ears of this world's Caesars – piercing sharp and precise through the hardened heart of Pharaoh; shining the bright light of a laser beam in the darkest dungeons of David's palace bedrooms.

### **Critical analysis of the church in politics (case analysis)**

And now, once again fast forward from the ancient world to the modern one. In its last century, the Church and its leadership stood true to its illustrious past in matters of speaking up when summoned to the call. In the valiant struggle for Indian independence of the 1940s against British colonial lordship, Mahatma Gandhi (an ascetic monk of a personality), became the soul of the struggle. While Jawarhalal Nehru (the politician) provided the spirit and muscle of the same struggle. Gandhi's trade mark was his legendary strategy of "Non-violence". With that implausible non-weapon, Gandhi (like Moses of the frail stick before him) soon put to rout the impregnable might of the imperial weaponry of the British Colonial machine.

Two decades later, in the early 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. stood up, walked about and spoke loud and eloquent against the patent injustice of color bar of his beloved Nation of the USA. He spoke up for the restoration of civil rights to all Americans. For this, he was martyred in Memphis Tennessee. He was a lead minister in his Baptist Church. His versatile assistants and colleagues in the struggle; Ralph Abernath, Jesse Jackson, and numerous others were all ministers in the Church. Their weapon of choice: a million person, peaceful, non-violent marches all across the then bigot-drenched colour-drunk states and cities of America. Another two decades later in another theater of operations, Nelson Madiba Mandela struggled against abominable Apartheid, the evil system of governance concocted by the bigoted Afrikaners Broderbund of the Boers of South. Paradoxically, the wicked Apartheid doctrine was alleged by its designers to be based in holy Biblical principles for his daring to dismantle the diabolical creed; Mandela was arrested, tried kangaroo style and incarcerated for life to hard labour in the World's most notorious detention den of Robben Island – there to expend the best years of his life and youth. However, like a phoenix, Mandela bounced back to design the Rainbow Nation. In all this, Mandela (the Moses) was openly and volubly upheld and approved by no less than the illustrious Archbishop of Cape Town, the venerable Desmond Tutu, a man in the purple frock of the church (the priestly Aaron of the

struggle), with him, were numerous others of the same frock; black and white most notably the white Bishop who was immersed to his ears in this seismic black struggle.

All these, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, went on to climb the World's pedestal of peace. For their tenacity in the struggle and their sagacity and magnanimity after the triumph, the war duly recognized them and enthroned them as Nobel Peace Laureates. And talking of Peace, we must factor into our debate the underlying motive and fundamental objective of the Church's involvement in politics.

The pulpit, the minaret, the synagogue, the temple, and all such, are places for preaching Peace; for proclaiming stability of the State; for espousing security of the Country's borders, and for demanding justice for the Population. The corollary of these noble intentions for the Church's involvement in national issues of great moment and magnitude is this; the Church as an institution must not act as the political Opposition, incessantly critiquing the ruling Party or persistently and routinely offering alterative national Policies. The voice of the Church rings most authentic and carries maximum effect when it is delivered without partisanship or bias; when it is motivated by the public benefit, not personal gain or private privilege, and when it is proclaimed or aired in the space of open transparency, uncovered by the fog of secret side dealings. The voice of the Church is a candle put on a pedestal to dispel any dark tunnels lurking the national debate.

In these recent times, the Bishops of Uganda have rallied around the political issue of Peace-calling for dialogue and reconciliation, when the Nation's temperature has been tense from electoral – related violence. The Bishops have called for reason and prior consultation of the entire population (i.e. referendum) when the Nation has been patently polarized by critically controversial amendments to the National Constitution. Through pastoral letters circulated to their congregations, the Bishops have, under their collective body: the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, called for patience and the resolution of outstanding political disputes through resort to a national conversation not through the deadly violence of the kind manifested in the hotspots of Kasese, Abim, Rukungiri and Tororo. The voice of the Church has been heard calling for cessation and investigation of the strange onset of a spate of unexplained mass crimes of serial murders against women “prostitutes”, Muslim clerics and police commanders, amidst the mysterious existence of electoral-related militia groups and gangs. It is quite clear that at stake in all these Church interventions, was the brand and quality of the country's governance. Governance is about responsibility and accountability. Governance is about transparency and equity. The conscience of the Nation has a duty to make governance its business.

A Church that is passively neutral to the sweep of these issues, a Church that sits silently, tight-lipped and tongue-tied, when the quality and quantity of governance totters on the doldrums is a dumb church. A Church that looks on when governance is galloping amok is a blind church. A Church that hears nothing when the noise of disagreeable and discordant governance is everywhere evident is a deaf church. A Church that sits dandy and folds up its hands in fence of injustice and iniquity is a church that has abdicated its anointed duty.

The church is the salt of the earth. Salt that loses its saltiness is worthless, good for nothing. It is thrown atop the trash heap, to be trodden underfoot.

The mandate of the Church, indeed the very *raison d'être* of the Church Universal, is to fight sin. Sin is, but the technical term for evil. Slavery, apartheid, segregation, greed, fraud, corruption, forgery, tyranny, dictatorship, authoritarianism, fascism, coercion, murder, genocide – all these

are manifestations of sin. The Church in the temple, the Church in the cathedral, the church in the basilica, the Church in the pulpit, the Church on the streets, the Church in people's homes and the unseen Church in the believers hearts and souls – would be remiss to look the other way against any sin – and particularly so, State-inspired sin or evil. The Church has no choice but to stand up and speak up against evil, thereby to involve itself in helping to rid the Nation of these evils. Silence where the church must speak makes her complicit in the perpetration of evil. Conversely, to silence of the peaceful is to spur the violent; for where peaceful discourse ends, violent discord begins.

But an equally important factor, however, is the manner and the extent to which the Church must involve itself in the “politics” of the Nation. There are peaceful means of holding a conversation; and there are radical paths of assaulting evil. Mahatma Gandhi led by positive non-violence. Martin Luther King Jr. led by peaceful marches against the government. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, followed suit, walking in the footsteps of these iconic peacemakers.

The struggle is a struggle for Peace, by people of peace, using instruments of peace. In that paradigm, there is no place for violence, no place for radicalism, no space for extremism. In that struggle, the Church must lead by example – the example of peace, the example of reason, the example of logic; and the example of tolerance. The reason of Gandhi against British imperialism, the peace of Martin Luther King Jr. against stubborn segregation, the stout logic of Tutu against appalling apartheid, and the bold but measured opposition of Janan Luwum against the fascist tyranny of Idi Amin.

The Church's amour is neither the sword nor the gun; not the rifle nor the revolver nor indeed, is it the terrorist's hand grenade or the bomb. Instead, the church's permissible armour is the armour of Ephesians Chapter 6 – namely the breast plate of righteousness is the shield, of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the word of God” – all clad in the shoes of the good news of the Gospel – and all done under the umbrella of Prayer.

In its anointed role, the Church stands on high moral ground. A government that understands the morality of the Church, the peace posture of the Church; indeed the underlying role of the Church has no reason to fear the Church's involvement in matters of State.

The militarily powerful Emperor did not understand the church when he contemptuously and rhetorically asked: “How many army divisions does the Pope have?” the Egyptian Pharaoh ultimately understood Moses the divine emancipator, Kabaka Mwanga misunderstood (as politician rebellion) the courageous stand of his doomed palace pages. Idi Amin misunderstood Janan Luwum's bold protestations, especially when roundly supported by Luwum's own Bishops. Imperial Britain reluctantly understood Gandhi. The Governments of John Fitzgerald, Kennedy and Lydon Baines Johnson readily understood Martin Luther King's inspired civil rights marches. South Africa's F.W. de Clerk understood Desmond Tutu. The rest is history – good history, writ glorious. However, a government that is over sensitive to criticism, especially to the Church commentary and correction, displays the symptoms of hiding and covering under the guilt of conscience. A government that attacks the Church for speaking out risks aligning itself in the wrong column of history; the column occupied by wicked stalwarts of Nebuchadnezzar, Belgium's plunderer King Leopold; the curse of Congo, Pontius Pilate, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and Mwanga and Idi Amin, of late memory.

## **Conclusion**

When the Church has stood up against evil, when the Church has spoken out against sin, when the Church has castigated injustice and oppression – she has ushered in serenity and tranquility in the affairs of the State and of her people. Remember, the Church of God, is (unlike Parliament) non-partisan. It is the solemn sanctuary and sure refuge of all the people, of all persuasions, for all time. When such a Church speaks, therefore, she speaks as the prophetic voice of the people; and the voice of the people, is ***The Voice of God!***

It behooves the State to listen to the Voice of God. There is just no way, whether in hell or in heaven, that this voice of God can be muffled, stifled or stilled let alone gagged!

Urged by the Pharisees in the crowd to rebuke (i.e. silence) His noisy disciples celebrating His triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus retorted; “Even if these (the living) should keep silent, the (inanimate, lifeless) stones (of the temple) would immediately cry out” Luke 19.39-40. The Pharisees were left tongue-tied, those who would prescribe speech were left speechless. That speaks volumes to those who would seek to silence the church. They cannot succeed.

***Canon Justice James Ogoola***  
*Emeritus Principal Judge of Uganda*  
*Chairman, the Elders Forum of Uganda*  
*Canon of the Church of Christ*