

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

Introduction

The church and the state are two powerful entities that have a very serious influence and bearing on the human being. Both the church and the state have the earth as their physical and geographical sphere of operation. While the state is largely defined by a certain socio-political and geographical sovereignty and lead by a government, the church, led by the clergy, has a transcendental sovereignty that is not limited by any territorial sovereignty. The question of the relationship between the church and the state was the preoccupation of the medieval period (5th-15th century AD). St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas were the two major theologians and philosophers whose works articulated, directed and influenced this reflection on the relationship between the church and the state. While their works gave a very prominent and influential position to the church in the state to the point where the church was more authoritative than the state, the Age of Enlightenment came to overturn the power that the medieval or middle Age church wielded. With the emergence of the enlightenment period, the authority of the church in the state has systematically been reduced. The relationship between the state and the church is **master/servant relationship**. The experience in this kind of relationship has progressively led to moral bankruptcy or decline in the state, leading to high crime waves and many other societal ills which the state alone cannot sufficiently handle. Should the state continue to insist on its secular nature without a mutual and symbiotic power-sharing relationship with the church, then humanity is doomed. How then should the state relate with the church in order to mitigate the progressive doom that is overwhelming humanity?

The State as the Body and the Church as the Soul

According to St. Augustine in **The City of God**, people need governments and laws because they have fallen into sin. Therefore, the church on her part exists because people have fallen into sin and have run short of the glory of God. While the state is there to redeem the society and its citizens from anarchy, the church is there for the holistic redemption of humanity. The state represents the plagued physical body and the church represents the conscious spiritual soul that connects the physical to the spiritual. Members of the church are citizens of the state and some of them play key roles in the running of the state.

The situation in Cameroon is not different from what obtains in most modern secular states. The state is the lord who lord it over all, and the church is the servant that more or less has very limited control over her members who constitute only a fraction of the population. Every secular state has the state machinery like the police force and the military to enforce its decisions, both good and bad, but the church has only her voice to appeal to the consciences of the people's moral and spiritual values.

The truth is that the secular state, despite its state machinery to enforce its decisions, has not succeeded to produce the kind of ideal state it dreams to produce. The church on her part has not yet produced the kind of spiritually ideal humanity she dreams to produce. Both the state and the church, operating on parallel lines because of conflicting ideologies have not yet provided succor to humanity, rather things are degenerating with widening gaps as a result of mutual suspicion. The church has often remained critical, attacking the state verbally for misrule and abuse of power, while the state has, on its part attacked the church, either directly using force to arrest, imprison, molest and kill some of her critical voices, or indirectly by stifling the smooth running of the church through administrative measures.

The relationship between the state and the church in Cameroon has hardly been a cordial one. It has often been that of mutual suspicion, tension or hostilities. This has hardly enhanced the progress of the state, the flourishing of the lives of its citizens or the successful mission of the church in any way. The present uneasy socio-political dispensation calls for both the state and the church to reexamine their relationship and see how they can come together and articulate a common and mutual ground of relationship for the good of all.

State Peace and security

It is understood that the concepts of peace and security are differently understood by both the state and the church. Peace to the state is the absence of physical war, and security is the presence of enough military forces and their necessary weapons.

To the church peace is not just the absence of physical war, but the inner satisfaction in the person that gives him/her a sense of belonging and hope for the future. It is in this peace that the church finds security. In this understanding, security is inherently wrapped in peace in such a way that once there is peace, security follows. The peace of mind comes from an enabling environment that provides for success in life, the realization of one's dreams and a sure path to a good life. These cannot be provided by the barrel of the gun and not even by the ballots of the box, but by inclusive and good governance.

It is an open secret that linguistic discrimination has ruled and ruined Cameroon for more than half a century now and has reached an explosion level and has exploded.

The church understands the concept of justice as fair-play and giving to each and everyone his or her share without any inclinations. The church goes further to see and say that **peace and security can only prevail by drinking from the spring of justice.**

The symbiotic relationship between the state and the church

Every rational being with the intension to improve on the status-quo is constantly on the search. It is not an overstatement to state that the Cameroonian state has not succeeded in its socio-political and economic dreams by acting in a master-servant relationship with the church, which no one can deny that, she is a veritable authoritative voice that has an overwhelming influence on the citizens.

It is high time the state steps down from its high seat and engage the church in a symbiotic relationship and partnership that can be holistically beneficial to the citizens of the state. Both the leaders of the state and the church are citizens of the same state and should share a common passion. The raison d'être of the state is for the physical peace, security, welfare and the progress of its citizens; and the church, on the other hand pursues these ideals from a spiritual perspective. What then stops these two authorities from working together in a symbiotic relationship?

This leads me to propose the following recommendations:

1. There should be official local, regional and national councils of church/religious leaders that should be completely apolitical, neutral, objective and critical. These councils should play advisory, liaising and consultative roles to the administrators.
2. The church should remain that critical voice and conscience of the state without being targeted and attacked as being against the state, but as correcting and curbing the excesses of the state.
3. Government policies should be conceived, agreed upon, elaborated and seen to their implementation with the participation of the church.
4. The church should be adequately empowered to perform her physical and transcendental spiritual missions by the resources of the state.

Conclusion

The welfare of the state is the sole responsibility of the state officials and the church leaders. These two powerful entities representing the physical and the spiritual state should be able to work in a symbiotic relationship. Since the inception of the Cameroonian state, this has never been tried and found wanting. If tried, it would obviously provide lasting solutions to some of the many problems that the state alone cannot

provide. Comparatively, a state that operates with the fear of the Lord manifests a very high moral sense of judgement, patriotism and a high value placed on the human welfare and dignity. In his wisdom King Solomon states that: **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (cf. Proverbs 9:10)**. If the state which is the physical body relates in a symbiotic manner with the church which is the spiritual body of the state, the weight of handling state challenges and problems would be shared and there would be a greater improvement in the welfare of the citizens and peace, security and progress would become a reality in Cameroon.

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