

# Religion in the Political Culture of Kenya

Hassan Ndzovu

## Introduction

The idea that religion exerts an indirect social control has a long history. As an institution, religion is believed to be comprehensive covering all realms of life involving human beings. Generally, all departments of life ranging from social, cultural to political have been influenced by religion in different ways. It is on this premise we see religion emerging as a force that has significant political implications in society. From time immemorial, religion and politics have been inseparable. In great ancient civilizations of the world, religion and politics were closely related and intertwined. This made it difficult for people to clearly ascertain whether they were dealing with a king with sacred powers, or a priest with political authority. It appears the two offices were inextricably linked since the beginning of time. In almost all the continents of the world, the priest-king phenomenon was a common feature. To mention but a few, this phenomenon was evident among the Egyptians in Africa (Ralph 1991:57), the Romans in Europe (Ralph 1991: 232), the Assyrians in Middle East (Kukah 1993:VII), and the Incas in Americas (Kukah 1991:VII).

Islam and Christianity, which predominate the religious realm in Kenya, each has its own theocracy. Historically, both have been state religions in different places of the world, and have even survived into modern times. Today, there are around not less than fifteen Muslim countries proclaiming Islam as the state religion (Moazzam 1981:5).

This paper attempts to examine the interaction between religion and politics in Kenya. This will be preceded by a global description of a general

interplay of religion and politics together with an analysis of the views regarding religion and politics in Islam. Finally, an attempt will be made to discuss the challenges of radical and politicized Islam in Kenya.

### **The Relationship between Religion and Politics**

To understand more clearly this subject of religion and politics, Carl F. Hallencreutz and David Westerlund suggested a comparative model of three different policies of religion. These are: (a) confessional (strict); (b) generally religious; (c) secular or liberal or Marxist. According to the two authors countries with a confessional policy of religion ensure that a certain religious community is politically established with a more or less intimate interaction between religion and politics. This alternative is the one predominant in most Muslim countries. However, at one time in European history confessional policies of religion existed as there were states founded on religious basis. The strict pursuant of confessional policies is usually found in theocratic states and the Islamic Republic of Iran is an example of such a state. In this country the state apparatus is subordinate to Islam and religious leaders have a strong and decisive voice in political affairs. Nevertheless, in other countries with a Muslim majority, as well as in some predominantly Christian and Buddhist countries such as Sweden and Thailand, a modified confessional policy is observed. In a Muslim majority country this modified confessional policies can be seen in form of Islam being declared as a state religion and privileged in various ways. Despite these privileges, the religious leaders and institutions are to some extent subordinate to the interests of the state (Westerlund 1996:2f). This is the case in countries such as Malaysia, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan among others.

Turning to the secular policy of religion, it is observed that this policy evolved after the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century. This policy is today adopted in many countries of the world. According to this alternative, it presupposes that there is at least a formal demarcation between religion and politics. The tendency in this policy is to limit the role of religion to a private affair. However, in the liberal form of the secular policy of religion, religion is respected and seen as an important resource in society. Individual as well as corporate religious freedom is provided for to a greater extent. As a result of that policy, religion may in

practice have a significant role in political life (Westerlund 1996:3). The other form of secular religious policy is the Marxist version, which is the opposite of the liberal one. This version is believed to have been established in the Soviet Union in 1917 and China in 1949. It is a policy that is characterized by an ideology that has a negative view of religion. Countries whose regimes are inspired by a Marxist critique of religion have a strong ideological divide between religion and politics, and therefore corporate religious freedom may be subordinate to the prerogatives of political order (Westerlund 1996:3). The main objective of states with this form of policy is to completely banish religion from the consciousness of the people and presumably leave them with only politics. In such states only the political power would define the social order that would keep the state together. This policy has not been successful in the countries it was introduced as it has always been challenged by the citizens. The explanation could be because of humankind being inherently religious. The only being that cannot do without religion. Lastly, the generally religious policy of religion is more ambiguous than the other two alternatives. In this policy a state may in principle be guided by religion, but it is not institutionally tied to any specific religious tradition. It is a situation where the country can be said to be operating on a middle ground. The best example of this middle option is Indonesia where one of the five pillars of the state ideology, *pancasila*, refers to belief in God as one of the bases on which the Indonesia nation should be built (Westerlund 1996:3).

A general survey of the globe reveals that the mixing of religion and politics has persisted over time. In the United States, the bedrock of scientific and technological civilization, religion and politics cannot completely be regarded as separate. Despite considering itself as a secular state, in America religion and politics are also harmonized and intertwined. On the one hand American politicians inject religious feelings into the veins of the public when soliciting for votes, and on the other, some religious organizations are getting involved in politics of the state. This is clearly illustrated by the conservative wing of the Protestant church that has been exercising religious influence on the politics of the country since 1973. In 1976, Jimmy Carter played with the religious emotions of Americans, which eventually enabled him to win the US presidency. He was reported to had claimed to be a born again Christian who if elected as president, would

moralize the secularized society by reviving ethical and family values among others (Haqnadvi 1995:19). In 1991, during the tenure, of George W. Bush, the president is observed to have hosted the evangelical Billy Graham at the White House and later participated in church service with him. Together they prayed for the success of the Gulf war I. Coincidentally, it is after the church service that President Bush went ahead and invaded Iraq in January 15, 1991 (Haqnadvi 1995:19).

In Latin America, similar cohesion of religion and politics is also evident. The case of Chile will suffice as an example. Lucy Behrman declares:

The priests may have influenced politics by sharing the ideas of the elite who passed through their schools. Also indirectly behind the political scene, the church definitely did contribute large amount of money to favoured politicians. Openly and directly the priests sought to politicize the masses in church, approved directions by organizing Christian Trade Unions and social groups (Behrman 1977:183).

According to Behrman, in Chile, church priests have managed to politicize the masses in churches by organizing Christian Trade Unions and social groups. In order to have greater say in parliament, the churches have financially supported politicians of their choice to win elections.

In Europe, the fusion of religion and politics has not gone unnoticed. For example in Britain, the head of the state is constitutionally a member of the British monarchy. He or she is also expected to be the head of the Protestant church (Alkali 1993:258). Since today the head of England is the Queen, formally she is by right the Governor of the Church of England. More to the interaction of religion and politics in this state is that the Archbishop of Canterbury is partly appointed by the prime Minister who is the head of the government. Further, in case there are major doctrinal changes which requires to be made in the church of England, they need the approval of the British parliament either directly or by delegation (Mazrui 2003). Turning to the Middle East, one does not need to be told that the state of Israel was created on the basis of religion. Since its inception Israel appeared as a religio-political movement. The concept of the promised land, which is strongly defended by the Jews is itself a religious idea as it is based

on Genesis 15. Up to now, the same religious language and symbols are used in the politics of the country. The interplay of religion and politics in the region is illustrated more graphically by the state of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both are Islamic states claiming the usage of *sharia* as their constitution.

Through its influence, religion has undoubtedly served as a means of political dominance and opposition in Africa. In a state like Nigeria, religion has extensively been used to influence the direction of that country's politics. To cite the words of Rotimi T. Suberu:

What is indisputable is that no discussion of democratic prospects and problems in Nigeria can be regarded as complete without careful attention to the religious elements in civil society (Oyediran & Agbaje 1999:45).

The above quotation illustrates to us how deeply entrenched religion is in the politics of Nigeria. This deliberate mixing of religion and politics has been argued as the vital cause of religious clashes in Nigeria. Clestus N. Chukwu (2004:1-22) believes that until the Nigerian political elites learn to separate religion from politics, the development of a viable democratic political culture in the country will be a difficult exercise.

On the eastern borders of Nigeria, the intellectual ideas and works of some Sudanese Islamists were the driving force behind the creation of the Islamic Republic of Sudan. It was in September 1983, when the Islamists in Sudan received governmental support with the introduction of *sharia*. Today, through the mutual courtship of religion and politics, Islamism remains the official ideology in Sudan. Since the implementation of *sharia*, specifically the Islamic penal code, it has emerged as the major source of conflict between northern and southern Sudan. Through the restoration of *sharia*, the northern administration has been able to amass support, thereby clinging to power no matter how undemocratic their policies are viewed by the southerners. As long as *sharia* remain incorporated on the statute books of Sudan, it will be difficult for any non-Muslim political movements to make peace with the northern administration. Until they are removed, any efforts to attain peace will be a mirage. To the Sudanese Islamists, the issue of *sharia* is not negotiable due to its ideological significance, and thereby

perhaps the most profound barrier to peace in Sudan (Hansen & Twaddle 1995:32-44).

Down to East Africa, in Tanzania religion has also to some extent been dragged into the politics of that nation. During the struggle for independence of that country, Catholic Church leaders were alarmed by Muslims' domination in the struggle. Before the merger with Zanzibar, in Tanganyika, there was greater involvement of Muslims in the political struggle for independence. To counter this domination the church leaders encouraged young educated Catholics to be actively involved in the activities of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The church leaders saw this approach as the surest way of keeping the assertive Muslims at bay (Njozi 2003:6).

This call perhaps is the one which led to a Roman Catholic politician, Julius Kabarage Nyarere taking a more central role in the political activities of TANU and thereafter becoming the first president of independent Tanzania. After independence, under the leadership of Nyarere, Tanzanian Muslims felt neglected in the sense that they believe there have been deliberate efforts by the government to maintain the privileged position of Christians. This perception is the one which has provoked Tanzanian Muslims who are now becoming more vocal in demanding their religious and political rights. And since their demands threaten the privileged position of the dominant group, Hamza Mustafa Njozi (2003:11) claims that Muslims in Tanzania are often labeled 'Muslim extremists' or even more conveniently, 'members of Al-Qaeda'.

Given the large number of Muslims in Tanzania, their prominent role and involvement in the country's politics is expected. Like elsewhere in the Muslim world, the phenomenon of militant and radical Islam is also common among Tanzanian Muslims. This phenomenon was illustrated by the 1993 demonstration that was marked with anti-Christian slogans. In this demonstration, several Christian butcher shops and bars were attacked and destroyed. The reason given for these attacks was that these places were selling pork and alcohol which are regarded as *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. Later in 1998, the US embassy in Tanzania like the one in Kenya was bombed and among the suspects were both foreign and local Muslims (Oded 2000:167). All these developments taken together are cited by scholars and commentators as examples of Islamic fundamentalism evolving in Tanzania.

## **Religion and Politics: An Islamic View**

There seem to be divergent views on the question of religion and politics from scholars. The contention is that there those who hold the view that religion and politics are integral, while others take the different position that the two are separable. The view that there is no distinction between religion and politics in Islam is such a prevalent one. Those who claim that religion and politics cannot be separated argue that from the very beginning of the history of Islam, religion and politics were not separate entities (Westerlund 1996:317). Their main defense is that Islam is a complete religion not only in terms of theological belief and worship, but also as a way of life which guides social, economic and political behaviour. As their evidence they draw from the life of Muhammad as both a messenger of God and a political leader of the state of Medina. After his death, they assert that the rightly guided caliphs took control of the affairs of the Muslim community in the same line pursued by the prophet. It is out of this background that the traditional jurists had forged a link between religion and politics by giving a religious legitimacy to political power. This has enabled the political Islamists to continue maintaining that religion and politics cannot be separated (Ayubi 1991:3). The ultimate objective of this mixing is the creation of an Islamic state. According to Islamic political theory, this state is supposed to be subordinate to *sharia*. It is the *sharia* which outlines the general norms and functions of the state (Kukah 1993:116). In other words such a state is expected to be guided with the principles of the Quran and Hadith, and to reflect the one established by the prophet in Medina. Its citizens should not all be Muslims as there hardly been such a situation through out the Muslim history. In fact even the seventh century prophet's state in Medina was a multi-religious state. What is required is all the citizens irrespective of their faiths to abide to the law and policies of the state (Mutalib 1993:50). However, as in other types of political systems those who do not subscribe to the ideological or philosophical basis of the state (in this case the non-Muslims) are not to be given leadership positions in government. The best they can occupy are the highest administrative positions of the state (Mutalib 1993:67).

The opposite view, however, maintain that there is a separation between religion and politics in Islam. This idea of the separation of religion and politics is today in the academic circles is referred to as *crastianism*.

Among scholars who believe that there is crastianism in Islam is Norma Salem. She aptly put her position in the following words:

In the first place, the Arabic language does distinguish between the concept of *din* (religion) and *siyasa* (politics), *dawla* (state) and sultan (power). The fact that many Muslim thinkers argue in favour of subjecting politics to the exigencies of religion indicates that such an ideal situation did not always exist either historically or even ideologically (Hunter 1988:151).

In the same line of crastianism in Islam, Nazih Ayubi argues that the original Islamic sources (Quran and hadith) have very little to say on matters of government and state. This view is clearly illustrated in his own words where he said:

Islam is indeed a religion of collective morals, but there is very little in it that is specifically political i.e. there is very little in the original Islamic sources on how to form state, run governments and manage organizations. If the rulers of the historical Islamic state were also spiritual leaders of their community, this was not because Islam required the religious leaders (Imams) to be also a political ruler (Ayubi 1991:4).

In agreement with Ayubi is Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi who commenting about the question of an Islamic state asserted that:

... there is no passage in the Quran about such a state and form of government, because the essence of religion, including Islam, is man, without regard to his terrestrial location, racial division or variety. Until the death of the prophet, there was no state in Islam; Medina approximated a city state. There was only a Muslim community led by the prophet. The basis of loyalty was religious belief, not any territorial state or nation. The Quran and sharia always addressed themselves to the faithful, not the citizens. In fact the idea of citizenship was alien and unknown to Islam (Cudsi & Dessouki 1981:187).



From the arguments propounded by the three scholars, there seem to be a consensus that the Quran and hadith of the prophet never dealt with the question of a form of government. In their view, religion is concerned with man and society, not with states and empires (Cudsi & Dessouki 1981:187).

The proponents of erastianism in Islam argue that religion and politics were brought together in the historical Islamic state by way of the state appropriating religion. There was indeed a connection between religion and politics through out much of the history of the Islamic state, but this was the out come of the state taking over religion as a legitimizing shield for its activity. Islam did not give the historical Muslim state its character; on the contrary, the historical Muslim state had, over the centuries, imparted its features on the Islamic tradition. This is the reverse of the European experience where, historically, it was the church which appropriated politics. Secularism in the West has involved a gradual exclusion of the church from the domain of politics. It was a relatively easy process because religion was institutionalized. As a result of this, once you removed the church, it implied that you had also removed religion from politics. In Muslim societies such a process could not work because there is no church as such in Islam (Ayubi 1991:5). Given the limited nature of political stipulations in the Quran and Hadith, Muslims have had from the start to borrow and to improvise in the developing of their political systems. This process was inspired by (i) the *sharia* as represented in the Quran and sunna; (ii) Arabian tribal traditions and (iii) the political heritage of the lands they conquered, especially Persian and Byzantine traditions. The influence of the first source was more noticeable during the era of the first four rightly guided caliphs, the second during the Umayyad dynasty and the third during the Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties (Ayubi 1991:6f).

Agreeing to the foregoing position, Al-Madhi argues that instead of the Quran being rigid, it took an open attitude to the adoption of useful ideas and institutions of foreign origin. It is out of this conviction, he believes that caliph Umar adopted several ideas and institutions. For example, the land tax called *kharaj* and the bureaucratic system of *diwa*. That dynamism in Islam was inspired by the Quran and shaped by the examples of the Prophet and his companions. According to him, While Islam is integral to politics and society, there is a distinction between that which is immutable and that which is subject to change and development (Esposito 1983:233). He further

adds that there is no particular system of Islamic government. All those who theorized about such a system have simply expressed historically relevant means of applying Islamic political injunctions. An Islamic system of government requires a set of general principles, for example, the need to politically organize society, the need to base that on popular participation, the imperative of justice, and so on; second, the requirement to apply Islamic legislation. Any system that fulfill these conditions is entitled to be called Islamic (Esposito 1983:236).

### **Religion and Politics in Kenya**

According to Almond and Powell, they have identified three aspects of political culture. These are (a) system, (b) process and (c) policy aspects. The system aspects include the people's notions about the nature of political community and the appropriate bases of political legitimacy. This political community refers to a collectivity whose members feel that they should be in the same state. Whereas, process aspects deal with the way people should relate to politics and the way they should conduct politics. And finally, policy aspects pertain to people's ideology, their image of the good society and their ideas about the issues politicians should address (Tapper 1991:35). In Islamic theology, all Muslims are supposed to constitute an *umma*, a community of believers who accept the divine basis of society. This is because religious community is synonymous with political community, and the state is its political organizations. Though in an Islamic state there may be non-Muslims who enjoy protected status, but they do not have equal rights and duties with the members of the *umma*. The reason is because they are subjects of the state but not members of the political community (Tapper 1991:36). We would now want to relate this theological model within the Kenyan context, by analyzing the religio-political relation of Kenya in both the pre-independence and post-independence eras.

### ***Religio-Political Relations in the Pre-Independence Period***

Before Kenya became a British colony, such a theological model partially corresponded to the Sultan East Africa Dominion which was a form of an Islamic sultanate. The dominion covered the capital Zanzibar, and the coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania. This implies that the Kenya's coast

had had a long tradition of sultanate rule before it was annexed by the British as a protectorate. In this dominion Muslims and non Muslims existed as distinct political entities. Until 1875, if one was to participate in the political affairs of the dominion such as holding an administrative office, one had to be a Muslim. Non-Muslims were free to practice their religion without interference, in return of recognizing and obeying the political authority. There was no way the non-Muslim could rule the dominion because they were not members of the dominion's political community. Obedience to political authority in the Sultan East Africa Dominion was secured in great part by attributing divine qualities to it. The social system would be maintained because it was divinely ordained. In short, religio-political system controlled both political and social behaviour, directing them to its support and harmonious operation. The establishment of colonial structures and the efforts of the nationalists paved the way to the transformation of political system such that the basis of political legitimacy shifted to secular ones.

But before that was done the polity gave as much legitimacy to religion, as religion did to the polity. Furthermore, the religion of the state was sunni Islam. This form of Islam accepts temporal power as being legitimate, and tended to accord legitimacy to whoever was in power (Tapper 1991:41). The clear distinctions of a political nature between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Islamic sultanate should not be taken as sufficient evidence that the former were a unified political community. There were racial and sectarian differences that split the *umma*. Thus, the dominion had both the African Muslims and *shia* sects. It happened that both were not integrated into the political community, rather they were suppressed. The political community was supposed to be dominated by Arab Muslims and of the sunni affiliation. This explains why with the advent of nationalism in Kenya, the African Muslims supported the view for unitary Kenya. The nationalist effort was to inculcate a sense of Kenyan nationality with equal treatment to all citizens. The Arab-Muslims on the other hand, found it difficult to accept an ideology that challenged their monopoly of politics and their superior social status. As it became clear that the Arab-Muslims will now compete for positions with the rest of Kenyans (whether Muslims or non-Muslims), Islam was turned to as a means of securing and preserving their privileges, but to no avail. The spread of the ideas of

nationalism among the non-Muslims and African Muslims, prompted further revisions in the ideologies of integration among Arab Muslims. This was important as the spirit of Kenyan nationalism seem to have been dominating.

The Kenya's war of independence was waged in the name of a new political community. Upon attaining independence, efforts were launched to shape the population which remained within the boundaries of the state into a new political community. Membership in the new political community was acquired by being a citizen of the nation-state. Citizens were expected to develop a Kenyan national identity so as to enhance their feeling of attachment to the political community. This required the sultan's subjects at the coast to adjust and accept the new basis of community membership, which previously was religiously based. From that moment a new political community emerged in Kenya, with members whose religious characteristics did not affect their membership. All citizens are by definition, members of the Kenyan state, having equal rights. Religious affiliation is not mentioned in the laws as a criterion for membership in the political community. However, examining at the behavioural level, some segments of the Muslims at the coast continue to view their society as a collectively characterized by Islam. Although there has not yet been any comprehensive research on this.

The rise of the nation as the prevalent form of collectivity with which people identify, inform us that the nationalists efforts may have been successful in helping redefine the nature of the political community. Contrary to Islamic theology which views all believers as belonging to a collective unit and also refusing the division of the *umma* into political communities without a religious base, the nationalists ideology taking nation as the appropriate unit on which to build the political community, appeared to have permeated the Muslim community in Kenya. Today, most Kenyan Muslims, while being aware that they share a common religion with a number of people in the Middle East, they do not seem to think that this commonality warrants their incorporation under the same rule or political system.

During the colonial era, freedom of religion was guaranteed but no extra effort was made to encourage Islam. Theoretically the British colonial power respected Muslim sensitivities in so far as religious practices and feelings were concerned. This would help explain why *sharia* courts existed in Kenya and why the *kadhis* were on the pay roll of the colonial

administration in the country. Nevertheless, generally, the imperial administration together with different Christian missionary societies considered Muslims in Kenya and the whole of East Africa as a threat to their religious and political interests in the colony. To combat that threat the British administration often co-operated in formulating and implementing a wide range of policies whose intent and effect was to favour Christians and weaken Muslims (Njozi 2003:2).

### *Religio-Political Relations in the Post-colonial Period*

After independence, Kenya adopted a constitution that did not elevate any religion in the country as a state religion. Its policy was to separate religion as much as it could from the politics of the country. This perceived separation could none the less be said to be inconsistent and ambiguous. Attempts made by the state to separate religion from politics have not successfully separated the behavioural relation between religion and politics. References to God are embedded in the national fabric such that some Deistic concepts are woven into the mix. For instance the country's national anthem opens with "Oh God of all creation", which is a prayer to the Ultimate Reality. The opening ceremony of every parliamentary session is always preceded by prayers offered by the representatives of the various religious groups who have been invited to the chamber. It is here we concur with John O. Voll (1982:276) who observes that:

The old ideas of the separation of church and state in many countries clearly do not signify the separation of religion from politics.

This is true of Kenyan situation. Despite Kenya being a secular state constitutionally, one never fails to see contradictions from the actions of its politicians. We shall illustrate the contradictions in a short while after giving a brief background of how Africans perceive religion.

Generally, Africans conceive of religion (any religion) as a total way of life involving deep rooted beliefs and practices handed down from one generation to another. According to John S. Mbiti (1969), in this way of life there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular. If one accepts this African conception of religion, can one honestly say that any African of whatever religious persuasion is capable of sincerely separating

that 'total way of life' from other engagements such as politics? It would be extremely difficult for anyone who understands the religious nature of the Africans to expect them to separate religion from their other life engagements, including politics. This is because as Mbiti (1969) further rightly observes:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the field where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.

The above quotation clearly reveals to us the religious nature of Africans. Since that is how their religious nature compels them to instinctively behave, then African cannot help bringing religion into their politics.

It is not difficult in Kenya to realize that there is an omnipresence of religious behaviour among the ruling class. This was much more perfected during the reign of Daniel arap Moi. President Moi sought to cultivate his personal image as devoted Christian. He was seen frequently and in well publicized Sunday expeditions to church. In some of his speeches at times he would quote the Bible. This attitude enhances behavioural brotherhood between the church and the state hence integrating religion with politics. This attempt to establish courtship with religion did not prevent the main church bodies (Protestant and catholic) and some Islamists groups from criticizing the bad governance of the president. It is out of this that Moi found solace with the fundamentalist churches. According to Paul Gifford, these are the new brand of churches in Africa that have resolutely refuses to challenge government authorities on their bad record. Their principle is never to engage in any social analysis of political structures. Most of these churches are Pentecostal and the US influenced churches (Westerlund 1996 :198-215). In Kenya they include the Gospel Redeemed Church, African Church of Holy Spirit, Seventh Day Adventist, and the newer influenced

American churches under the umbrella the United Evangelical Churches of Kenya (UECK)<sup>1</sup>.

Since these churches divert attention from its deficiencies, the government uses them for support it offers to continue staying in power. This suspicion is likely to be valid because at a time when the Moi regime was under increasing pressure to become more democratic and accountable, the fundamentalist churches were busy offering their political support. This ridicule could be evident after the widely rigged elections of 1988. Reinhard Bonnke's magazine declared Kenya as truly privileged to be ruled by a born again head of state<sup>2</sup>. More to this courtship between religion and politics in Moi's regime was illustrated during the visit made by the international President of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church. During his 1991 visit to Kenya, the church president paid a courtesy call on President Moi. In their discussion Moi took the opportunity to commend the SDA church for their role in preaching the gospel and for being good missionaries in Kenya. It appears that to Moi a good religious body was one that did not indulge in politics of criticizing his government. In his reply, the church President commended President Moi who he described as a champion of religious freedom and expression. He assured President Moi that the SDA church together with its followers would continue supporting and being loyal to the government<sup>3</sup>.

Under Moi, Kenya's political structures had become so characterized by corruption and mismanagement that in November 1991 external donors refused further aid, pending the introduction of some system of accountability (Harden 1991:248-68). In the midst of widespread agitation for multiparty democracy which Moi was strenuously resisting, an official of Potter's House (an American denominational fundamentalist type) came to his support. This strange support was covered by one of the country's daily which reported that:

A Pastor [of the Potter's House] said yesterday that Christians

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<sup>1</sup> This is an umbrella body of about sixty churches most of which are affiliated to the United Evangelical Churches of America.

<sup>2</sup> *Revival Report* B/1989 E, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Kenya Time* December 1, 1990, p2.

should be parrying for the government instead of criticizing it. [The pastor said] 'As an American citizen who has lived in Kenya, I do not believe that a multiparty political system will work at this time in Kenya.' He said he had been to many developing countries and Kenya was one of the fastest developing he had been to. 'I believe that this is the result of good leadership. I want to thank President Moi ... for the outstanding job [he has] done', [the pastor] said<sup>4</sup>.

The same sentiments that Kenya was not ready for multiparty politics were echoed by Moi in his crusade to kill the agitation for plural politics. This did not stop other religious bodies in Kenya to continue pressuring for an accountable leadership. At this particular moment in time when the government was under sustained criticism from several sources, the African Church of the Holy Spirit held a special service in Nairobi to pray for the government. During the service over 1,200 followers together with their leader Bishop Kisanya registered as KANU members. The church resolved to support KANU and President Moi<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, with his support from the fundamentalist churches, Moi had to give in to the will of majority Kenyans – the acceptance of multiparty politics.

As the first multiparty elections of 1992 were approaching, more support for Moi surfaced from the United Evangelical Churches of Kenya (UECK). The head of their parent affiliate body (United Evangelical Churches of America), Rev. Charles Hardin led a delegation to Kenya for a major convention. This was in November 1992 only a month before the elections. And just before the convention, Rev. Hardin, his colleagues and the Kenyan leadership paid a visit to President Moi to confer and to pray with him. Moi took the opportunity to advise them to avoid ungodly behaviour, to have no antagonism to the state, and to stay out of politics. Moi's message and patronage was not lost on the UECK, as the ensuing convention became something of a promotion of Moi. This led to a statement signed by UECK leaders challenging the negative comments of the other churches (Westerlund 1996:207). This declaration gave Moi some assurance that it was not all the religious groups in Kenya that were opposing his

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily Nation* July 2, 1991, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Standard*, March 30, 1992, p. 4.



administration. It is at this point in time that the Protestant NCKK, the Catholic church and the IPK had come out with politically harsh statements critical of his regime. After the elections in December 1992, Moi won but through mass irregularities. As the opposition and NCKK were still debating whether to challenge the results, the UECK leaders came out again strongly rebuking the NCKK and urging the opposition to accept the results.

In March 1993, Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church of Seoul came to Kenya for a crusade. He had a well publicized reception with President Moi at state house, where Moi referred to his preaching as a 'blessing' for Kenya. In his last crusade, which Moi attended, Cho is reported to have preached the following:

.... [He] called on Kenyans to have faith in God in order to be delivered from the economic crisis facing the country. He said that Kenya was a blessed country because it had a God fearing leader. The South Korean preacher urged Kenyans to trust in Jesus in order to prosper ... [Pastor Cho said] that God gave the President wisdom to lead the country<sup>6</sup>.

Like other fundamentalist churches we have observed Cho's preaching was mere political. At exactly the same month (March), the London Financial Times, reported that the Kenya's economy had been plundered by Moi together with his few closest cronies. They have stolen million of dollars into their personal accounts thereby adversely affecting Kenya's economic development.<sup>12</sup> At a time when foreign and local press were pointing out that the root cause of Kenya's economic retardation was because of the state sanctioned corruption, a visiting religious head was preaching to thousands that Moi was ruling with wisdom bestowed by God himself. To him, the Kenyans were unable to prosper due to lack of commitment to God. Cho's preaching may have been a blessing for Kenya, but it was certainly for Moi.

### *Islamism in Kenya*

Through out the history of Islam, the Muslim world has witnessed the emergence of renewal movements within itself. These periodic renewal

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily Nation* April 1, 1993, p. 6.

movements were always stimulated by various factors, significantly political decline and socio-economic crises<sup>7</sup>.

Since these renewal movements were emerging in different eras depending on the prevailing circumstances, Youssef M. Choueiri suggests three names to describe a specific movement in a specific era. These names are: revivalism, reformism and radicalism.

According to Choueiri, revivalism refers to those Islamic movements that had emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The period that witnessed the emergence of revivalist Islam is said to have been characterized with financial crises, demographic dislocations and agricultural stagnation (Choueiri 1990:20). It is against this background that religious revivalist movements began to sprout in order to reinstate Islam in its pure and original state. Thus, Islamic revivalism made its appearance and exerted an enduring impact in the outlying areas stretching from Sumatra and Indian sub continent to Central Arabia and northern Nigeria (Choueiri 1990:20).

By contrast, Islamic reformism is a modern movement that came into being in the twentieth century. This movement conducted an open dialogue with European culture and philosophies in an attempt to grapple with what it appeared to be intolerable state of Islamic decline. By studying the pre-industrial phase of Europe, its exponents hoped to unveil the pre-conditions of building viable political structures and sound economic basis (Choueiri 1990:9). Thus, when Muslim religious leaders and politicians realized that their societies were in a state of decline in comparison with European nations, they felt there was need to correct the defect. It is this awareness of decline, which turned out to be the main theme in the discourse of Islamic reformists.

Lastly, Islamic radicalism is the latest attempt to establish an Islamic state. Its ideology is closely related to the anxieties and ambitions of certain strata of society, particularly the low and middle class professionals. It happened that by the mid of the twentieth century, both revivalism and reformism were superseded by the emergence of sovereign nation-states through out the Muslim world. It is argued that these new states carried out varied programmes of development and in the process they relegated Islam

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<sup>7</sup> *Financial Times* March 24, 1993, p. 6.

to a personal sphere (Choueiri 1990:10). Consequently, Islamic radicalism is viewed as a direct reaction to the growth of the nation-state and the peculiar problems of the twentieth century. Among the founders of this movement are al Maududi and Said Qutb.

Islamic resurgence in Kenya has been evident both in its radical and conservative forms. Perhaps, its radical face was can be claimed to have been presented by the IPK while its conservatism form has for a long time manifested itself through SUPKEM. Like in most countries in Africa, Islamism in Kenya is emerging as a force of political opposition. In early 1992, IPK was formed and wanted to participate in the political election of the country. The party's its intent was the desire to join the rising voice of national democracy and liberation. It had declared that its aim is to bring about a just constitutional government that upholds the ideals of democracy, human rights and removal of all forms of discrimination at all levels. However, the party was not given the opportunity to participate in the elections. The government failed to accede to the appeals of IPK (Muslims) to register it as an official political body. Instead it declared that there was no way it could register IPK as a political party. In response, youth within the IPK steered the organization on its militant direction. This new direction radicalized the IPK with respect to the state, and took a step towards a united Kenya Muslim identity in the Coastal town of Kenya.

The actions of the Islamist groups in Kenya are not only directed against the state, but also against the national umbrella organization (SUPKEM) representing Muslims. This umbrella organization could not wholly identify with the radical political Islam of the IPK. This could be attested by their publicized visit to the state house at a time when the IPK was engaged in street battles with the state. The SUPKEM was intent on acting as the sole guardian of Muslim affairs in Kenya. Perhaps, to the officials of SUPKEM, the political ailments of the community could not be treated through embracing radical Islam. All along the SUPKEM has maintained a more moderate and co-operative approach to the state in Kenya. Consequently, this conservative constituency to some extent scuttled the radical anti-state Islamic ethos of Islamic resurgence witnessed in Kenya. Nevertheless, the challenge posed by IPK to the government redeemed the complacency of the community with the state until then. Given the experience of political disturbances and frequent violence between the

government and members of IPK, the influence of Islam should not be underestimated in the national politics. Although, Islam in Kenya will continue to be a religion of minority in the years to come, its impact on politics at the national level cannot be ignored (Ayubi & Mohyuddin 1994: 154).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to show how humankind is both notoriously religious and political at the same time. The idea of the separation of religion and politics is only theoretical. The call for the separation of the two is often echoed to the convenience of the moment, which has been difficult to uphold.

DPHil student  
Religion and Culture  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

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