

FAITH-BASED DIPLOMACY, A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFRICAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY.

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Introduction: Lessons from 'Rwanda 94'

Like many Rwandans of my generation and more particularly believers, the timeline of our lives is fractured into two distinct periods; a pre-1994 and a post-1994. The fracture event is the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.¹ These two periods also correspond to two theological moments with regard to political theology: a moment of dull and dangerous ignorance and a moment of startled awareness. For more than 90 percent of Rwandans who were Christians, pre-1994 was a period when belonging to the church and belonging to the Rwandan polis were two extremely compartmentalised, almost alienated, lifestyles.

Let me open a postcolonial critical parenthesis: With regard to Rwanda and Christian missions, the issue is not that the Christianizing enterprise failed; rather the problem is that it succeeded too well. It successfully and systematically annihilated the so-called Rwandan paganism. Unfortunately, the baby and the water went down the drain together. The missionaries could not or did not want to distinguish between genuine religious expressions and pure paganism. Rwandan folk wisdom holds that the task of demolishing is far easier than the task of rebuilding. The theological task of the missionary and post-missionary church was to replace the old with the new, a pagan society with a new Christian order. To say that this theopolitical project did not succeed is a euphemism. The exponential growth of Christianity did not put in check the insidious fragmentation of the political society on ethnic lines. Publicly and in private lives, the wheat and the weeds grew together. In 1994, Christianity was gearing up to celebrate its centenary in Rwanda and the Rwandan *polis* was ripe for the most brutal genocide of the 20th century.

Writing about the re-emergence of *political theology* in German in the work of J B Metz, Moltmann pointed out that Metz developed the New Political theology as a late yet welcome Christian reflection and discourse on the Holocaust.² With this in mind, it is not surprising that the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide would trigger profound interest in Rwandan political theology. The task of theologising about 'Rwanda 94' is, at least, a three-fold engagement with Rwandan political theology. First, it sees in historical processes, both political and theological, an outworking of what could be termed, for want of a better concept, 'negative' political theology or what Aguilar calls the 'high theology of the Rwandan Church.'³ *Metz made a similar critique against the transcendental theology of Rahner.* This negative political theology was revealed in Passivism, the Reciprocal Assimilation and cooption of political and ecclesial elites and what Bayart calls the politics of the belly.

¹ To avoid unnecessary repetitions, 'Rwandan genocide' is replaced by 'Rwanda 94' in some passages of this paper.

² Michael Kirwan's *Political Theology: A New Introduction*. (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 2008), 170.

³ Mario Aguilar, *Theology, Liberation and Genocide. A Theology of the periphery* (SCM Press: London, 2009), 18-19.

Secondly, it treats genocide itself as a theological moment/event; a ‘sinful’ culmination of political and theological malpractice. It is a bold critique that dares to qualify these malpractices theologically as ‘Sin’, but also strongly stresses faith-motivated heroism demonstrated by individual believers or entire faith communities in the face of ungodly violence. Heroism here amounted at times to sacrifice and martyrdom.

Thirdly, post-genocide period is a period of re-membering a dis-membered Rwandan social body, to borrow from Mary Gray, and reconciliation. The task of political theology is to offer a critique of the dominant role played by the State; a questioning of what Cavanaugh would call State Soteriology. It also consists of a surveying of the involvement of faith communities, Christian ones in this instance, in the process of reconciliation and re-membering.

It is this last aspect that inspired today’s contribution with the intention of moving from a particular instance to a broader platform, from Rwandan to African context, from genocide as an extreme instance of catastrophe/conflict to African identity-based conflicts in general, from post-genocide reconciliation to pre-, post and in-conflict peace making referred to as Faith-Based Diplomacy.

It appears important at this juncture to clarify key concepts around which this contribution hinges.

Faith-Based Diplomacy: This concept was borrowed from Johnston and Sampson.⁴ It is used here primarily to refer to a Christian alternative to that aspect of conventional diplomacy related to conflict resolution and peace making. It presupposes the existence of a conflict situation and is an instance of active involvement in political crises which taps in Christian Faith Capital. However, it could be argued that Christian ministry understood politically, including the incarnation and the work of Christ, is diplomatic both in means and ends.

African Political theology: without going into the complexities surrounding the definition of Political theology⁵, suffice to say here that by African Political theology, I mean that forward looking form of theologizing that is positive, healthy, life-affirming and in conformity with the politics of the Christ of the Gospels. It is also a political theology that takes seriously the particular historical reality of the African subject.

Hybridity: In the context of a dialogue with African Theology, political or otherwise, it is important to re-emphasize the hybrid nature of postcolonial Africa. For better or worse, Colonialism –understood as a coming together of a hegemonic and subaltern cultures- changed Africa for ever. The Africa which emerged from the colonial era had no way of going back to a supposed pristine pre-colonial identity. Legally and geographically the *uti possidetis* principle enshrined within the Charter of the African Union in 1963 foreclosed any possible return to the past. Even without this legalization of the colonial *status quo*, the cultural-epistemic might be the best term, political and theological landscape had been terminally contaminated with western thought and world view. The African subject ever since belongs to two worlds and two orders of knowledge. After 120 years which in would be the average combination of colonial and post

⁴ Douglass Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, ed., *Religion: the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, (Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 1994).

⁵ For a comprehensive survey of the ‘definitions’ of Political theology, I refer to the first chapter of Kirwan’s *Political Theology*, 3-15.

colonial years for most Africans, we are hard pressed to distinguish between the legacies of the two matrixes. It is my view that the more time elapses the harder this distinction will be.

Being a Christian African Theologian one must, I contend, embrace this hybridity in one's theology as a matter of fact. The simple mention of 'Christian' or 'theology' juxtaposed to 'African' is sufficient to remind one that they are moving on hybrid ground. Our theology, ecclesiology and Christian witness and praxis are infused and saturated with this belonging to two orders of knowledge. Yet, African theologizing faces us with the task of clarifying what is so African in methodology and substance. My research at Manchester university and today's contribution reflect this mixed identity and hopefully our discussions have already and will continue to shed a light on different ways of theologising responsibly and with accountability to Africa's contextual peculiarities.

The Political in African Theology

There is no doubt that contributions to the development of an African Political theology are a matter of urgency, if one considers the insignificant place that this branch of public and practical theology occupies in the overall body of African theology. Two examples help illustrating this situation: the first work is *Paths of African Theology*⁶ and the second work, the article "Black Political Theologies" in the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*.⁷ What these two works share in common are the relatively small, or indeed complete lack of any reference made to sub-Saharan African Political theology. Whereas Copeland's article confines African Political Theology to the South-African experience; *Paths of African Theology* does not mention African Political theology at all.

However, despite this deficiency in theoretical articulation, African Political theology is reflected in numerous instances of praxis within African faith communities in general and Christian ones in particular. It exists in its negative format but also in its positive format. The negative format refers to those instances in which Christian communities have rendered their support, implicitly or explicitly to political praxes which are antithetical to, or contradictory with the foundations of Christian beliefs. The positive format represents the opposite: the historical moments when Christian communities upheld political praxes that promote life in its fullness in the face of policies and politics of death, injustice or chaos in Africa.

This contribution is interested in the development of political theology as inductively springing from this second set of practices. Out of many instances of Christian political praxis, it focuses on African Christian communities as depositories of the ministry of peace and reconciliation and shows that these communities have been actively involved in the resolution of some of the most complicated conflicts on the continent. This involvement was not a subtle or timid indirect attempt to influence the outcome of the conflicts. It was rather a bold and direct initiative to confront war by peace and lead the way in the search for a lasting and peaceful solution. Although the case of South Africa immediately comes to one's mind, and rightly so, it is far from being an isolated case. In Mozambique, Rhodesia, the Sudan, Nigeria and Zaire, to name

⁶ Rosino Gibelini, ed., *Paths of African Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

⁷ Shawn M. Copeland, "Black Political Theologies", in Scott and Cavanaugh, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 274-5.

but a few, Christian communities have been at the forefront of what Johnston and Sampson have called Faith-based Diplomacy and have wrought peace out of bloody conflicts.⁸

This paper aims at answering the following questions: in post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa ridden with identity-based conflicts, what does faith-based diplomacy or conflict resolution mean and in what way does it constitute a theopolitical praxis? How do these praxes constitute an overlooked source or material for Political Theology? Could it be possible that not elaborating a theology out of these praxes deprives faith communities of historical theopolitical resources to engage with or prevent future conflicts?

Against Rahner's transcendental approach, Metz argued that theology in general and political theology in particular must be rooted in the historical reality of human subjects.⁹ Mushete echoes this concern when he argues that the two main thrusts of the current theological thought in Africa's theology are to remain in close contact with the primary sources of revelation (Bible, Tradition) and a determination to be completely open to the African world and its problems.¹⁰ Copeland has suggested five areas of responsibilities for African Political Theology, including the violence to which Black African subjects are forced to endure almost on a daily basis.¹¹ I argue here that political identity-based conflicts in Africa constitute one instance of such violence and that faith-based diplomacy in which African Christian communities have been involved, constitutes an example of Christian practices, which illustrate Political Theology in action.

These practices subvert the secularization of the politics of war and conflicts. They also dissent from a certain *Politique de l'Afrique* which characterised the relationship between faith communities and politics in Africa, where the veil of separation of the secular and the sacred masked damning collaboration and compromise. They also shed full light on the eschatological status of these communities as harbingers of the Peaceful Kingdom in which swords will be turned into ploughshares and the Lion and the Lamb will drink from the same brook (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Church and State in post-colonial Africa: Passivism and Negative Political theology

The modern state in Europe rose in a historical context (the aftermath of the Wars of Religions), which led to a separation of State and Religion (Christianity). From this separation, Cavanaugh argues, the 'myth' of the Enlightenment assumes that any directly politicized theology is "inherently dangerous and violent, and that the modern era has done a tremendous service for peace and in separating power from Religion."¹² The birth of the African postcolonial state is different. As Bayart explains, the contribution of Christian Churches in the rise of postcolonial Africa is so undeniable that many have seen in churches the matrix of the African State and

⁸ Johnston and Sampson, *Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, 3.

⁹ Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the mystery of God: Political, liberation, and Public Theologies* (Continuum: London, 2001), 39-44.

¹⁰ Ngindu Mushete, "An overview of African Theology", in *Paths*, 18.

¹¹ Copeland, *Black*, 283

¹² William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a political Act in a Age of Global Consumerism* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 5.

ethnicity.¹³ He writes that, “a political reading of religious practices in modern Africa consists in finding in them one of the main matrixes –if not *the main matrix-* of the post-colonial modern state (*modernité étatique postcolonial*).”¹⁴ As a consequence, there has always been some sort of parental connection between the Missionary Church and the political elites in postcolonial African states. This connection was more the rule than the exception in predominantly Christian states; even though there have been instances of subsequent violent divorces and fallouts.

A ‘negative’ political theology issued from this close kinship between State and Church. This political theology was mainly based on a political reading of two key biblical texts: Romans 13:1-7 and 1Peter 2 :17-20. These passages which form the spine of traditional Christian political theology, at least within African Roman Catholicism, derive all political power from God and call for unchallenged or absolute submission and obedience to the state. In fact, argues Bayart, they go beyond, if not in the opposite direction of Christ’s political thought, who never stopped to castigate the vanity and the vileness of worldly things and whose attitude towards political power was one of contempt with a touch of irony.¹⁵

This petrine and pauline conception of power, a “*nulla potestas nisi a Deo*”, has profoundly marked the political and intellectual thought of the African Church. Moreover, it has had many heavy consequences on African political Theology. First of all, echoing Schmitt’s political theology, the Church fulfilled the function of legitimating and underwriting political power.¹⁶ Besides, by means of a mutual assimilation of elites, more often within the ruling political party and under the authority of the President; the church could neither avoid being instrumentalized nor losing its role as an institution of social critique.¹⁷ Thus, Bayart points out that Christian Churches remained strangely silent in the face of bloody conflicts in Burundi in 1972, in Kenya, in Zaire, to name but a few.¹⁸

This complicit silence was offered in return for and was part of what Bayart has referred to as the *Politique du ventre*. By this concept, he alludes to a series of political and economic practices by means of which the Church participated in or identified itself with the authoritarian nature of the State and the control over the channels of economic production. This led Christianity to a political *ecclesiologie de chefrerie* in which the pastor, the priest or the bishop requires a ‘ritual of the Chief’. On the economic front, the Church became an abrasive economic entrepreneur whose activities responded to the exploitative and predatory logic of the postcolonial state. According to this logic, those who hold political power also have total control on the means of wealth accumulation and strive to keep this control.¹⁹

¹³ Jean-François Bayart, « Les Eglises Chrétiennes et la Politique du Ventre » in Jean-François Bayart, ed., *Religion et Modernité en Afrique Noire* (Paris : Karthala, 1993), 143.

¹⁴ Bayart, *Religion*, 15.

¹⁵ Bayart, *Religion*, 290.

¹⁶ Michael Hollerich, “Carl Scmitt”, in *The Companion*, 113

¹⁷ Another accusation levelled against Schmitt’s theology. See Hollerich, *Carl Scmitt*, 119.

¹⁸ Bayart, *Religion*, 147

¹⁹ Bayart, *Religion*, 141

*African conflicts and Faith-based Diplomacy*²⁰

African Conflicts: Catastrophe as daily routine

Violent conflicts have become so perennial in Black African countries as to have become structural in some countries and spreading like wildfire on the continent.²¹ From Niger, Nigeria, Chad and the Sudan at the Saharan northern gate to Angola, DR Congo and Zimbabwe at the southern entry of the Kalahari, almost every country in this vast zone has experienced a violent conflict in the last decade, and some are still unresolved. The sub-continent's track record on civil war, violent conflicts, strife and political instability has earned it the undesirable appellation of a "continent at war with itself."²² Like poverty, diseases (AIDS, malaria, etc.) and desertification, chronic violence has become a cannibalistic deity to which many Black Africans sacrifice each day. The practice has been repeated so often that it has become a macabre ritual, a fatalistic banality. The situation reminds one of Metz's jeremiads: "catastrophes are broadcast in between two songs –the music continues like the heard flow of time which unmercifully overruns everything and cannot be interrupted." Or in the words of Brecht, "When the criminal deed occurs like the rain falls, nobody will interfere, shouting: Stop it!" Walter Benjamin has summarized this African predicament aptly, "The fact that 'everything continues as usual' is the catastrophe."²³

This *banalisation* of violence brings to one's mind Metz's concept of "nonidentity."²⁴ In relation to the Third World, the world to which the majority of African countries belong, Metz argues that its very existence, with its misery, its abandonment, its violence and its more than problematic future, is "a frontal, practical denial of the Christian message."²⁵ This challenge "takes away the possibility of reasoning theologically beyond cultural and ethnic determinations."²⁶ Therefore a fully inner assumption is required from theology. For Metz this took the form of a departure from transcendence and theory to history and praxis and constituted the ground and the aim of his political theology. The history and experience of violent conflict by sub-Saharan Africans confront Christian faith communities and theologians, those on the continent and those interested in it, with the same brutal reality of nonidentity and ask them to offer the possibility of speaking of God without compromising the truth of the Christian Gospel. In the words of Jean-Marc Ela,

For the sake of the credibility of the gospel, we must renounce religious discourse pronounced from on high, where it wafts above the byroads of misery and indignity. We

²⁰ In the previous and following pages, "diplomacy" refers to that aspect of diplomacy related to conflict resolution and peace building.

²¹ Adebayo Adedeji, ed., *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 6-7.

²² Adedeji, *African Conflicts*, xvi.

²³ Jurgen Manemann, "The Depoliticization of God as a challenge for Political Theology" in Hoelzl and Ward, ed, *Religion and Political Thought* (London-New York: Continuum, 2006), 272.

²⁴ J.M. Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 5.

²⁵ Martinez, *Confronting*, 77.

²⁶ Martinez, *Confronting*, 83

must enable our people find their way of speaking of God precisely where they may face the forces of death in every day life. Otherwise we will not be able to give them the Gospels entire wealth of protest, its demands to transform the world.²⁷

Faith-based Diplomacy: Thumping State Soteriology

At this point, it is important to remember that together with security, diplomacy - or international relations in a broader sense - is one of the main and exclusive functions of the state; it is also the most secularized. It is not susceptible to privatization, unless this privatization is seen as authorized by the State. By means of diplomacy, politicians aim at carrying out the soteriological mission of bringing peace.²⁸ When wars and conflicts break out, statesmen and stateswomen feel that it is their prerogative to bring peace on the national territory through diplomatic negotiations.

The complex nature of African identity-based conflicts makes it difficult for conventional diplomacy to deliver a sustainable resolution. They are intra-state conflicts, deeply rooted in history and derive from clashes of communal identity; whether on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality or religions. More often, they tend to occur in situations where societies are suffering from the strains of economic competition and rising expectations.²⁹ The classical tools of conventional diplomacy, usually suitable for dealing with conflicts that relate to power politics and tangible material interest, are ill-equipped to deal with nonmaterial, identity-based conflicts in which the key is often, to use Johnston's words, the "understanding of the emotional stakes of the parties."³⁰

Faith-based diplomacy as a type of political mediation arose among others from this nature of African conflicts, in response to the inadequacy of conventional diplomacy and because of the rapports between Religion and State in Africa. If, in modern times, religion has increasingly been seen in the West as a theological set of issues rather than a profoundly political influence; the political importance of religion reverberates with strength in Third World countries, particularly in Africa. Bayart highlighted the vital role of religious mediations in Africa, pointing out that religious cults are the referential axis around which revolve the intricate game of conflicts and agreements by which a new cohesion is reached.³¹ In sub-Saharan Africa, Bayart continues, it is the religious factor that glues together the socio-political body because better than other social institutions, "they are the more likely to provide the accords, rejections, allocations and exclusions whose details often elude most of us but which contribute to the dialectic of the dual arrangement of external frontiers (spatial) and internal frontiers (social) which make the political city."³²

²⁷ Jean-Marc Ela, "Christianity and Liberation in Africa", in in *Paths*, 145.

²⁸ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 10.

²⁹ Douglas Johnston, "Beyond Power Politics", in D. Johnston and C. Sampson, ed., *Religion: the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

³⁰ Johnston, *Beyond*, 3.

³¹ Bayart, *Religion*, 12.

³² Bayart, *Religion*, 12.

Historical examples of Christian faith-based Diplomacy

The following three cases are short abstracts of historical instances of faith-based conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1960s and 1990s. They are presented in chronological order to highlight historical continuity. Also, they represent ‘closed cases’, allowing for a full appraisal which would not be possible in the study of current or ongoing crises.

a) *Quaker conciliation in Nigerian Civil War*³³. The Nigerian Civil war, which lasted from May 1967 to January 1970 is also historically known as the “Biafra War” because it broke out following the declaration of independence by the Nigerian Eastern Region of Biafra. In this conflicts, many identity factors came into play : regional (north-south), religious (Muslims-Christians) and ethnic (Hausa and Fulani against Ibo). The war ended by military action, however all along the conflict, a group of Quakers from London had worked tirelessly to end the conflict by negotiations.

b) *CSE and the Catholic Church in Mozambique*³⁴. Mozambique was under Portuguese colonial rule until 1975. In 1962, the Frente de Libertação de Mozambique (Frelimo) was founded to rid the country of the Portuguese. With Portugal’s defeat in 1975, Frelimo became the natural power base. Within six months of achieving independence, however, an insurgency was launched by the Resistance Naciaonal Mozambicana (Renamo), an organization supported by Rhodesia.³⁵ The civil war in Mozambique lasted sixteen years following another long war for the decolonization of the country from Portuguese rule. The negotiations between the government of Maputo and the Renamo guerrilla movement took place in Rome from 1990 to 1992. What makes these negotiations particular and relevant to this work is, to use Della Rocca’s words, the ‘official and unusual role’ played by a faith communities: the Community of Sant’ Egidio (CSE) in Rome, the Catholic Church represented by Bishop Goncalves of Beira and, in a limited measure, protestant churches.³⁶

c) *MRA, the Quakers and the Catholic Church in Rhodesia*³⁷. As one by one African states broke free from the shackles of colonialism, black Rhodesia’s quest for self-rule encountered an entrenched white establishment. Ian Smith, the stubborn and resourceful leader of the heavily outnumbered whites unilaterally declared Rhodesia independent of Britain in 1965, effectively tightening the grip of white control. Sanctions by Britain and the United Nations followed, while internally a guerrilla campaign was waged against the government by competing nationalist factions, the main two being the ZANU-PF of Robert Mugabe and the ZAPU of Joshua Nkomo. The struggle left the nation with a war-ravaged infrastructure, a fragmented opposition, and little hope for a peaceful solution.

In 1979, Rhodesia was a political nightmare; black and white civilians were exhausted by the war and already 20,000 people had been claimed by the conflicts. Rhodesia was also a theatre of

³³ This summary is taken from Johnston and Sampson, *Missing Dimension*, 88-111.

³⁴ This wonderful peacemaking saga is the subject of Della Rocca’s *Mozambique: De la Guerre A la Paix*. (L’harmattan: Paris, 1997).

³⁵ Douglas Johnston, “Looking ahead: Toward a New Paradigm” in *Missing Dimension*, p.327.

³⁶ Della Rocca. *Mozambique*, 7.

³⁷ For a longer version see Johnston and Sampson, *Missing Dimension*, 208-251.

failed diplomatic negotiations. Between 1966 and 1979, some twenty efforts had been launched, most involving government outside Rhodesia in a brokering role. All of them had failed. However, in September 1979, the impossible happened. The warring parties met in London at Lancaster House and after 13 weeks of non-stop negotiations, a cease-fire was signed, a transitional government was agreed upon and a settlement on a new constitution was secured. It is historically evidenced that religious influence was pervasive in the events that led to the signature of the peace agreement. Three main religious actors, mostly Christian, were at work: The Catholic Church, Moral Re-Armament and the Quakers.

How is Faith-Based Diplomacy an outworking of Political Theology?

The three cases presented above are not isolated. One could have added the roles of the World Council of Churches and the All African Council of Churches in the Sudanese conflict in 1972, the well-documented role of Christian Churches in ending Apartheid in South Africa,³⁸ and the role of the global network of National Prayer Breakfast in the conflict opposing Kenya and Somalia regarding the Northern Frontier District in 1981. Currently, one thinks of the ongoing efforts by Nigerian Christian and Muslim clerics to reduce conflicts between both faith communities³⁹, the recent involvement of Desmond Tutu in the post-electoral violence in Kenya and the crucial role which is being played by Father Apollinaire Malu Malu in the East of the DR Congo.⁴⁰ These efforts are Christian political-historical practices which should inspire a richer articulation of an African Political Theology. Below, I give five reasons, which are more representative than exclusive to substantiate this claim.

a. Speaking of God in historical catastrophic circumstances

It has been argued that Political Theology is a theologico-political theology whose task is to speak God in the midst of the terribly difficult circumstances of people's lives.⁴¹ Manemann is right to point out that "actual political life indicates whether we really believe in God or just in our believing in our belief in God. Because whenever we use the word 'God', this must change our life."⁴² Indeed, the faith communities involved in Nigeria, Mozambique and Zimbabwe have not shrunk from tapping into the 'God' resource. Hence in Mozambique, the parties used the biblical story of Joseph to emphasize the importance of reconciliation.⁴³ In Rhodesia, MRA workers used selective scriptures and testimonies of their experience of God in order to encourage the belligerent to listen to God.⁴⁴ By doing this, religious mediators enabled the parties, if they so desired, to concede assets or claims to that authority itself so to speak, rather than to their antagonists.⁴⁵

³⁸ See for e.g Nancy Nyquist, *Trauma, Truth and Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30-38.

³⁹ www.usip.org/pubs/peaceworks/pw55.pdf

⁴⁰ Tshitenge Lubabu, "Grand-messe pour la Paix à Goma", In *Jeune Afrique n°2455*, 38.

⁴¹ T. Peters, *Johann Baptist Metz*, 17-18.

⁴² Manemann, "*Depoliticization*", 271.

⁴³ Della Rocca, *Mozambique*, 129.

⁴⁴ Krybill, *From Rhodesia*, 234.

⁴⁵ Luttwak, *Missing dimension*, 18.

b. Subverting State Soteriology

Faith-based diplomacy does not only encourage conceding authority to God, it also challenges the myth of the State as the arch of salvation. It is in soteriology, argued Cavanaugh, that the end of the Christian mythos and the state mythos seem to coincide and the aim of this soteriology is to make peace.⁴⁶ However, in the footsteps of Locke and Hobbes, Schmitt's political theology had suggested that the political is the total. This would mean that when existential conflicts erupt, no other criterion for decision-making could take priority; the religious being discarded because the church could only exercise an *indirecta potestas* in the sphere of law and politics.⁴⁷ Clearly, one does not have to be a full supporter of the Radical Orthodoxy school of thought to agree with Cavanaugh that religion can and does offer an alternative to the 'real politick' model of peacemaking.⁴⁸

Thus, the communities presented in the three cases recognized that in the eschatological politics of in-between times, it is the calling of the *ekklesia* to shoulder the ministry of peace and reconciliation (John 14:24, 2 Cor. 5:19) in the stead of the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) and be the real Peacemakers who will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:9). All the religious actors involved in the conflicts mentioned above showed a tremendous commitment to the cause of peace. This commitment was especially demonstrated through the practice of patience. In Mozambique, the CSE worked tirelessly for two years and never yielded to discouragement, setbacks or even the reluctance of the parties.⁴⁹ In Rhodesia and Nigeria, this was exemplified by the amount of time that the Quakers committed to the suffering people of both countries.⁵⁰

c. Fighting a binary constellation of identities "friend-foe" and reclaiming the pristine unity of the social body.

With African identity-based conflicts reappears the old definition by Carl Schmitt of the political as the distinction between friend and foe. In this context, difference is experienced as a threat and conceptualised as what Mannemann calls a "binary constellation of identities"⁵¹, and Hobbes' assumption of a human natural state of *bellum omnis contra omnem* is enthroned.⁵² When Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau imagined the social body as a multitude of individuals deadlocked in endless warfare and needing a Leviathan or a Social Contract to keep the peace, they rooted their assumptions in the human predicament of the post-fall. From the moment Adam accused Eve, Cain killed Abel, the Tower of Babel... individuality was born and with it enmity, strife and war. Neither of them conceived a pristine pre-fall state of unity and harmony among creation.⁵³

⁴⁶ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 18-19. Ironically, the old Roman saying '*si vis pacem, para bellum*' seems to be the golden rule *since* war becomes the means by which the State soteriology is realised!

⁴⁷ Hollerich, *Carl Smith*, 116.

⁴⁸ On the political theology –or Political Ecclesiology to be more precise- of the Radical Orthodox, see Kirwan, *Political Theology*, 178-187.

⁴⁹ Della Rocca, *Mozambique*, 16.

⁵⁰ Krybill, *From Rhodesia*, 234; Sampson, *Quaker Conciliation*, 106ff.

⁵¹ Mannemann, *Depolitization*, 275.

⁵² Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 16-17

⁵³ Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical*, 17.

By actively seeking the end of conflicts, these Christian communities testified to the fact that the Cross was the ultimate violence to end all violence. It has restored peace and unity of the social-political body by annihilating the social insecurities, pain or guilt that tend to transform healthy 'I-Thou' relationships into 'friend-foe' fragmented identities.⁵⁴ These religious mediators involved in African conflicts would rather agree with Liebsch that there is no one who is condemned to be an enemy, neither a natural nor an objective one. Rather enmity is the result of a previous process in which enemies are made.⁵⁵ As one of the Quakers involved in the Biafran affair noted, their virtually sole dogma was that God is in everyone, that one cannot be hostile toward another without being hostile or violent toward oneself and that working for peace is "to realize –make real- the bond between us all".⁵⁶ This echoes Metz's thought when he postulates that the experience of the other in his or her otherness is an unavoidable path to the experience of the radical otherness of God.⁵⁷

d. Solidarity and Service as Discipleship

Christian peacemaking testifies to this divine bond between "us all" through a genuine solidarity and service to all those caught in the midst of historical violence. This was arguably the greatest drive behind the cases of faith-diplomacy evoked above. Christianity is truly solidarity and means, to use Metz's definition, "the affirmation and support of the subject as such under any historical circumstances, especially under the threat of suffering and destruction of that subject."⁵⁸ It is indeed in the arena of historical catastrophes and political struggle that the truth and transformative power of the Christian faith should be demonstrated.

In Rhodesia for instance, the Quakers understood their peacemaking efforts as primarily a way of establishing human solidarity with all parties. In their engagement with all combatant parties, the Quakers brought the simplest agenda to the meeting: engaging the parties as human beings suffering from a ghastly war and struggling to find their way out. In a more practical way, the team of peacemakers demonstrated their compassion by calling on the vast network of Quaker relief organizations.⁵⁹ The same could also be said of MRA and the Catholic Church or the CSE in Mozambique. Solidarity and service imply presence and the possibility of developing an "eyewitness" theology.

e. A Theology that "sees" beyond what is "visible"

Faith-based diplomacy is a Christian practice, which, in violent conflicts, sees what conventional diplomats tend not to see. Instead of seeing "interests", it sees people, their suffering, their lost dignity, their hunger for peace and their starvation from the fullness of life. It sees the human subject. Metz is reported as saying that what most characterizes the political role of the Christians in relation to situations of injustice and oppression is their ability to see more, to see

⁵⁴ J,M Ashley, "Johann Baptist Metz", in *Blackwell*, 247

⁵⁵ Mannemann, *Depoliticization*, 277.

⁵⁶ Sampson, *Quaker Conciliation*, 95.

⁵⁷ Martinez, *Confronting*, 78.

⁵⁸ Ashley, *Metz*, 247

⁵⁹ Krybill, *From Rhodesia*, 233-6.

with the eyes of their faith. Christianity is for Metz a School of seeing, a seeing capable of discovering both the suffering of the world, and in it, discovers God.⁶⁰

As Christian practice, faith-based diplomacy is most of all, a practice of “open eyes”, a practice of seeing more than what is normally seen, especially in relation to the unseen, the unnoticed suffering in the world—a practice capable of bringing that suffering to the awareness of all and making this suffering meaningful on the political scene. The Catholic Church in Rhodesia did just this when, through its worldwide network, it endeavored to inform the world about what was happening to innocent civilians during the war.⁶¹ Faith-based diplomacy carried out in Nigeria, Mozambique and Rhodesia was also a practice that heard untold stories. Through the disciplined listening of the Quakers, the Catholic workers of the Justice and Peace Commission or the discreet MRA advisers; untold stories were heard and the mediators made sure that they were brought to the negotiating table.

Conclusion

“Why haven’t you told us of these catastrophes in theology? Why do we experience the abyssal misery of people we face just like an echo from the past or the aftermath of a thunderstorm when we realize everything is over? Why is our theology so far away from the history of people’s suffering?”⁶²

With this question Metz complained about the transcendental theology of his teacher Rahner. This paper rejoins the criticism intoned by Metz; starting with the introduction which made a clear connection between inept political theology and Rwandan genocide. It argued that if in their dialogue with Africa, African Christianity and theology fail to take into consideration the political-historical situation of the African subject; the result would be in the same category as the ‘disastrous theological error’ denounced by the *First Barmen Declaration*.⁶³

African identity-based conflicts, it has been argued, constitute a historical-political reality where the African subject experiences violence and death. It is also an arena in which, on the one hand official diplomacy has experienced more failures than successes, while on the other, Christian faith communities have shown that they can offer a viable alternative for peace-building through faith-based diplomacy. The efforts of Quakers in Nigeria, of the CSE and the Christian Churches in Mozambique, and of the MRA, the Quakers and the Catholic Church in Rhodesia constitute historical examples of Christian political praxes which could inspire the elaboration of constructive and positive political theology on the sub-continent.

A genuine conversation between the Christian faith and sub-Saharan Africa cannot avoid the perennial identity-based wars and conflicts that have mercilessly claimed many lives of the African subjects. However, emphasis should not be put exclusively on violence as if to exalt the ‘Satanic greatness of evil’. Rather, this dialogue must give pride of place to faith-based diplomatic efforts carried out by faith communities and religious leaders; appointed *diplomats* of the eschatological in-between, to end these conflicts. This, I argue, should lead to the articulation of a practical political theology that understands the situation of African people, church(es), society(ies) on the one side and the Christian message on the other; a theology

⁶⁰ Martinez, *Confronting*, 79.

⁶¹ Krybill, *From Rhodesia*, 213

⁶² Manemann, *Depoliticization*, 272.

⁶³ Kirwan, *Political theology*, 115.

expressed in and through a praxis that, based on concrete biblical narrative, always takes sides to favor the African subject, especially the oppressed, the destitute, the conquered, and the dead. Hopefully, African Political theology will see more studies in the mould of Katongole's recent *The Sacrifice of Africa*; works drawn from the wells of faith in God and in the believing goodness of his people.⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa. A Political Theology for Africa*. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge UK, 2010).