

## **The Local Church and Lived Out Politics in Africa**

Heglon Kitawi Mwandaghina  
Africa International University  
hkitawi@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

Politics is much more than elections, democracy, State governance, and such like activities; it encompasses all of life in a society. The church is not left out in politics and it is my assertion here that it is at its most political when it lives out its true message as the church. I seek to illustrate this assertion using Karura Community Church based in Nairobi, Kenya under the leadership of Rev. Ngari Kariithi. This is on the backdrop of the indictment from Gifford (2009) that the Church in Kenya is co-opted with the State machinery. The study seeks to illustrate that as much as the hierarchical Church structures are important in confronting excesses in state Governance, lived-out Christian testimony is just as effective. This is because the one who issues authority to Govern for the State is the same one who issues authority for the Church that is God. It, therefore, follows that the quality of congregants produced by the church should be of great interest to the State because in healthy functioning governance because they make good citizens. This is a neo-Augustinian understanding of the connection between the Church and politics where we see the City of God and the City of Man work alongside each other.

Keywords: Neo-Augustinian, local church/local assembly, corruption, Kenya, politics

### **Introduction**

Gifford (2009) describes the way Kenyan Christianity has failed in its mandate to stem rampant corruption. He examines the church hierarchy and is disappointed. Gifford does not have kind words for clergy who have thrown in their lot with the state or act in a way that mimics them. He explores four ways Kenyan Christianity and politics relate. Firstly, he seeks to correct the overly homogenous ways that commentators describe African Christianity. Kenyan Christianity, he argues, is best seen as a collection of Christianities. Secondly, he seeks to show that each segment of these contextual Christianities engages with politics differently. He argues, however, that each expression of Christianity in Kenya uses its “dominance, influence and authority as a way of achieving visibility, status and acquiring gain.” (Gifford, 2009, p. 1) Thirdly, he defines politics broadly. For Gifford politics should not only be restricted to parliament and political parties but also to “vital public institutions like the judiciary, media, agencies of law enforcement, financial institutions, even health and education systems.” (Gifford, 2009, p.1) Fourthly, he chooses the elements in Christianity that engage best with politics in Kenya. He is not overly concerned with the obvious elements used to describe a church, for example, the hierarchical nature of leadership or the efficacy with which piety can be described or even the distinguishing theology of each group. He is concerned with the way each expression of Christianity has engaged with the political powers of the day, and in so doing, he decides whether it has failed or succeeded in holding the government in check. (Gifford, 2009)

In analyzing the Christianity evidenced by the new churches, Gifford seeks to explain the lack of engagement or unwillingness to engage in socio-political change. He wonders whether the influence of the East African Revival in the way that ‘the saved ones’ shunned political engagement has affected Kenyan Christianity. “There is a strand, perhaps influenced by the East

African Revival, which sees socio-political analysis as simply irrelevant to the one thing necessary.” (Gifford, 2009, pp. 227-228) He gives an example of Redeemed Gospel Church under the leadership of the founder Bishop Arthur Kitonga who receives support from World Vision and his American network to alleviate the plight of the needy and the vulnerable. It is telling that he does not see any need to extend that work, to build structures, or use it as a platform for advocacy for the needy; consolidation of his power in conformity with the political powers of the day seems to interest him more.

In this paper, my goal is not to disagree with Gifford but rather broaden the argument. I do this by pointing out that he focused on the hierarchical clergy’s inadequacy in pointing out the excesses of the state and in effect it looks like the Church has failed in its role of being a vanguard. I propose that the church includes the clergy and the congregants and therefore we also need to shine a light on what the congregants can achieve when they are adequately mobilized. My argument is that the church as an assembly of believers in Jesus Christ can adequately play its political role simply by being the church. Before we zero in and look at an example of a local assembly, let us discuss a neo-Augustinian understanding of the church and its political role.

### **A Neo-Augustinian Understanding of Politics**

St. Augustine (354-430 BC) was the Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa. Writing from the vantage point of the waning influence of the Roman Empire, he was able to see more clearly the tension between what man seeks to build by his efforts and what it is man can accomplish if he allows God and acknowledges him. Though he was not writing about politics, his major works have influenced western philosophers in the area of politics. His thoughts about the relationship between the church and the state have been picked up by a sizeable number of authors justifying the categorization of neo-Augustinianism. Most of these authors specifically utilize St. Augustine’s ideas in engaging with specific areas of contemporary culture and how it and what can be learned from the way he engaged with the culture and practices of his day. For our specific context we shall mainly engage these author’s political theories which indeed have been influenced by Augustine.

O'Donovan (1996) is one such author in his work *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. As he explores the connection between theology and politics he lays out the significance of Christianity in its modern context and in so doing helps fit in this discussion with the context of Christianity and public life in Kenya. He goes into detail examining how God establishes his rule over the hearts and possessions of men explaining how this has been exercised throughout history and that it connects with the scriptures that prophecy the ultimate triumph of God’s Kingdom. He utilizes four key terms drawn from Israel’s relationship with *Yhwh* as the ultimate ruler and these are salvation, judgment, possession, and the human response of praise. He explains,

“Yhwh’s authority as king is established by the accomplishment of victorious deliverance, by the presence of judicial discrimination and by the continuity of a community possession ... I add a fourth, which identifies the human response and acknowledgement of Yhwh’s reign: *ʿhillah* (praise).” (p. 36)

The four areas we have mentioned (salvation, judgment, possession, and human praise) correspond to the modern concepts of power, law, tradition, and political recognition respectively.

O'Donovan helps us appreciate how governance presided by human beings should be viewed in light of God unveiling Christ's ultimate rule when he explains the tension of the social and the political. This tension is not resolved because the church demands that citizens obey earthly rulers yet in the same breath demands the obedience of society's rulers to the just law of God. He asserts that "There is only one society which is incorporated into the Kingdom of God and which recapitulates the narrative of the Christ-event, and that is the church" (p. 251). The fear is not that modern society will regress into barbarism but rather into parodies of the Christ event explained in the biblical book of Revelations. It, therefore, means that the political role of the church is to provide an enabling environment that ensures that the masses do not fall for the lie of the anti-Christ but to the truth embedded in the Christ event culminating in the final unveiling of Jesus Christ as the sole world ruler.

Another author influenced by St. Augustine's works is Jonathan Leeman in his work *The Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule*. He helps us appreciate that we can understand politics from the standpoint of a local church without having to delve in what is traditionally understood as involving politics for example voting, parliament or even government authority. He is clear in viewing the church as a political body as rooted in the authority of God as the one who governs human affairs. This does not mean that he does not recognize human authority as exercised here on earth but rather he looks at it as being penultimate with God having the final authority in the affairs of man on earth. As he explains, "But what binds the local church together as a distinct body of people, distinct from the nations and distinct from Christians united to other churches, is the fact that Jesus Christ's universal lordship gets exercised there — among them" (Leeman, 2016, p. 23). In his work, Leeman utilizes the covenants as laid out in the Bible as the primary way in which God can institutionalize relationships and therefore ground the political kernel of the church. In describing covenants as laid out in the Bible, he points out that we have specific and general covenants.

Leeman goes on to utilize the covenants as laid out in the Bible, grouping them into two categories namely: general category covenants and special category ones. "The key lies in properly relating the common covenants (the covenants with Adam and Noah) and the special covenants (the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants)" (Leeman, 2016, p.188). We are able then to establish the underpinning rationale as to how a state has the authority and at the same vein declare that all power and authority belong to God. The Noahic covenant establishes the perimeter within which human authority is supposed to operate and at the same time anchoring God's authority as ultimate. "In short, the authority of government does not derive from the consent of the governed or a social contract; it derives from the one who 'requires' justice" (Leeman, 2016, p. 199).

The church then is, "a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ's name to preach the gospel and to affirm and oversee one another's membership in Jesus Christ with the authority of the keys through baptism and the Lord's Supper" (Leeman, 2016, p. 386). This is the embassy of Christ's rule which exercises its political mandate as given by the one who has the authority to give; God himself. Yet, this authority has been given both to the church and the state through two models: the deputy model and the delegate model. "The local church and its members represent God's rule according to a "deputy model" of authorization. ... The state represents God's rule according to a "delegate model." (Leeman, 2016,., p. 376). Looking at the

church versus the state from a political standpoint each has authority derived from God yet their mandates or authorization or periods within which they operate are different.

Smith (2017) does not hide his admiration for St. Augustine's works. In his book, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, the third part of the 'Cultural Liturgies' project, he brings out political theory through the lens of liturgy. Liturgy is explained as spaces and practices that form us through repetitive involvement and because of that, they end up forming narratives of our lives. Such practices are like spending time in the shopping malls, competitive sports, political events, etc. He then wonders what if the populace did not consider themselves as citizens but more as lovers. Here one understands lovers to mean those who care deeply about circumstances that shape them. He wonders whether the political engagement of the populace would be different if for example individuals were not only expressing their political views but were actively engaged in shaping, "the ethos of a nation, a state, a municipality to foster a way of life that bends toward shalom?" (Smith 2017, p. 13) Lastly, he wonders about the relationship between politics and an eschatological vision. Related to this, the question is, how will our activism in pursuit of our political and social ends look like? He crowns it when he refers to the relationship of the state and the church as a marriage of convenience; "a sort of engaged but healthy distance rooted in our specifically eschatological hope, running counter to progressivist hubris, triumphalistic culture wars, and despairing cynicism." (Smith 2017, p. 16)

From here we can map out the Augustinian influence that buttresses his book in bringing out the political viewpoint he addresses. As I had mentioned, the Augustinian view tends to comment on a specific society, and here Smith comments on the liberalism agenda which has a tight grip on culture and in extension politics. He exposes the inadequacy of evangelical theology in trying to fit in with a modern understanding of the political. This over-identification with modern-day politics has led to a loss of identity of a scripturally construed political stand, he explains, "It is when we immanentize Christian political concern that we are most prone to succumb to regnant ideologies and hence ideological conflict – sometimes even in the name of being "nonpartisan" or "postpolitical." (Smith 2017, p. 210). By immanentizing a Christian political stand he means that Christians especially within the North American context have tried to reduce the understanding of justice to one that can be guaranteed by human means. What this eventually means is that 'heaven' is no longer that place we shall finally be unveiled by God but a place that can be achieved if human beings worked hard enough. This is what forms the basis of a liberal view of authority according to Smith which engages with penultimate aims instead of ultimate. He scoffs at this stance in liberalism explaining the agnosticism which comes along explaining that liberalism states;

I'm not telling you what to believe. I do not really 'believe' anything. Let's just agree to some rules to help us arrive at some consensus about penultimate matters. It is when we fixate on the ultimate that people get hurt, according to this story, the penultimate never hurt anyone" (p. 21)

Although he does not claim to write from an Augustinian perspective, Katongole (2017) is right in step with the quest of explaining political theory from a practical standpoint. This is because he believes that solutions to issues facing the nation will come through the church as a gathered community of believers. Like many writers writing about Africa, he grapples with the problems facing the continent. He offers a prism of looking at suffering in Africa where the narrative is an explanation and also the suggested way forward to resolving the problem. Katongole (2017) uses the term "hope" as a solution to the problems in Africa. On hope, he

explains that he would have expected this to be a theme that is discussed extensively by authors but it is not the case. Theological discussions of hope have been reduced, “to nothing more than forms of private spiritual encouragements, motivations, and consolations” (Katongole 2017, p. 649). Katongole believes that it is few who can recognize the type of hope he is championing particularly when it is evidenced by Christians. He narrates an experience by a Nigerian journalist who lives in America by the name of Dayo Olopade who, while doing a documentary on Africa, was shocked to find Africans who are “... resilient, joyful, and innovative, a continent of do-it-yourself change-makers and impassioned community leaders” (Katongole 2017, p. 675). It is within the same space that he is disappointed at Olopade’s grim forecast of the power of Christianity to cause change, commenting, “With typical secularist slight, she dismisses religion from serious consideration with a quick reference to its destructive side, pointing to the “prosperity gospel” (Katongole 2017, p. 691). Katongole’s inspiration of renewal and transformation in Africa is drawn from God’s overarching power to correct that which is wrong because he has the ultimate authority. When we put our faith in this ultimate authority that God possesses it puts us in the same mindset as Jesus’ apostles like Peter or Paul. He further compares the context with which Peter and Paul did their ministry as full of tribulations just like what is being experienced in Africa and he comments, “Their examples also suggest a stronger theological claim namely that there is something about Christian hope that is revealed only through tribulation” (Katongole 2017, p. 851).

### **Methodology**

The research methodology used is a qualitative method called portraiture. Portraiture is defined as, “a genre of inquiry and representation that seeks to join science and art ... a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity, dynamics, subtlety of human experience, and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lighfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). The authors assert their conviction that the burden of empirical rigor can successfully be infused with artistic elements to produce a product that is aesthetically appealing and at the same time well researched.

The strength of this methodology comes out in capturing the snapshot of the life of a church as it goes about its normal business. It is in explaining the different facets which make up the church and how they fit into its overall vision in coming up with an aesthetic piece. The academic rigor is involved in connecting this aesthetic work to the political theory we are seeking to bring out.

### **Karura Community Chapel-KaruraCC**

Though KaruraCC identifies itself as a non-denominational, its direct association with Nairobi Chapel helps place its moorings. Nairobi Chapel has both a Nairobi Baptist Church background and a Plymouth Brethren background as Irene Tongoi explains,

So, Dennis [Tongoi] and I were involved in setting up Nairobi Chapel because the Nairobi Baptist Church saw the need to create satellite congregations. ... We used to meet weekly to pray and evangelize in the South B area, it was during this time that

members who used to meet at Nairobi Chapel called and told us that they wanted to give up that sanctuary... (Tongoi, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

As a church, they operated following the leadership structures set by the Nairobi Chapel. For example, over the years the tradition of producing audited accounts which includes a ministry report in an annual general meeting every year has been sustained. KaruraCC is a church that seeks to have a congregation that is informed in socio-political issues and from time to time the leadership endeavors to address these issues from the pulpit. For example, on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016 Rev. Ngari preached a sermon titled ‘Corruption and Integrity’ which was a reinforcement of the social justice work being done at KaruraCC. In 2012, KaruraCC unveiled a five-year strategic plan and in March 2016, they issued a comprehensive document detailing how they had performed in the implementation. In the area of what they describe as transformational influence three areas were highlighted: Compassion and Social Justice Ministry, Missions and Evangelism Ministry. Rev. Ngari summarizes that the church “... ministered to 18,209 people (cumulated annually) and had 2,200 (cumulated annually) individuals giving of their time to ensure those deserving were ministered to. Each of those is a story of a life impacted and a person loving others in the pattern Jesus commanded” (Karura Community Chapel, 2016, p. 8).

In this area, Karura Chapel was able to mobilize its members’ involvement in initiatives that touch others, who are not members of the church, with the love of Christ and especially the less fortunate members in the society. We have a ministry that deals with the youth living in the communities around the church which is a semi-rural setting. We also have a ministry dedicated to supporting a kindergarten in an informal settlement called Huruma. We also offer scholarships to the underprivileged children and take them through a mentorship program. There is the Dorcas ministry, a weekly, social welfare initiative to support the needy and it also includes a church service to those coming to receive physical support. In collaboration with a local University – St. Paul’s University, Karura Chapel hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Integral Mission Conference. All these are geared towards bringing awareness of Christian development initiatives in society (Karura Community Chapel, 2016).

### **Rev. Ngari Kariithi**

Rev. Ngari Kariithi is emphatic in his analysis of Kenyan Christianity and specifically the exercise of spiritual leadership in the country. He is optimistic in his outlook stating that “There are a lot of people now getting interested in ministering beyond their denominations” (Kariithi, 2016) He believes that many people are focused on listening and doing God’s will rather than pursuing their interests in the name of propagating Christianity. He further explains that listening and doing God’s will is finding relevant ways to fulfil the great commission<sup>2</sup> which has two parts; baptizing and teaching the people to obey God’s word. Rev. Ngari Kariithi comes out as very informed and well-read about Christianity, he is therefore not afraid of sharing strong opinions about the shape and direction of Christianity in Kenya. He points out that there is a desire to enable people to apply their Christianity in their day-to-day living. He further explains that it is in the element of outreach that people get to express their beliefs in Christianity.

A further probing as to whether we are now seeing a higher quality of Christians in Kenya than in previous years gets us discussing the place of discipleship. He attributes

<sup>1</sup> Nairobi Chapel was a Plymouth Brethren Church before they requested for assistance from Nairobi Baptist Church who sent a group of persons including Bishop Oscar Muriu who became the senior pastor then.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the words of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 28:16-20.

discipleship as anchored on obedience to the word of God as a Christian. He describes this type of Christianity as a matter of making lifestyle choices that are in line with the word of God. For this to happen, the Holy Spirit has to be given a free hand to convict the lives of people and therefore this becomes a great move of the Holy Spirit. The evidence of this move of the Spirit is seen in the multiplication of God's work and the unity witnessed by different Christian leaders and inter-denominational cooperation. The objective now becomes, how do we fulfil the mission of Jesus Christ?

Rev. Ngari Kariithi is very aware that in the twenty-two years that he has been part of KaruraCC, he has had a platform with which to live out his convictions stating "All I can say is I can share my convictions, my very deep convictions. ... I mean when you look at what people went through in the scriptures to grow and get to this place, the sufferings they went through. Most of us have not suffered, that's a reality" (Kariithi, 2016)

This is the backdrop of the life of a man willing to lay down his life for his cause and he compares himself to others who have gone ahead of him as shown in the Bible. This is what he states as his life's mission, "My calling is to equip the body, my mission statement for example is through life and teaching to set up a life-transforming truth of God in a way that's relevant to modern life" (Kariithi, 2016). He left a government position as an engineer to lead others in discovering God and His truth as laid out in the Bible.

The challenge in exercising one's convictions as a leader is whether those whom one is leading will see it from your perspective or they will be influenced by what comes much easier to them as Christians. Kariithi is well aware of this tension and he sees his role as one where he needs to be relevant to the modern Kenyan person. He correctly points out that though the church has done a great job in localizing international content in a way that makes it easier to digest. He is happy that in Kenya we use Kiswahili and this comes out strongly in the worship songs sung in church. He is aware that to meaningfully reach out to the modern Kenyan person the local expression has to be made prime as much as there is influence from the international. He further reiterates, "All the lessons that we're learning are lived out locally even though there might be a section that would be related to the global" (Kariithi, 2016).

Looking at it keenly, the quest to stay relevant to the local person had made KaruraCC stay away from partnering with churches outside of Africa even though this is no longer the case. Kariithi was convinced that before interaction could be done with larger churches; they needed to first engage with smaller local churches and specifically in the social justice arena. It is when KaruraCC had made noticeable partnerships with the local churches that it became comfortable with reaching out to international partners in enriching what they have already started. He summarizes this understanding stating, "We can partner with people who are here, and then we can also be thinking about where we can connect with people in terms of understanding, having a shared vision that can all we work together for" (Kariithi, 2016). It is not hard to understand why church planting has become a consuming ambition for Rev. Ngari personally and KaruraCC as he leads it. They are keen to support the planting of churches especially those churches that are not similar to KaruraCC. It is not only in church planting but also in social justice activities, "The neighborhood, the community around should find that there is some contact that Karura does make some sort of impact." (Kariithi, 2016).

**Irene Tongoi**

Irene Tongoi brings a valuable angle to the KaruraCC story because of two factors; an insider who has been there from the time when the church began but also one who has championed the social justice arm of the church. KaruraCC was planted by Nairobi Chapel through the help of Irene and her husband, Dennis Tongoi. The Tongoi's and other ten families including David Gatende, who was then the Elders' Court chair of Nairobi Chapel, and Rev. Ngari championed the KaruraCC church plant. She explains how they decided on joining the KaruraCC plant stating, "So because Dennis and I are both pioneers, we felt our gifts will best be used in a pioneering context, we left six months after coming in" (Tongoi, 2018).

She goes on to narrate that KaruraCC came to embrace the social justice ministry because of the desire to positively impact the lives of the low-income groups living around the affluent Runda and Gigiri suburbs. She confesses that she was against the idea of having a mixed congregation catering to the different social classes in the Runda-Gigiri area. She explains that the mandate that had been given by the Elders at Nairobi Chapel was to reach out to that affluent neighborhood. She elaborates that in those years the Runda-Gigiri area was composed of only two classes; the very financially able and those who worked for them; there was no identifiable middle class. She later discovered the existence of two informal settlements namely Githogoro and Huruma that were located within the Runda area. Her eyes were opened by a lady called Nyambura Githagui who called her up one day and said she had acquired her number from the church office and wanted her to be part of a visit to the Huruma informal settlement. It turned out that Nyambura was a Ph.D. holder who worked at the World Bank and her employer was willing to fund a poverty assessment study to understand the poverty status in the settlement aimed at helping the needy. Irene ended up being the coordinator of this World Bank poverty assessment activity which involved interviewing different groups of youth, ladies, and men to understand their needs. After the exercise, Tongoi (2018) confesses that she had doubts about its success and told Nyambura about her doubts even though the latter insisted that it had worked everywhere. She suggested to Nyambura that they organize vision conference training<sup>3</sup> in KaruraCC as a better method of helping the people of Huruma village to start devising ways of eliminating poverty.

The World Bank through Nyambura gave USD 2,000 to KaruraCC to facilitate the teams drawn from the informal settlements and others to attend the conference at KaruraCC. The one-week vision conference gave birth to "New Dawn Education Center". The Vision Conference ended up becoming a yearly event at KaruraCC. Irene tells of the testimony from Pastor Sammy one of the Pastors from Huruma who had been involved from the initial stage and still involved with the New Dawn Education Center stating,

... if we had never sat at the feet of vision conference and taught, we would not have realized as much as we have in the church, the conference clarified the gospel message, it showed me how to do ministry and many people have come to know the Lord as a result of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

She picks out deliberate decisions taken at KaruraCC that helped it navigate the treacherous waters of holding on to a mixed congregation from different socio-economic and political backgrounds. One important phase in the life of KaruraCC was when during 2007/08 post-election violence the leadership decided to host the internally displaced Persons- IDPs

---

<sup>3</sup> The Vision Conference is a seminar for helping Communities see the resources within themselves and it is an effort by Discipling Nations Alliance (DNA) whose coordinator in Kenya is Dennis Tongoi.

within the church grounds. Irene comments that this action made the congregation look within themselves but also learn what it means to actively respond to the crisis. The pulpit was one of those spaces which were utilized in educating the congregation as Tongoi puts it, “we used to have a month, I think, of preaching that was targeted talking about the current situation in the country, responding Biblically or with a Biblical mindset to our current socio-political context..” She adds, “You know that was a very important contribution that KaruraCC made, helping its members interpret what they were experiencing and seeing the future from a scriptural perspective.”(Ibid., 2018) This message from the pulpit would then be discussed in the life groups (home Bible Study Groups) where it would be unpacked and dissected and feedback would be received by those in the discipleship ministry and it would shape the decisions made thereafter..

### **Pastor Evans Makatia**

Pastor Evans Makatia is an energetic and effusive individual and after spending time with him, one cannot help it but get caught up in his enthusiasm. He is one of the longest-serving members of staff at Karura Community Church (KaruraCC). At the moment he is in charge of missions and outreach at KaruraCC. It is not hard to notice that he is an insider with institutional knowledge especially on the evangelism and outreach arm of the church. He is quick to give facts and illustrations when questioned about the work of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the ministry at Karura and Kenya at large. He explains that he still gets fascinated when people give their lives to Christ and gives an example that when 10 young people make that important decision at once, he can only attribute it to the Holy Spirit. In responding to why he has reservations as to whether a revival is happening, he delves on his pet subject; discipleship. He is emphatic that discipleship is the missing link in the evangelization story that is supposed to be at the root of strong and steadfast Christianity (Makatia, 2016).

Makatia thinks that the work of discipleship cannot concisely be measured and the only way one can assess its performance is when a disciple is engaged in the process of making other disciples. It is this realization that made him introduce the coaching system in discipleship. Primarily, it was to solve the practice of taking people through teachings without giving them an outlet to practice what they have been taught. Interestingly, the trigger towards this new way of thinking of KaruraCC came after attending a church planting conference in the United States of America. It was Rev. Ngari Kariithi who first attended and then a team from KaruraCC including Pastor Evans Makatia also attended. He explains that the conference was focused on having an exponential increase in the number of disciples in a church. The fruits of the conference have been in the increased emphasis towards discipleship that insists on those being discipled to disciple others. Coaching as an addition to the discipleship work going on at KaruraCC was mooted to ensure that disciples are also making other disciples. It was started as a pilot program and the results so far have been very encouraging. For him the coaching system has been very effective, “We’ve done it here in the Ombi, we’ve done it at Kamiti and Katembu Prison. We’ve done it in schools and it has beautiful results.”(Ibid.)

Makatia looks at everyone who is contending for the gospel as bringing something to the table whether from a local, regional, or international perspective. He prefers to use the term partner in ministry as opposed to volunteer. When it comes to KaruraCC foray into the international level of ministry he prefers to see relationships of reciprocity. This is when each of the partners is confident with what they bring to the table which may not necessarily be financial

resources. It is through this model of engagement that KaruraCC has been able to partner with International ministries like Saddleback Church<sup>4</sup> from the USA. He explains that in the initial stages when KaruraCC was being started, seeking out relationships with International friends had been shunned but with time it has been embraced. This has proved useful especially in discipleship and church planting ventures. KaruraCC is involved in the Viral Conference<sup>5</sup> which is connected to the school of Church planting conference spearheaded by Nairobi Chapel. This way they can hold each other's hands with International and Regional partners in the Evangelism efforts. (Makatia, 2016).

### **Impact of the Local Church on Socio-Economic-Political Agenda**

Indeed the narrations from Kariithi (2016), Tongoi (2018), and Makatia (2016) in themselves do not constitute political theory and were not meant to, yet they illustrate the vantage point that Gifford (2009) misses. Earlier on I had explained that because Gifford (2009) writes from the perspective of hierarchical clergy and in so doing his argument is robust. By shining light on the activities of a local assembly of Christians trying their best to live out the message of Jesus Christ, therein we see the other side of the argument. The quality of the congregant produced at KaruraCC is aware of his responsibilities firstly as a follower of Christ and this in effect produces a responsible citizen. The answer in confronting the argument by Gifford (2009) lies not in castigating the leader of a denomination or a church, but in an activity or combination of activities being done by a local assembly. This was the wisdom of bringing a neo-Augustinian view into the picture because the writers we singled out share Augustine's viewpoint of the unfolding of the divine plan of God which every generation of Christians should be aware of participating in. The righteousness, justice, and prosperity or shalom that accrues when State leaders are aware of deputizing God's authority is the same one that leaders of local church assemblies should be manifesting when they appropriate God's delegated authority.

The implications of this understanding are not confined only to the local church assembly but the society as a whole. I envision a scenario where churches become aware of their political role by just being the church. What we have seen with KaruraCC in terms of their political role is sermons being preached from the pulpit, the underprivileged being taken care of, and even the care of Internally Displaced Persons caused by tension due to disputed elections. The impact of a well-formed political ideology will mean that the area of operation in which to advocate for issues is enlarged. The church cannot operate in a narrowly defined zone of what it means to act politically and this is when it has taken the initiative to do so. My vision in seeing the local assemblies of Christ's disciples taking on their political role is much more than merely having a social welfare department in the church. It will mean that areas of advocacy and even activism are talked about in the pulpit and churches taking action especially when they come together as a network of churches or a denomination. O'Donovan (1996) although writing from the perspective of the democracies in the global north identifies a list of areas that need to be given close attention in what he terms structures of authority that can be overstepped by those who have power and influence to the detriment of the vulnerable. It is most likely that individuals or corporations can act within the law yet perpetrate injustices because they are protected by that

---

<sup>4</sup> Saddle Back Church is a church based in California, USA and has popularized 40 day campaigns in different discipleship areas.

<sup>5</sup> The VIRAL Conference is a church planting conference organized by Nairobi Chapel.

law without anyone calling them out. We have the mass communications sector which can easily be corrupted, individual liberty that can be manipulated by technological manipulation, and also we have the issue of courts that have been appointed arbitrarily and because of that civil rights are trampled on, or bankers arbitrarily appointed because they can guarantee stable market conditions. He goes on to wonder whether for those who are facing punishment a humane approach can be used which satisfies social science or is there a way in which threats of nuclear devastation be protected through international justice. His list is not done when he delves into the area of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities wondering how identities can be asserted without oppressing individual freedoms and again in the area of natural resources whether democracy can forestall their massive exploitation. He adds his voice to the injustice meted by the strong, articulate, and middle-aged who demand freedoms that go against the handicapped, the elderly, and the unborn. He also speaks against powerful governmental conglomerates that exert their power to sovereign nation-states. (O'Donovan, 1996, p. 18).

What O'Donovan has laid above is from a western democracies' perspective of looking at how structures of authority can be manipulated by those who can at the expense of many who will suffer. In Kenya, several areas have defied rectification over many years and even a vocabulary has entered the Kenyan idioms when they talk of long-term injustices. In some of these areas, the church has been involved through joining hands with the para-church agencies but more work needs to be done. This list will not be exhaustive but it will highlight some major areas of concern. We have the issue of land in Kenya where some areas are more affected than others. The church should look into ways of protecting or assisting the poor in its different variations. We have management of the conservation industry which includes the management of game parks and the tourist industry. In Kenya, it is skewed to those who are able and can cut deals with the government. We also have the management of natural resources especially the exploitation of gemstones/mineral deposits including water. The church should also speak boldly in areas for example the complacency of the Kenyan middle class who stay away from issues that require agitation or change of policy because such issues do not affect them. We also have the area of consumerism or what can be called greed. Here, our churches are not left out as they preach a one-sided message that people will be blessed materially. But connected to this are schemes to make money easily or traps that easily make people come down with overwhelming debt. We have the issue of access to credit for a large section of the population, the church cannot stay complacent without encouraging efforts in this direction or condemning instances that deny others credit. Policies in the education system should enable everyone across the board to accessing quality education and also our education should be connected with real societal needs. Investment in the country should not pity the desperate Kenyans in search of jobs against exploitative multinationals. And also, companies should not make excessive profits without being checked.

I cannot exhaust areas that the church can get involved politically especially now when we have a broadened understanding of what political involvement means. Through education of their congregants and means of getting involved, more ground can be covered politically.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

We began our discussion with a well-illustrated indictment of the Kenyan Clergy that they have been co-opted into the corruption and impunity of the Kenyan Government, from Gifford (2009). It is here that he posed a question wondering why Kenyan clergy are not interested in seeking long-term solutions to the economic and social problems by holding their

leaders accountable. I pointed out that I do not disagree with Gifford's analysis of the Kenyan situation but I choose to broaden the argument by including the congregants together with the clergy. What Gifford (2009) has done is to focus on what top Clergy should be doing that is holding the State officers to account or not participating or enabling corruption and impunity. I went further and focused on what the congregants can achieve politically by living out the commands of Christ faithfully. To buttress our argument, I utilized a neo-Augustinian of the church and politics. These are authors who draw from St. Augustine's commentary of how he understands God amid the collapse of the Roman Empire and therefore how God unveils his purposes over time. When it comes to the church and politics, we learn that God has delegated his authority to World powers and the same God works through the church. This means that the church and the government have a similar mandate but different licenses from the same God.

The KaruraCC portrait helped capture a specific case of God's rule being exercised in a local congregation. It illustrates a community of believers through the leadership of their Pastor being able to disciple people towards the purposes of God which are political. They are political because the individual who is keen on fulfilling the purposes of God even partially is, in essence, obeying the rule and authority of God. When these efforts are added up over time they contribute to the social and economic progress of the society. This is the same goal mandated to the State officers who are supposed to practice justice and righteousness and this will lead to prosperity or shalom. Local assemblies like KaruraCC are best placed to achieve this compared to the role of top clergy confronting State officers who are unwilling to act right and live right. Such pockets of God's rule being manifested will be a testimony and even these individuals can be used to shine their light in other public spaces.

There is much that can be achieved in the area of church and politics and congregations living out their mission faithfully is not the only way that churches can engage in politics. Like Gifford (2009), the church needs to point out the excesses of its leaders. Political leaders and Governments should be held to account for what they promised to offer their citizens and when they do not do it clergy should sufficiently be removed from them so as to speak against them. Chances to do so may be far and in-between therefore what is important is to grow congregations where we have individuals who take initiative in living out the message of Christ which is good news preached to the poor.

### References

- Gifford, P. (2009). *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya*. London: Hurst.
- Kariithi, N. (2016, August 15). Audio recording. (H. Kitawi, Interviewer)
- Karura Community Chapel. (2016). *Annual Report and Audited Financial statements 2015*. Nairobi, Kenya: Karura Community Chapel.
- Katongole, E. (2017). *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing.
- Lawrence-Lighfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. San Fransisco, USA: Jossey - Bass.
- Leeman, J. (2016). *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy for Christ's Rule*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press.

Makatia, E. (2016, August 2). Audio recording. (H. Kitawi, Interviewer)

O'Donovan, O. (1996). *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. New York, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, J. K. (2017). *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academics.

Tongoi, I. (2018, March 20). Audio recording. (H. Kitawi, Interviewer)