

Article

The Catholic Church and Prophetic Mission: Transitioning Church-State Relations in Africa

Valentine Ugochukwu Iheanacho

Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa; valmsp73@gmail.com

Abstract: The Zimbabwean Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter on 14 August 2020. Its title, "The March is not Ended", echoed the words of the late American civil right activist and politician John Robert Lewis. In the introduction, the bishops reminded their fellow citizens that "Peace building and nation-building are never completed tasks. Every generation has to establish national cohesion and peace". In using the biblical text from Micah 7:1–6 where the prophet denounced corruption and oppression in his own days, the bishops took a swipe at Zimbabwean political leaders. African politicians never take responsibility for their misrule of the continent, which has kept Africa largely underdeveloped. The perplexity of the situation in Zimbabwe is reflective of similar situations in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa where leaders look the other way and shift blames. This research undertakes to explore how the Catholic Church in Africa has fared in its prophetic mission in relation to the political-cum-socioeconomic questions on the continent. It will acknowledge instances where the Church, through certain prelates, has proven itself to be a moral conscience. It will also indicate how the efforts of African bishops closely align with those of Pope Francis in relation to the prophetic mission of the Church as a defender of truth, human rights and social justice. Contribution: Africans, like most people in the world, have a very simple vision of the good life: to live in reasonable material comfort and in peace. This research is essentially anchored within Catholic social teaching. It underscores how the Catholic Church in Africa has defended and continues to uphold the rights of the people to actualize their aspiration of a simple good life in a hostile and self-serving African political and socioeconomic context. It notes that the Church cannot take the place of political leaders because its role is basically the promotion of the common good, which includes public order and peace, development, equality, justice and solidarity.

Keywords: Catholic Church; bishops; state; social justice; democracy and good governance



Citation: Iheanacho, Valentine Ugochukwu. 2022. The Catholic Church and Prophetic Mission: Transitioning Church-State Relations in Africa. *Religions* 13: 339. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040339>

Academic Editor: Jo Renee Formicola

Received: 20 February 2022

Accepted: 5 April 2022

Published: 9 April 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Research Statement and Perspective

The question about the compatibility of religion with politics in terms of nation building, social justice, and even democracy and human rights, is an ongoing debate. It is a perplexing inquiry that is both ancient and modern. With specific reference to Christianity, its clash with temporal powers began quite early in this declarative teaching of Christ: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are Gods" (Mt 22:21). In light of the continent's political and economic exigencies, the Catholic Church in Africa, as the Second Vatican Council made crystal clear, is duty-bound "to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it" (GS 76 §5).

President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya once charged the Eastern African Catholic bishops to put aside any shade of timidity and to assume the role of the conscience of their respective countries. In his speech at the 6th Plenary Assembly of AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) in July of 1976 in Nairobi, President Kenyatta addressed the gathered bishops thus: "The Church is the conscience of society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we are wrong and you keep

quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes” (cited in [Healey 2009](#), p. 8). What, therefore, has been the prophetic scorecard of the Catholic Church in Africa? How does the prophetic mission of the African bishops fit into the global visions of Pope Francis for the entire Catholic Church?

2. Introduction

The Catholic Church in Africa may not have produced prophetic voices like Oscar Romero of El Salvador, Dom Helder Camara of Brazil, or Cardinal Jaime Sin of the Philippines. It has, nonetheless, seen the courageous witnessing of someone like Cardinal Émile Biayenda of Congo-Brazzaville, whom after his tragic death in 1977, Pope Paul VI described as “this best and brave cardinal” (cited in [Evutens 1977](#)). There are also witnesses like Bishop Albert Ndongmo of Cameroon and Monsignor Raymond-Marie Tchidimbo of Conakry, Guinea. Both prelates narrowly escaped execution at the hands of authoritarian governments in their respective countries, thanks to the timely interventions of the Holy See ([Konings 2007](#), pp. 51–52; [Fombad 2015](#), p. 25; [Foster 2019](#), p. 3). Of course, not to be forgotten are the prophetic and social consciousness of regional and national episcopal conferences such as the 2002 Pastoral Letter of the Central African Regional Catholic Bishops on “Church and Poverty in Central Africa: The Case of Oil”, and the 1992 Pastoral Letter of the Malawian Catholic Bishops entitled “Living Our Faith”.

Africa is a complex and diverse continent. The same is true of the Catholic Church, which is not a monolithic entity. For instance, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) brings under its umbrella more than 500 Catholic dioceses in Africa, and represents more than 20% of the continent’s population ([Pengo 2013](#), p. 1). It is natural that each particular church and regional episcopal conferences may be confronted with peculiar social issues. That notwithstanding, the Catholic Church in Africa, especially since the dawn of political independence and the formation of SECAM in 1967, has shown concerns for issues pertaining to human development, democracy, justice, peace and reconciliation ([Pengo 2013](#), p. 1). This has been possible on the basis of the commonality of certain experiences on the continent. One common experience is economic poverty. Africans have seen their hopes dashed and their goodwill squandered by African leaders since the end of colonial rule. As Robert Fatton has noted, Africans have been severally squeezed and “devoured by causes and leaders that they supported and embraced” ([Fatton 1990](#), p. 470).

This research examines the prophetic mission of the Catholic Church in sub-Saharan Africa through the lens of the Church’s social teaching. It focuses on a few occasions when the Church in Africa has risen above the encumbrances of tribalism and ethnicity to claim a higher moral ground. It pinpoints some instances and challenges where credible prophetic witnessing has been put to the test. As much as possible, effort has been made to capture across board the similarity of political and socioeconomic experiences of a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Also to be noted is that, being qualitative research, this study adopts a mixture of historical, descriptive and narrative approaches.

By means of primary and secondary sources, the research is woven principally around four main subheadings: (a) a plundered continent; (b) prophetic mission as evangelization; (c) avant-garde for good governance and democracy; and (d) looking towards the future. It must be stated upfront that the use of “church” herein refers to the involvements and proclamations of bishops as leaders of the Catholic Church in Africa. A word also needs to be said about the preponderance of political and economic exposés in this study. The reason is not far-fetched. Politics and economics affect almost everything in sub-Saharan Africa. As the Catholic bishops of Malawi perceptively observed, self-serving politics and bad economic policies make a vast majority of people languish in “abject poverty while wealth and luxury are enjoyed by a few who are unconcerned about these dehumanizing conditions of the majority” ([Episcopal Conference of Malawi 2022](#), p. 3).

3. A Plundered Continent

A glance at African social and political issues can provide a background to the issues, questions and challenges that have occupied the attention of the Catholic Church and its leaders in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. It is pertinent to situate the local churches in their African matrix, since every church is shaped by the temporality of a particular locale and history (Kilby 2009, p. 198; Iheanacho 2021b, p. 128). This sheds light on why the Church has been exerting itself to demand a transition from African state hegemony to a genuine democratization process and true political pluralism. It equally explains the Church's concerns for good governance, peace, justice and reconciliation in Africa.

Post-independent sub-Saharan Africa has unarguably been home to various forms of autocracy as the post-independence era steadily receded towards the era of death, doom and destruction in the subsequent periods (Daniel and Napoo 2013, p. 12). Its autocrats showed themselves oblivious to the constraints of democratic institutions and social demands as independent Africa has witnessed more violation of human rights, corruption, injustice and oppression than during the colonial era (Daniel and Napoo 2013, p. 12). In the view of Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, concepts such as “the people”, “the public”, “the nation”, “the national interest” and “public opinion” seemed to have mattered very little in the personal rule or politics of “the big men of Africa” (Jackson and Rosberg 1984, pp. 422, 425). The African political scene until the late 1990s was populated by omnipotent autocrats who also pretended to be omniscient. They knew almost everything and never allowed political debate. They arrogantly identified themselves with the state and were almost synonymous with their countries. They included Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Fulbert Youlou of Congo-Brazzaville, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and Francisco Macías Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (Kenyon 2018, pp. 262, 269).

The ignominious list contains the names of Jean-Bédél Bokassa, the self-declared “emperor” of the Central Africa Republic and Mobutu Sese Seko whose “Zaire” was depicted as “an African horror story.” Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) became a byword for everything that had gone wrong in postcolonial Africa. Mobutu profited from every chaotic situation to maintain himself in power (Berkeley 1993). To be numbered among the despots are Idi Amin of Uganda, Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon and Omar Bongo of Gabon as well as the later senile Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire. The regimes of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi were reportedly marred by political killings (Daniel and Napoo 2013, p. 16). Of course, the list is not complete without mentioning Robert Mugabe. He presided over the ruin of what was once a prosperous country with his dictatorial misrule and clamped down upon anyone who dared challenge him (Mbeki 2009, pp. 177, 186–88).

East Africa, that once suffered under one-party suffocation, has seen the emergence of a hybrid form of multiparty system. It intrinsically retains the constitutive tactics and essential trappings of the repressive one-party authoritarianism of the recent past (Phiri 2000, p. 783). Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Isaias Aferukei appear as the reincarnations of the old guards who are resolutely intent on thwarting and truncating any opposition. Salva Kiir of South Sudan is determined not to vacate the political scene any time soon, just as Faure Gnassingbé of Togo has perfected the old tricks of his late father, Gnassingbé Eyadéma. Paul Biya of Cameroon and his fellow dictatorial gerontocrats in the Central African region, such as Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea and Denis Sassou Nguesso, have ably proved themselves as possessing multiple political lives. South Africa is slightly different because the state is largely run by a small band of Black elites who have the capability to compromise the professional managers of state enterprises (Mbeki 2009, p. 98).

It could be surmised that the democratic waves of the 1990s seemed to have been too feeble for any radical upturning of the political establishments. It was hoped at the start of the twenty-first century that African states would face pressures from citizens to decentralize and adapt to global governance structures and standards in regard to transparency and accountability (World Bank 2000, pp. 48–49). Given the faltering of

the democratization process on the continent towards the end of the 1990s, the World Bank sounded this warning: “[d]emocracy must deliver on the bread and butter issues, otherwise, the continent could slide back into situations where the politics of poverty gives rise to the poverty of politics” (World Bank 2000, p. 48). As the same World Bank analysis regrettably noted, sub-Saharan Africa entered the twenty-first century with many of the world’s poorest countries (World Bank 2000, p. 48).

The foregoing does not negate the fact that post-independent Africa has experienced a mixture of outcomes of successes and failures in some instances. It rather points to the fact that African nationalism and independence have not so much brought economic transformation; they have produced instead disillusionments in their wake (Mbeki 2009, pp. 7–8). It is not a question of lack of natural resources but the absence of clear and purposeful leadership. The experience of post-independent Africa brings to the fore the hidden underbelly of the beast. The mere abundance of mineral natural resources and endowments, as well as their extraction, are not sufficient in themselves to bring socioeconomic development. The contrary is rather veritable. A country develops when, alongside its natural mineral endowments, it is able to harness the energies and talents of its people in order to put them to productive use (Mbeki 2009, pp. 38, 98). Herein come the burden and curse of African natural resources. Instead of uplifting the people, they have often been the sources of corruption, mismanagement, underdevelopment and wars.

In practicality, it means that a monopoly of power translates to a monopoly of wealth and status (Jackson and Rosberg 1984, p. 434). Again, this is largely due to the inability to develop functioning state institutions to checkmate the arbitrary exercise of power and uncontrolled access to national treasury. Consequently, the absence of any meaningful restraint to African leaders’ quest for power and wealth has led to mass impoverishment and the perpetuation of corruption in many countries (Daniel and Napoo 2013, p. 12). Ironically, the weakness of the African state is “biased impotence” because while “the same state favors and enhances the power, interests and status of the well-off and privileged class”, its weakness “does not stop it from unleashing its violence against particular groups and classes” (Fattou 1988, p. 257). The observation of the Zimbabwean Catholic Bishops about repression in their country is equally valid in a few other countries. As underscored by the bishops, the might of the state was felt in the repressive crackdown on citizens who protested against economic hardship (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference 2020, p. 1).

The counterpart of monopoly of power is corruption, which has bedevilled many postcolonial states. As a social evil, it can only be fought and defeated by a determined adherence to the good. As explicated by Joseph Ratzinger: “Only where good is done and is recognized as good can people live together in a thriving community” (Ratzinger 2008, p. 147). Nowhere in Africa is that assertion more evident than in Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. They are the three biggest exporters of crude oil in sub-Saharan Africa but have not much to show for the huge petro-dollars that accrue to their governments. Oil money has been blamed for fueling corruption in Nigeria, which has plagued the country and held it back in multiple ways. It is estimated that about \$380 billion have either been stolen or wasted since 1960, when the country gained independence from Britain (Fickling 2021). The consequences of massive mismanagement are quite obvious. About 17 million Nigerians are residing outside their country. The figure is about one-twelfth of the entire population, with a high rate of unemployment and extreme poverty (Fickling 2021).

During the decades of armed conflict in Angola, between 1975 and 2002, the government of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) channeled the country’s oil and diamond earnings to finance its war with the National Union for the Independence of Angola (UNITA). The rest of the proceeds ended up in the private pockets of politicians and state functionaries. The looting did not abate after the war. It rather became intensified under the administration of former President Eduardo Jose dos Santos, since there was no more war to take the lion’s share of the booty. Archbishop Luis Maria Perez de Onraita of Malanje often criticized the government for neglecting its responsibility towards

its citizens while acknowledging that speaking up against corruption and dereliction of responsibility on the part of the government was part of the evangelical duty of the Church. In the words of Archbishop Perez de Onraita: “We have challenged the government to do more on behalf of the people because our evangelical mission is to liberate people from oppression” (cited in [Jeter 2021](#)).

Equatorial Guinea became the most valued country in Africa when gas and condensate were first discovered in the early 1990s in the northern part of the capital, Malabo. With its modest population, the magnitude of its oil deposits was more than enough to turn the country into the Kuwait of Africa. While most of the people languish in severe poverty, President Obiang and those connected to him are awash in luxury and affluence ([Kenyon 2018](#), pp. 284, 289). At the 2002 plenary assembly of the Episcopal Conferences of Central African region, the bishops decried the disparity between enormous wealth and abject poverty in their region. They lamented that while the region that comprises Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Chad and Equatorial Guinea, was richly endowed with oil and other natural resources, it held the bottom rank in the world scale of poverty. They also noted that the region was located around the Gulf of Guinea which had become a strategic zone in world oil production ([ACERAC 2002](#), p. 2). Instead of benefiting the people, petro-dollars were stolen. The ill-gotten wealth emboldens the leaders of the region who consider themselves independent of their populace and see no need for accountability ([ACERAC 2002](#), pp. 2–3).

The problem is certainly not limited to West and Central Africa. It is a continent-wide malaise with varying degrees from country to country. In some nations, it has become incurable and a way of life, while it is malleable in others. On the whole, it remains an incontrovertible fact that corruption hobbles contemporary Africa. Like cancer, it has eaten deep into the political and economic fabrics of sub-Saharan Africa ([Jackson and Rosberg 1984](#), p. 434; [Iheanacho 2021a](#), p. 10). Because of the crises of rampant poverty, disease, famine, civil wars, and illiteracy, all wrought on the people by kleptocratic leaders, Africa may effectively be classified as “the Fourth World” ([Ninsin 2006](#), p. 13). In consideration of the African political and socioeconomic reality, bishops as leaders of their particular churches cannot possibly close their eyes to the issues of poverty, corruption, embezzlement and bad governance that inflict pains and miseries on their faithful ([Fombad 2015](#), p. 22).

4. Prophetic Mission as Evangelization

Right from the onset, the general situation of Africa has always posed a big challenge to the Catholic Church. The authors of the *African Report* at the 1986 Second General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, in Mexico, connected the fragility of Africa to that of the church. For its authors, the fragility of Africa is equally the fragility of the church in Africa since the members of the church are deeply affected by the same fragility that is at the core of the African reality. As they surmised: “If Africa sinks, the African church will sink with it” ([Abraham 1990](#), pp. 42–43). That is why in view of this realization, evangelization in the African context was conceived as indissolubly tied to human promotion, understood as “a struggle for fundamental human rights, and for political, economic, social and cultural liberation” ([Abraham 1990](#), p. 44). The *African Report* drew inspiration from the pastoral letter of SECAM that was released in May 1985, entitled, “The Church and Human Promotion Today in Africa”. It knitted together the knot between evangelization and the demand for social justice as entailing liberation from political and economic subjugations. Acutely conscious of this inseparability, the bishops resolved to do more through their pastoral programs to ensure that social justice as human promotion was accorded a prime of place. Therefore, “If in the past evangelization and human promotion have been considered as in separate activities, we must now unify our pastoral program, in order to include, as a constitutive dimension of it, the task of human promotion within the evangelization process” (cited in [Abraham 1990](#), p. 56).

It has to be acknowledged that the Catholic Bishops in Africa, whether individually or collectively as an episcopal conference, have shown determination regarding the awareness

of their prophetic calling. However, not every bishop or national episcopal conference has been courageous and vocal in calling attention to political and social ills of their countries. Pope Paul VI once prayed that bishops might have the courage to let the promise of Christ re-echo in their hearts and to strengthen them (Silke 1978, p. 435). As the pope indicated, in matters of prophetic mission and witnessing, the Church expects persecution as a rule, rather than the exception, because: "History shows us so every century and several times a century" (cited in Silke 1978, p. 435). A prophetic mission on a plundered continent has never been an easy ride because the call to be prophetic presents a major problem that requires a delicate balance. It is important to recall a few examples like the April 1955 joint letter of the bishops in Cameroon, with which they cautioned against the Marxist propaganda of the *Union des Populations Camerounaises* (UPC). The UPC had sought in its anti-Catholic campaign to smear the Church as inimical and opposed to the independence of the country. The bishops were not against the desire of Cameroonians to take their destiny in their hand, as long as the gospel principles of charity, justice and prudence were respected (Brasseur 1986, p. 60; Fombad 2015, p. 23).

Similar confrontations occurred between church and state in places such as Mozambique, Angola, Guinea and Congo-Brazzaville. The Catholic Church in Mozambique and Angola enjoyed a special status under the missionary arrangement of the Holy See. While other mission churches in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa were grouped under the Propaganda Fide, the churches in Mozambique and Angola were placed under the jurisdiction of the Consistorial Congregation. Until the declaration of independence in both countries in 1975 and the emergence of indigenous clergy in ecclesiastical leadership positions, the churches in Angola and Mozambique were considered as extensions of the Catholic Church in Portugal. Their special status was regulated by the *Concordat* of 1940 and the *Accordo Missionario* of 1941 (Serapião 1981, p. 331). Those documents effectively restrained the capacity of the Vatican to have any major say or control over the missionary activities of Portuguese ecclesiastical hierarchies in Africa (Serapião 1981, p. 332). As the Church was wedded to Portuguese colonial interests in its African colonies, it became apparent that its prophetic witness was ashamedly compromised. Since he who pays the piper calls the tune, so it was between church and state in the Portuguese colonial arrangement. In the case of Angola, the Portuguese government's subvention to the Church in Angola saw an increase from \$99,236 in 1940 to \$564,514 in 1960. With such financial support from Portugal, it was inconceivable for the Holy See to raise any meaningful voice of protest in case of human rights violations (Heywood 2006, p. 193).

Consequently, many Portuguese clergy in Angola and Mozambique did not support the nationalist struggle for self-rule. They were also not enthusiastic to sign on to the Vatican's indigenization policy in Africa. Mozambique had only 20 African priests and no African bishops when Frelimo came to power in September of 1974 (Serapião 1981, p. 334). Portuguese ecclesiastics like Cardinal Teodósio Clemente de Guoveia of Maputo, and Bishops Custodio Alvim Pereira and Francisco Nunes Teixeira, were decidedly and openly opposed to Mozambican nationalism. Bishops Pereira and Teixeira are believed to have worked with Portuguese secret police to arrest some priests who dared denounce Portuguese colonial abuses and atrocities in Mozambique (Serapião 1981, p. 333). Cardinal de Guoveia rejected the mild and diplomatic request from the Vatican to retire and leave Maputo supposedly on health grounds. He demanded to be buried in his cathedral in Maputo (Serapião 1981, pp. 328, 333). On account of the entanglement of the Holy See within the strong grip of Portugal, Luis Serapião expressed the view that the interest of self-preservation made Popes John XXIII and Paul VI not openly condemn Portuguese atrocities during its colonial wars in Africa (Serapião 1981, p. 330).

Although Paul VI eventually met in 1970 with the leaders of three liberation movements in Portuguese African colonies, the Church did not change its official policy of alignment with Portugal. The representatives of those movements who met the pope in Rome were Amícal Cabra of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Marcelino dos Santos of Mozambique and Agostinho Neto of Angola (Heywood 2006, p. 197). The Church's

unwillingness to jettison Portugal in order to identify with the aspiration of the people, and in favor of evangelization and social justice, weakened the credibility of the Church. Its untenable position was not helped, especially in Mozambique, by its rejection of the request from Frelimo to minister to its members in their bush camps during the armed struggle for independence (Rossouw and Macamo 1993, p. 538). That refusal later caused the Church a lot of pain and persecution once Frelimo had consolidated its power in 1977 with the declaration of Marxist–Leninist ideologies as the official policy of the party.

Purportedly couched on “scientific socialism”, the Mozambican government unleashed a series of anti-church measures. They included the omission of religious holidays from the national calendar, nationalization of church property, the abolition of religious instructions in school curricula and the persecution of church leaders in certain instances. Most of those measures remained in place until 1987, after Joaquim Chissano became president following the death of Samora Machel in a plane crash in 1986 (Rossouw and Macamo 1993, pp. 539, 443). Similar measures were adopted in Angola by the MPLA government of Neto. His Marxist government clashed with the Church for its takeover of religious educational institutions. The government was angered by the bishops’ criticism of its policy, which they considered as “atheistic propaganda.” In retaliation, President Neto ordered the nationalization of Radio Ecclesia, and progressively targeted Catholic institutions in the country. Relations between church and state only improved with the prolongation of the war when the MPLA government realized that it needed all the support it could get in its armed conflict with UNITA. Cardinal Alexandre de Nascimento is believed to have played a significant role in the conciliation between the Catholic Church and the Angolan government. It is remarkable how the Church transformed itself by discarding its inglorious colonial legacy to become a formidable moral force and a prophetic voice in war-torn Angola and the post-war reconstruction of the country (Heywood 2006, pp. 198, 201, 203; Jeter 2021).

Prior to the ordeals of the two-sister churches in Mozambique and Angola, the Catholic Church in Congo-Brazzaville passed through the crucibles of persecution between 1963 and 1968. After the disastrous years of Fulbert Youlou, Alphonse Massambo-Débat emerged as president in the coup of 1963. With the imposition of a Marxist–socialist credo and policies, the government of Massambo-Débat commenced its harassment and persecution of the Church. It hardened its position after the Church criticized its policy, which targeted Christians, especially the mistreatment and marginalization of the Catholic faithful. If put within the perspective of the time, about 40% of Congo’s 1.3 million population were Christians, and most of them were Catholics (Evutens 1977; Elenga 2006, p. 248). It is, therefore, understandable why church leaders needed to raise their voice in protest. The government sought to punish the Church by nationalizing Catholic schools. This action of the government infuriated the Congolese hierarchy, among whom was Bishop Émile Biayenda. He was at one time placed under house arrest due to his outspokenness against state injustice and the persecution of the Church, which may have eventually cost him his life (Dictionary of African Christian Biography 2015).

This fact must have informed the Congolese government’s initial accusation of Massambo-Débat as being behind the death of the cardinal on 22 March 1977. As a political narrative, it did not matter to the government that Massambo-Débat had been overthrown by Marien Ngouabi in 1968. Archbishop Biayenda was made a cardinal in 1973 by Pope Paul VI and became the youngest of twelve African cardinals at the time. His tragic death occurred a month after the brutal killing on 17 February 1977 of Janani Luwum, the Ugandan Anglican archbishop. He was murdered for his criticism of the outrageous excesses of Idi Amin (Kiefer 1999). As for Cardinal Biayenda, he was the second cardinal of the Church to be murdered in contemporary history after the gruesome death of the Spanish bishop, Cardinal Juan Soldevilla of Zaragoza in 1923 (Evutens 1977; Dictionary of African Christian Biography 2015). According to Yvon Elenga, Cardinal Biayenda was believed to have been kidnapped and murdered in an act of ethnic vengeance for the death of President Ngouabi. The reason could be the leveling of grief because President

Nguoabi, who died in the coup of 19 March 1977, came from the north of the Congo while Cardinal Biayenda was a southerner. Under the leadership of Biayenda, the Congolese church keyed into the vision of national unity, promoted by the government of the slain president (Elenga 2006, p. 48).

5. Avant-Garde for Good Governance and Democracy

SECAM, in its 2013 pastoral letter, was emphatic that the destiny of Africa depends on the common commitment of Africans. As such, Africans ought “to ensure that economic and political governance is realized in line with the common good in a context favorable for the peaceful transition of power” (SECAM 2013, #42). The bishops of SECAM conceived their prophetic mission in contemporary Africa through the prisms of the biblical “prophets and the apostles”. In continuation of that prophetic ministry, they are conscious of the fact that “the Church has been sent into the world to promote the common good, of which good governance forms a part” (SECAM 2013, #7). The interest, concern and commitment of the Church in Africa to democracy and good governance must be squared within the prioritization of those issues in contemporary global Catholicism by the post-Vatican II Church, starting from Paul VI (Schelkens et al. 2013, p. 166).

Already with Paul VI, starting with the creation of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on 6 January 1967 and followed by the publication of *Populorum Progressio* in March 1967, there emerged a vital interest of the Holy See in social questions. Thenceforth, social issues and questions began to assume global importance in papal preoccupations and diplomatic considerations (Schelkens et al. 2013, p. 166). A specific offshoot of those preoccupations is the rapprochement between global Catholicism and democracy (Philpott 2004, p. 33). One of the imprints of Pope John Paul II on contemporary Catholicism is his insistence that democracy and good governance constitute an integral part of the message of the Church (cited in Philpott 2004, p. 35):

I am not the evangelizer of democracy; I am the evangelizer of the Gospel. To the Gospel message, of course, belong all the problems of human rights; and if democracy means human rights, it also belongs to the message of the Church.

It has to be noted that the Church’s support for democracy has neither been monolithic nor homogenous everywhere around the globe. Bishops implement the Church’s social teaching with varying degrees of interests as they may depend upon personal convictions, particular circumstances and local politics (Philpott 2004, pp. 33, 36). African bishops are not exempt from the rule because some bishops have distinguished themselves in their commitment to social issues almost in the same manner as others have remained simply tepid or unconcerned. On the whole, when taken as a collective in certain countries through national episcopal conferences, the performance of bishops in demanding meaningful political and social transformation is commendable. Mention should be made of the active roles of some national episcopal conferences in resolving political deadlocks in eight countries that had national transitional conferences in the 1990s. Five of those conferences were chaired by Catholic bishops: Msgr. Isidore de Souza in Bénin Republic; (2) Msgr. Basil Mve in Gabon; (3) Msgr. Ernest Kombo in Congo-Brazzaville; (4) Msgr. Philippe Fanoko Kpodzro in Togo and (5) Msgr. Laurent Monsengwo in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SECAM 2013, p. 4). In the cases of Bishops Kombo and Monsengwo, both prelates turned down the request and pressure mounted on them to contest for presidential elections in their countries (Elenga 2006, p. 250).

Prior to the 1990s was the publication in 1986 of the pastoral letter by the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The role of the Catholic Church in ending apartheid in South Africa is often glossed over, possibly because the bishops often spoke in unison. After observing in their pastoral letter the untold sufferings, pains, insecurity, starvation and widespread horrors that were associated with the oppressive system, the bishops courageously called for economic sanctions against the apartheid government of South Africa. According to the bishops, their support for sanctions was to increase global pressure on the government to end its apartheid policy so that the sufferings and

pains caused by that policy might also be ended. Aware of the prevailing atmosphere of fear, intimidation and oppression, the bishops judged the imposition of further sanctions as morally justifiable so long as it was needed to bring about the elimination of so great an injustice (SACBC 1986, p. 2). They were insistent that economic pressure ought to be maintained until a determination on the part of the government for genuine changes was clearly manifested. They also called for the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of their organizations (SACBC 1986, p. 3).

Reference has already been made to the 2002 pastoral letter of the bishops of the Central African region. The bishops were at pain to note that the Franco-African summit which took place in 1990 in Baule, France, was successful to the extent that it ushered in a hollow democratization process. It never succeeded in fundamentally changing the mindset of the leaders of their region in reference to the lure of personal gain and the deep-seated desire to remain perpetually in power. There remains in the region a nostalgia for the one-party system since the bankruptcy and absence of genuine democratic process have enabled the strongmen of the region to neutralize the steam and force of the democratic winds of the early 1990s (ACERAC 2002, p. 3). As citizens of their countries, the bishops acknowledged that they had a right and obligation to participate in their countries' political, social and economic life. According to the prelates, their prophetic mission and calling did not permit them to remain silent at the risk of being accomplices to such a dreadful injustice before God and before history. They could not remain indifferent to the cry of their people for good governance because Christ identifies "himself with all human beings, but in a particular manner, to all those whose fundamental rights are flouted" (ACERAC 2002, pp. 7, 9).

Among the epochal moments in the history of the Church's intervention on behalf of democracy is the 1992 pastoral letter of the Malawian Catholic Bishops. It contained truly the first public criticisms that were leveled against the authoritarian one-party rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda. For their part, the bishops of the Democratic Republic of Congo have been quite forthright in their opposition to authoritarianism. They energetically opposed Mobutu's *Movement Populaire de la Revolution* (MPR) as a one-party state and his dictatorial tactics to cling on to power. The clash between Mobutu and the Catholic Church reached its peak at the "March of Hope" rally in Kinshasa on 16 February 1992. The Church organized the march to demand the reopening of the National Conference that Mobutu had suspended. People carried bibles and rosaries as they marched. They were met with brutality from security forces who violently repressed the rally. Between 16 and 49 people were thought to have died. One of Mobutu's ministers, Kitenge Yezu, blamed "radical Roman Catholic priests" whom he accused of being "responsible for what happened as they had been warned not to hold the march" (Phiri 2000, p. 785; Olivier 2010). The bishops also opposed the political rigmaroles of Joseph Kabila with similar vigor and determination as they had done during the Mobutu years.

In the neighboring Congo-Brazzaville, the Church had not been less active in positioning itself as a major catalyst for a democratic transformation of the country. At times, even amid threats to their lives, the bishops have often taken the initiative and liberty to speak on any issue that they considered of national importance (Elenga 2006, p. 251). In West Africa, the Catholic Church in Nigeria has been lauded for openly supporting the common cause against military dictatorship. On that basis, it may be described as the religious wing of Nigeria's civil society in the fight for democratic rule in the country even though democracy has not led to good governance (Obadare 2013, pp. 102, 104). The local churches in Kenya, Zambia and Ghana were active among opposition movements against authoritarianism (Philpott 2004, p. 41). An outstanding figure in Kenya is the late Archbishop Raphael Simon Ndingi of Nairobi. He is remembered for promoting justice and peace in the run up to multiparty democracy in Kenya, and a prophetic voice against Daniel Arap Moi's repressive policies (Neliba 2020). In Cameroon, despite the regional, ethnic and linguistic differences, the Catholic hierarchy has remained committed to its prophetic mission. The bishops have severally voiced their concerns and disapproval of the government's handling of the economy, electoral malpractices, poverty and underdevelop-

ment (Fombad 2015, p. 27). The Cameroonian episcopal conference published a pastoral letter in 1990, highlighting the dire economic situation of the country, which was provoked by the state's "structures of sin". The bishops returned to the same theme in 2000 and regretted that corruption had become the *modus operandi* in state and public enterprise affairs. More recently, the majority of the bishops have opposed Paul Biya's continued hold on power. Archbishop Samuel Kleda of Douala publicly took a swipe at Biya in the following words: "If Paul Biya loves this country, he should withdraw rather than lend an attentive ear to those who are asking him to run again" (cited in Denwo 2020). Paul Biya is on record as the longest ruling non-monarch in the world, and at 88 years of age, he is the oldest president in Africa (Denwo 2020).

Elsewhere, Catholic bishops in Togo and Ivory Coast have clashed with their respective governments for demanding a level playing ground for all politicians. Their demand was misconstrued as "the Church's involvement in politics". As a matter of fact, the Togolese bishops' request to send observers during the presidential elections in February 2020 was turned down by the government. Their Ivorian colleagues were accused of "partiality" because of the bishops' message at the end of their 114 plenary assembly in January 2020 (Mukoso 2020). The plenary assembly had as its theme "Communion at the service of reconciliation". Speaking on behalf of the episcopal conference, Bishop Ignace Bessi said that the church was concerned about the hardships of the people and as such the church was not willing to "accept the sacrificing of human lives in the calculation of particular interests" (cited in Atemanke 2020). Among the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of the Sokoto Diocese stands out with his annual Christmas messages, which often put the government on the edge. The cleric has strenuously decried what he calls "dark clouds of death" over a country that is adrift "almost rudderless" because of the Nigerian government's ineptitude and lack of vision. Rudderless leadership has meant that: "[t]he prospects of a failed state stare us in the face: endless bloodletting, a collapsing economy, social anomie, domestic and community violence, kidnappings, armed robberies, etc." (Kukah 2020, ##1, 4, 7).

Similarly, truly heroic is the courage of the Eritrean Catholic Bishops to stand up to President Isaias Afwerki. He has been described as "everything" in Eritrea, a country where there is no opposition. His paranoia has meant that between 5000 and 10,000 political prisoners have been jailed by the man who "is the army, the security service, the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and the economy" (Kenyon 2018, p. 380, 421; Schonecke 2020). The Catholic Church has been the only institution in Eritrea that has boldly criticized the government of Afwerki. The bishops in 2014 denounced "the countless crimes of the Eritrean regime and the silence of the international community" (cited in Schonecke 2020). In South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and South Sudan, the local churches have always denounced violations of human rights and democracy (Mukoso 2020).

Regrettably, unlike their other counterparts, the bishops of Rwanda and Uganda seem somewhat unperturbed by the tyranny of their political leaders. The reason for such indifference, in the case of Rwanda, may not be unconnected with its experience of the genocide in 1994. It has left a trace of deep scepticism towards the Church, particularly among those who accuse the Rwandan hierarchy of complicity in the bloodbath (Rutagambwa 2006, p. 173). The cooperative relationship between some bishops and Rwandan politicians prior to that "African holocaust" was very problematic. It may be construed as a wilful alliance on the part of the Church. The local church showed itself captive in its involvement with morally questionable politicians. According to Elisée Rutagambwa, the church's collusion with political power, specifically those in power of Hutu extraction, proved in the long run to be an evil in its mission of evangelization (Rutagambwa 2006, p. 177). With regard to the Ugandan hierarchy, their silence may be explicable by the bitter experience of their country's bush war between 1980 and 1986.

6. Looking towards the Future

Antecedent to the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Francis in 2013, the African Church witnessed a *kairos* moment with the Second Synod on Africa that took place in Rome from 4 to 25 October 2009. Described as a “New Pentecost”, it was meant to prepare and launch the African Church into the future for its mission of evangelization on the continent. Its general theme, “the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”, already anticipated some of the major areas of concern of the pontificate of Francis. Very instructive are the propositions of the bishops and their message to the people of God in Africa. The propositions took a comprehensive look at Africa and its many challenges, which include poverty, conflicts and wars, denuding of African environment and the ecosystem, lack of social and ethnic cohesion as well as fragile political and economic institutions due to the absence of good governance in many parts of the continent. In reference to social justice and poverty eradication, the bishops explicitly singled out African women, young people and children as those who should be accorded the place of priority in every consideration ([Catholic Bishops of Africa 2009a](#), ##17, 21–30, 47–49). Recalling the complex and challenging socioeconomic and political contexts in which Africans live, the bishops as shepherds exhorted them not to lose hope: “...Africa is not helpless. The waters may be turbulent. But with our gaze on Christ the Lord (cf. Mt 14:28–32), we shall make it safely to the port of reconciliation, justice and peace” ([Catholic Bishops of Africa 2009b](#), #42).

All is still not well with Africa. As Leonard Shilgbo has accurately noted: “No African scholar of note will deceive himself or herself into believing that all is well with Africa, or that Africa is making progress no matter the indices of measurement that may be employed” (cited in [Ugwuanyi 2017](#), p. 72). It means that most of the socioeconomic and political issues that occupied the attention of the bishops since the dawn of political independence on the continent have largely remained unresolved. As a matter of fact, Pope Benedict XVI underscored this point in *Africae Munus*: “Given the chronic poverty of its people, who suffer the effects of exploitation and embezzlement of funds both locally and abroad, the opulence of certain groups shocks the human conscience” (AM #79). The relevance of the message of the Church in Africa depends greatly on its immersion in the African reality. It also depends on the interpretation and judgment it brings to bear upon the social context and the workaday world in which ordinary people strive to earn their daily bread with dignity. In commemoration of the 30th anniversary of “Living Our Faith”, the Malawian bishops reiterated that: “[i]t is the Church’s mission to preach the Gospel which affects the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation, be it hunger, ill-health, corruption, ignorance, blind loyalty, despair, paralyzing fear, etc.” ([Episcopal Conference of Malawi 2022](#), p. 15). This is where the exhortation of Pope Francis is very appropriate in his insistence that leaders of the Church like shepherds, ought to have the smell of the sheep on them ([Gregory 2019](#), p. 9). As he has repeatedly indicated since the inception of his pontificate, people at the margin of society and those who suffer ought to be the first priority of the Catholic Church.

In the programmatic vision of Pope Francis as outlined in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the centrality of the social dimension of evangelization and its demands for the just ordering of society, peace and human dignity, are underlined as intrinsic and constitutive components of the Church’s mission and evangelization ([Francis 2013](#), ##176–258). He has been clear that “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society” (EG #187a; [Bevans 2016](#), p. 466). For this reason, the pope is hopeful that change is possible because ([Francis 2016a](#)):

Poverty, hunger, disease, oppression are not a fatality and cannot represent permanent situations. By trusting in the power of the gospel, we can truly help change things or at least improve them. We can reaffirm the dignity of those who await a sign of our love and together protect and build “our common home”.

It is in this regard, through the ministry of encounter and commitment, that Pope Francis wants the entire Church to help society in the actualization of the following goals (Francis 2016b):

There must be no family without a home, no refugee without a welcome, no person without dignity, no wounded person without care, no child without a childhood, no young man or woman without a future, no elderly person without a dignified old age.

Evidently, the sociopolitical and economic preoccupations of African bishops and their demand for the equitable distribution of the continent's wealth and resources are not radically different from the social vision of Pope Francis. On the contrary, those concerns of the bishops align very well with those of Pope Francis, although any admissible difference that may exist could be understood in terms of emphasis and accentuation. However, the quagmire of Africa that is characterized by a paradox of polarities—wealth and rampant poverty, opulence and desperation—makes it all the more urgent for African bishops to amplify their prophetic voices following the example of Pope Francis. The continuous bleak economic conditions that African Christians share in common with other Africans cannot be ignored. Hunger, famine and sickness seem endemic as well as limited opportunities for young people.

Many young Africans undertake risky journeys through lands and seas in search of better opportunities outside the continent. Local churches and national episcopal conferences must continue to hold African political leaders accountable on behalf of ordinary Africans. These and other related issues, such as environmental concerns, form part of the crux of the message of the Church upon which her relevance and credibility may depend in the long run. Perceptively, Cardinal Philippe Ouédraogo (President of SECAM) has appealed to rich countries and international financial institutions as well as multilateral aid agencies to “take a closer look” at Africa. He pleaded with them to grant the continent a total cancellation of its financial debts in order to help Africa cushion the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the areas of food security and development of healthcare systems. He equally admonished African leaders “to ensure that the limited available resources be used to assist those who really need help, especially, the poorest of the poor, and do not end in the pockets of the politically connected people through corrupt practices” (cited in Allen 2020).

7. Conclusions

The basic orientation of this research has been to make an excursus of how the Catholic Church in Africa, through its local hierarchies, has carried out its prophetic ministry within the context of a challenging African political and socioeconomic reality. To a considerable extent, it could be positively affirmed that African bishops have taken their prophetic mandate seriously. This is evidenced in many of their pastoral letters, where they sought to walk in the footsteps of the biblical prophets to denounce many of the evils that have held Africa in bondage and underdeveloped.

Local hierarchies have equally endeavored to interlace the socioeconomic and political concerns of the African bishops with those of Pope Francis. At the same time, they have attempted to locate a niche for those concerns within the general vision of the pope. The challenge of balancing these temporal and spiritual needs is ultimately based on the Church's responsibility to work for the just ordering of society so that no person is left behind, particularly the poor and the less privileged. The untiring efforts of the bishops for good governance and a fairer Africa find alignment with the global visions of Francis and his support for a better and a fairer world.

Alongside Pope Francis, the bishops of Africa can think globally while acting locally for the benefits of their flocks. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church in Africa may continue to play a prophetic role within the socioeconomic, political and religious spheres as the continent weathers many of its daunting challenges. Thus, it is incumbent upon the African Church to continue to play this vital role in the transitioning of the

continent because political and socioeconomic issues are never settled at one blow. As the Zimbabwean bishops wisely underscored in “The March is not Ended”, the Catholic Church in Africa cannot vacate its place in Africa’s political and public squares. It is not possible in the African context for bishops to retreat into sacristies and not hear the human cry of despair or not see the material poverty of their flock.

Although the Church itself has faltered in some places through action or inaction and outright silence, it remains true that its prophetic work will and must continue. As Archbishop Monsengwo (later cardinal) always insisted: “The church has to be more prophetic, denouncing the social and economic systems which keep peoples and countries underdeveloped. The church has to advance moral principles for justice and peace” (cited in Boyle 1992, p. 49). A lot still remains to be done. For that reason, under the direction of Pope Francis, the African Church is called upon to remain relevant on a continent that is changing both economically and socially. Through its commitment to the prophetic mission of the Church, which includes the defence of the common good and the principles of truth and justice, it will, in turn, safeguard the fundamental rights of all people.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Abraham, Kuruvilla C., ed. 1990. African Report. In *Third World Theologies: Commonalities and Divergences*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, pp. 28–56.
- Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Central African Region (ACERAC). 2002. The Church and Poverty in Central Africa: The Case of Oil. Available online: <https://www.laohamutuk.org/OilWeb/Bground/Africa/CRS%20Africa%20report/Africa%20Bishop\T1\textquoterights%20on%20Oil%20&%20Poverty.pdf> (accessed on 15 December 2021).
- Allen, Elise Ann. 2020. After Recovering from COVID-19, African Cardinal Calls for Debt Relief for Continent. Available online: <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2020/06/after-recovering-from-covid-19-african-cardinal-calls-for-debt-relief-for-continent> (accessed on 12 March 2022).
- Atemanke, J. 2020. Bishops in Ivory Coast Resolve to Engage in ‘Destroying Barriers, Building Bridges’. Available online: <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/666/bishops-in-ivory-coast-resolve-to-engage-in-destroying-barriers-building-bridges> (accessed on 12 March 2022).
- Berkeley, Bull. 1993. Zaire: An African Horror Story. Available online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/08/zaire-an-african-horror-story/305496/> (accessed on 15 December 2021).
- Bevans, Stephan. 2016. Together Towards Life and the Evangelii Gaudium: Life and Joy in Dialogue. In *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*. Edited by Kenneth R. Ross, JooseopKeum KyriakiAvtzi and Roderick R. Hewitt. Oxford: Regnum Books and the World Council of Churches, pp. 461–72.
- Dictionary of African Christian Biography. 2015. “Emile Biayenda (1927–1977)”. Available online: <https://dacb.org/stories/congo/biayenda-emile/> (accessed on 15 January 2022).
- Boyle, Patrick M. 1992. Beyond Self-Protection to Prophecy: The Catholic Church and Political Change in Zaire. *Africa Today* 39: 49–66.
- Brasseur, Paule. 1986. L’Églisecatholique et la décolonisation en Afrique noire. In *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l’empire colonial français, 1936–1956 (Colloque organisé par l’IHTP les 4 et 5 octobre 1984)*. Edited by Charles-Robert Ageron. Paris: CNRS Éditions, pp. 52–66.
- Catholic Bishops of Africa. 2009a. Final Propositions. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_elenco-prop-finali_en.html (accessed on 12 February 2022).
- Catholic Bishops of Africa. 2009b. Message to the People of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_message-synod_en.html (accessed on 12 February 2022).
- Daniel, Kasomo, and Naila Geoffry Napoo. 2013. The Relationship between Church and State. *International Journal of Applied Sociology* 3: 9–18. [CrossRef]
- Denwo, Jean François Channon. 2020. In Cameroon, Face Off between Government and Catholic Bishops. Available online: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/world/in-cameroon-face-off-between-government-and-catholic-bishops/11562> (accessed on 12 March 2022).

- Elenga, Yvon C. 2006. The Congolese Church: Ecclesial Community within the Political Community. In *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*. Edited by Paul C. Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon and Clyde Wilcox. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 245–57.
- Episcopal Conference of Malawi. 2022. *Pastoral Letter: Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of 'Living Our Faith'*. Lilongwe: Catholic Secretariat.
- Evuturs. 1977. Cardinal Is Murdered in Congo; His Death Linked to President's. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/03/24/archives/new-jersey-pages-cardinal-is-murdered-in-congo-his-death-linked-to.html> (accessed on 15 January 2022).
- Fatton, Robert. 1988. Bringing the Ruling Class Back In: Class, State, and Hegemony in Africa. *Comparative Politics* 20: 253–64. [CrossRef]
- Fatton, Robert. 1990. Liberal Democracy in Africa. *Political Science Quarterly* 105: 455–73. [CrossRef]
- Fickling, David. 2021. Nigeria's Oil Curse Could Become an Opportunity. Available online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-04-07/nigeria-s-oil-curse-could-become-an-opportunity-for-renewable-power> (accessed on 21 December 2021).
- Fombad, Charles Manga. 2015. State, Religion, and Law in Cameroon: Regulatory Control, Tension, and Accommodation. *Journal of Church and State* 57: 18–43. [CrossRef]
- Foster, Elizabeth A. 2019. *African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Francis. 2013. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed on 12 February 2022).
- Francis. 2016a. Address to the Members of the Board of Representation of "Caritas Internationalis". Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161117_caritas-internationalis.html (accessed on 12 February 2022).
- Francis. 2016b. Message to His Excellency, Ban-ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations. Available online: <https://holysemission.org/contents/statements/574daeda037ef5.06059441.php> (accessed on 12 February 2022).
- Gregory, William P. 2019. Pope Francis's Effort to Revitalize Catholic Mission. *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 43: 7–19. [CrossRef]
- Healey, Joseph. 2009. Innovations and new trends in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa today. *Hekima Review* 40: 85–100. Available online: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/innovations-and-new-trends-in-small-christian-communities-sccs-in-africa-today/> (accessed on 27 January 2022).
- Heywood, L. 2006. The Angolan Church: The Prophetic Tradition, Politics, and the State. In *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*. Edited by Paul C. Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon and Clyde Wilcox. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 192–206.
- Iheanacho, Valentine Ugochukwu. 2021a. Jean-Marc Éla's Hut and Empty Granary: Rethinking the Social Significance of Theology in Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 47: 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Iheanacho, Valentine Ugochukwu. 2021b. *Historical Trajectories of Catholicism in Africa: From Catholicae Ecclesiae to Ecclesia in Africa*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock.
- Jackson, Robert H., and Carl G. Rosberg. 1984. Personal Rule: Theory and Practice in Africa. *Comparative Politics* 16: 421–42. [CrossRef]
- Jeter, Jon. 2021. In Angola, Church Is Surrogate State. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/03/22/in-angola-church-is-surrogate-state/21d9a33a-4bda-411a-bd31-15ed626c7693/> (accessed on 15 January 2022).
- Kenyon, Paul. 2018. *Dictatorland: The Men Who Stole Africa*. London: Head of Zeus.
- Kiefer, James E. 1999. Janani Luwum, Archbishop of Uganda, Martyr, 16 February 1977. Available online: <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/101.html> (accessed on 5 January 2022).
- Kilby, Karen. 2009. Karl Rahner's Ecclesiology. *New Blackfriars* 90: 188–200. [CrossRef]
- Konings, Piet. 2007. Church-State Relations in Cameroon's Postcolony: The Case of the Roman Catholic Church. *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20: 45–64. [CrossRef]
- Kukah, M. H. 2020. *Christmas Message: A Nation in Search of Vindication*. Sokoto: Catholic Diocese of Sokoto.
- Mbeki, Moeletsi. 2009. *Architects of Poverty: Why African Capitalism Needs Changing*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Mukoso, Camille. 2020. L'engagement de l'Eglise dans la politique en Afrique. Available online: <https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/afrique/news/2020-01/l-engagement-de-l-eglise-dans-politique-en-afrique.html> (accessed on 18 December 2021).
- Neliba, Arnold. 2020. The Story of a Teacher, Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki. Available online: <http://www.seedmagazine.co.ke/the-story-of-a-teacher-archbishop-ndingi-mwana-anzeki/> (accessed on 5 January 2022).
- Ninsin, Kwame. 2006. Introduction: The Contradictions and Ironies of Elections in Africa. *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement* 31: 1–10.
- Obadare, Ebenezer. 2013. A Sacred Duty to Resist Tyranny? Rethinking the Role of the Catholic Church in Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy. *Journal of Church and State* 55: 92–112. [CrossRef]
- Olivier, L. 2010. Chronology of the Democratic Republic of Congo/Zaire (1960–1997): Mass Violence and Resistance. Available online: <http://bo-k2s.sciences-po-fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/chronology-democratic-republic-congozaire-1960-1977> (accessed on 15 January 2022).
- Pengo, P. 2013. A Statement from SECAM. Available online: https://www.cidse.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/03/SECAM_POSITION_ON_THE_POST_2015_MDGs_PROCESS.pdf (accessed on 27 January 2022).
- Philpott, Daniel. 2004. Christianity and Democracy: The Catholic Wave. *Journal of Democracy* 15: 32–46. [CrossRef]

- Phiri, Isaac. 2000. Proclaiming Peace and Love: A New Role for Churches in African Politics. *Journal of Church and State* 42: 781–802. [CrossRef]
- Ratzinger, Joseph. 2008. *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Rossouw, G. J., and Eugenio Macamo. 1993. Church-State Relationship in Mozambique. *Journal of Church and State* 35: 537–46. [CrossRef]
- Rutagambwa, Elisée. 2006. The Rwandan Church: The Challenge of Reconciliation. In *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*. Edited by Paul C. Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon and Clyde Wilcox. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 173–89.
- Southern African Bishops' Conference (SACBC). 1986. Economic Pressure for Justice. Available online: <http://www.sacbcoldsite.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/PASTORAL-LETTER-ON-ECONOMIC-PRESSURE-FOR-JUSTICE.pdf> (accessed on 18 December 2021).
- Schelkens, Karim, John A. Dick, and Jürgen Mettepenningen. 2013. *Aggiornamento?: Catholicism from Gregory XVI to Benedict XVI*. Leiden: Brill.
- Schonecke, Wolfgang. 2020. Eritrea: Under Siege. Available online: <https://www.combonimissionaries.co.uk/index.php/2020/01/27/eritrea-under-siege/> (accessed on 21 January 2022).
- Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). 2013. Governance, Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa. Available online: <https://mafrsouthernafrica.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/secam-pastoral-letter-feb-2013.pdf> (accessed on 18 December 2021).
- Serapião, Luís Benjamim. 1981. The Roman Catholic Church and the Principle of Self-Determination: A Case Study in Mozambique. *Journal of Church and State* 23: 323–35. [CrossRef]
- Silke, John. 1978. Paul VI, Pastor. *The Furrow* 29: 432–39.
- Ugwuanyi, Lawrence Ogbo. 2017. Critiquing Sub-Saharan Pan-Africanism through an Appraisal of Postcolonial African Modernity. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 64: 58–84. [CrossRef]
- World Bank. 2000. *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. 2020. The March Is Not Ended. Available online: <https://spotlight.africa/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ZCBC-The-March-is-not-ended.pdf> (accessed on 20 December 2021).