



Theology and Politics: Partnering for Nation-Building and Transformation

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ABSTRACT

While religious leaders and political scientists have always viewed the existence of theology and politics in a definite manner, this article explores the relationship between the two and how they shape nations. It aims to demonstrate that theological approaches guide political leadership, fostering justice, equity, and peace. The discussion starts with analyzing other historical examples of how theology has fomented social change, explaining how religious ethos has shaped government and legislation. Incorporating this understanding, the article discusses how theological underpinnings impact the processes of human rights activism, socioeconomic change, and the pursuit of the common good in diverse secular political environments. The article provides examples demonstrating the practical application of theology in nation-building efforts, fostering reconciliation, and supporting vulnerable groups. The article also addresses the challenges arising from the interactions between religious worldviews and multicultural political frameworks and offers solutions. Subsequently, the article aims to show that greater collaboration between theologians and policymakers is possible through theological perspectives to foster innovative stewardship and development. Finally, the article's framework outlines the practical strategies for incorporating theological axioms into the political discourse. To bridge the gap between theology and politics, the article presents a comprehensive paradigm that can effectively address modern society's challenges and promote holistic growth. According to the article's explanation of this synergy, deontologies within political systems have the potential to uphold ethical values, thereby contributing to the advancement of a just and equitable society.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between theology and politics has been one of the most influential in world history, making it difficult to find a common theme. However, both domains play fundamental roles in the development of societies, albeit in very distinct ways. Theology stands in stark contrast to purely secular science, as it provides guidance on the ethical evolution of individuals and societies.¹ On the other hand, politics coordinates social relations, managing how people interact and sharing power and resources. Notwithstanding this, there is a vast intersection between the two fields, and the fusion offers a potential way of advancing moral ideas for practical uses in government.² Their combination can solve social problems, encourage justice, and bring leadership to turn society in the desired direction.

It is worth understanding that theology often served as the basis for political systems, defining the powers, laws, and prominent leaders. Sophisticated theocracies of antiquity, feudal monarchies of the Middle Ages, and even the contemporary democracies and liberal states have turned to theological values to make political choices. For instance, Christian ethics greatly informed the theology of the American civil movement on matters of equality. Likewise, different liberation movements worldwide still use religious prescriptions to forward cognate messages of hope and call to action.³ However, relations between the two entities were accompanied by conflict, especially in modern, secular, or multi-state societies with different visions of the world order. The problem is how to ground such determination in these tensions while maintaining the possibility that theology can still play a role in the political field.

1.1 The Intersection of Theology and Politics

Theology and politics are entwined and nuanced based on the interaction and relation between politics and theology. Often, theology offers the rationale, using divine models of justice, equality, and the common good. Politics processes these ideas into concrete programs that may define relations between people and organizations. Occasionally, people struggle to understand the systematic injustices, but when theology and politics work together, they challenge them and promote holistic development.⁴ It is possible to give numerous examples of how theology has influenced

politics in the past. For instance, my involvement began when theologians emphasized the importance of every human being and challenged the authority of enslavers to own Blacks. Likewise, the discourses of decoloniality used scripture to denounce domination and to imagine justice and equality. In these contexts, theology provided a vision of justice outside of politicking.⁵

However, regardless of the rewards at stake, there is always a point where theology and politics intersect. Theologians' inclusion of theological considerations in the political lexicon can be problematic when there are competing belief systems, as in modern secular and postmodern pluralist societies. Some opponents have argued that such integration is wrong because it will isolate the people of different theologies.⁶ However, the enthusiasts insist that theology provides common ethical imperatives and principles, such as compassion, justice, and the dignity of human beings, regardless of the context in which the agenda applies. Understanding these dynamics requires reflection on what becomes possible and impossible when theology and politics interact.

1.2 Purpose and scope of the study

This research has aimed to analyze the possibility of synergism between theology and politics for national development. A review of the sample reveals how politics has been drawn from theology by showing various illustrations of past and present politics. This research explores the application of theological ethics in shaping political decisions related to human rights, reconciliation, and socioeconomic transformations.

The general theme that cuts across this research is the sociopolitical function of theological ethics. Often, theology has offered perspectives for speaking for the voiceless, countering oppressive systems, and imagining different ways of being. This paper discusses these principles, aiming to apply them in the modern world to promote sustainable development and ethical governance. The examples are explained using recent experiences of how theology has provided practical solutions to nation construction, addressing issues of pardon and reunion after a conflict or war and contemporary questions about equity in society and environmental conservation.

In this regard, the study acknowledges sometimes losing touch with modern political discourse regarding the

¹ Fox, Jonathan, and Nukhet A. Sandal. "Toward Integrating Religion into International Relations Theory." *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* (2010): 149-159.

² Fox, Jonathan. "Integrating religion into international relations theory." In *Routledge handbook of religion and politics*, pp. 285-304. Routledge, 2008.

³ Reynolds, Susan. "The historiography of the medieval state." In *Companion to Historiography*, pp. 117-138. Routledge, 2006.

⁴ Hauerwas, Stanley. "A Worldly Church: Politics, a Theology of the Church, and the Common Good." *JL Phil. & Culture* 3 (2009): 447.

⁵ Joseph, Celucien L. "James H. Cone: The vocation of Christian theology and the Christian church today." *The Journal of Pan African Studies (Online)* 12, no. 7 (2018): 8-58.

⁶ Guggenberger, Wilhelm, Kumar Hrudayaraj, and Bala Kiran. *Democracy, Religion, and Pluralism: Theological Responses*. innsbruck university press, 2022: 184

integration of theology. Juxtaposition: In secular and pluralistic environments marked by various religious and post-secular points of view, theology considered in terms of its function presents a set of acute problems. This paper addresses these challenges, focusing on dialogue and engagement between theologians and policymakers. Such partnerships would create opportunities to use theological approaches and practical leadership wisdom to improve society.

Finally, this research expects to develop practical suggestions on how political systems can factor in theological outlooks. Therefore, this systematic discipline aims to connect theology and politics, demonstrating their potential to foster humane, fair, and sustainable societies. All of this leads to the central argument that, when applied wisely and sensitively, theology can facilitate the development of ethically oriented political systems that benefit society.

Consequently, a reflective appraisal of the study's findings reveals that contemporary theology and politics require a new direction of innovation. This entails forging a collaborative relationship between Christian political theology and a political mission while respecting each other's institutions. By doing this, the study aims to develop a strategy for leveraging theology's moral and ethical strengths to address current issues and bring about the necessary changes in nations.

2. Historical Foundations

2.1 Theology's Influence on Political Movements

Theology, specifically religion, has significantly influenced political systems and emancipations throughout history. These examples illustrate the evolving role of religion in the historical relationship between religious fundamentals and social change. These examples demonstrate the involvement of political theology as a doctrine in the pursuit of justice, equality, and change.

The abolition of slavery in the 19th century could easily be described as a political movement influenced by theology.⁷ As Christians viewed all men and women as equals, abolitionists based their beliefs on the sin that God created man in His image, leading them to initiate a movement against slavery. They used what scriptures

had to say on the sanctity of life and the morality of slavery. Like William Wilberforce in Britain and Frederick Douglass in America, virtually all leaders periodically employed theological discourse to intensify their already active political activism, intending to eradicate the institution of slavery, which they perceived as both unethical and unchristian.⁸

The development of liberation theology in Latin America during the mid-20th century is another significant example. Liberation theology emerged as a reaction to the consistent structures of sin at societal and economic levels and in countries that suffered from poverty and political suppression.⁹ Based on justice and biblical analysis of contexts, liberation theologians demanded the overthrow of oppressive structures and the responsibility of political elites. Some thinkers, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, insisted that theology should serve as a means of releasing the oppressed and fighting for the change of systemic injustice, thereby intertwining faith and activism.¹⁰ Yet again, theology transformed political systems; this time, the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century gave teeth to the same. Martin Luther's displeasure with the practices of the Catholic Church, in many ways, sparked the Reformation, which had massive political implications.¹¹ Luther became the great leveler, the liberator of the individual conscience and scripture, and the untimely death knell for the church-controlled political world with its received wisdom. His theological principles helped shape subsequent postures concerning the rights and liberties of single persons and the principle of self-governance, which in turn embraced the foundations of modern democracy.¹² It also paved the way for a renewed focus on sectors of society beyond religious reform, influencing political analysis and education systems.

It also highlights the relevance of the interaction between theology and political movements in the context of faith-based activism. For instance, the fight against apartheid in South Africa prominently featured religious motifs. Various churches, especially those of the Catholics, were involved in managing the course and offering leadership and spiritual direction to the movement. In 1985, the Kairos Document, a theological statement, emerged, denouncing the use of God by religious individuals to justify apartheid and advocating for churches to take a strong stance against injustice.¹³ They also showed that when religion and politics mix, it

⁷ Anaele, Cyril. "Slave-Trade, Christianity and European Imperialism in Nigeria: A Study of the Ante and Post Abolition Periods." *Canadian Social Science* 10, no. 6 (2014): 78.

⁸ Greene, Sandra E. "Minority voices: abolitionism in west Africa." *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 4 (2015): 642-661.

⁹ Huda, Nurul, Arqom Kuswanjono, and Agus Himmawan Utomo. "Redefining the Meaning of Freedom in Liberal Theology and Liberation Theology, and Its Implementation in Religious Life." *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 21, no. 1 (2023): 1-24.

¹⁰ Gutiérrez, M. Gustavo. "Notes for a Theology of Liberation." *Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (1970): 243.

¹¹ Glanzer, Perry L. "Protestant higher education around the globe: The worldwide spread and contemporary state of Protestant Higher Education." *International handbook of Protestant education* (2012): 599-613.

¹² Dixon, C. Scott. "Martin Luther and the Reformation in Historical Thought, 1517–2017." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 106, no. 424 (2017): 404-416.

¹³ Davids, Nuraan. "Transforming Post-Apartheid South Africa Through Shared Religious Education." *Religions* 15, no. 11 (2024): 1330.

is possible to mobilize people for change and implement the vision of a better world.

2.2 Case Studies of Theology-Driven Nation-Building

The principle of "ubuntu" serves as a case study in South Africa, illustrating the interrelationship between theology and nation formation. The Bantu philosophy, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people, essentially gives rise to Ubuntu. This theological worldview formed the foundation of apartheid in South Africa and was dominant in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of apartheid theatre.¹⁴ Under the leadership of prominent figures such as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) implemented Ubuntu to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. This commission's political and theological mission was to heal the nation and bridge the divide.¹⁵ Thus, by implementing Ubuntu in its operation, the TRC showed where sociological and theological ideas could lead communities together toward justice.

The civil rights movement in the United States provides yet another compelling example. Some leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., focused on Christian theological ethical norms like love, justice, and nonviolence. Therefore, this paper argues that King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" illustrates how theological philosophy underpins political activism.¹⁶ King drew heavily from the scriptural and theological discourses to ask for equal rights for Black people. The leader initiated significant legislative changes in civil rights, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, establishing the foundation for ongoing struggles unless other social justice causes received support.¹⁷ Therefore, one could see religion, in the sense of theology, as the moral guidance and rallying factor.

One more intriguing example explores the connection between the United States and theology, specifically focusing on the role of theology in constructing the new state. The Pilgrims, who landed in Rock's America with a vision of a "city upon a hill," expanded the Republican denomination and introduced its theological vision into the early American political structure.¹⁸ Puritans specifically held to covenant

theology, asserting a social and political covenant between God and humanity, which served as the foundation for dependent social and political concepts in colonial America.¹⁹ This is because the theological citizenship construct helped to shape American democracy, favoring ideas such as accountability, collective responsibility, or the progression of justice. Therefore, issues related to the integration of theology in nation-building efforts persist in the modern era. Theological beliefs have played an essential role in the healing process in Rwanda since the genocide.²⁰ Churches have played a significant role in organizing discussions, shamans, and efforts to reconcile feuding parties. Through theology, there has been a way of providing moral analysis of violence, reconciliations, and the way forward to lasting peace.

It is also clear that theology and nation-building are present in today's political cases, not just historical ones. For example, the climate justice struggle, a global phenomenon, encompasses theological frameworks of caring for creation and the earth for generations to come. These various applications should demonstrate the relevance of theology in addressing current and future challenges in global societies.²¹ In the same way, in areas experiencing shifts in political power, religious actors are involved in conflict resolution bereft of their faith beliefs on mercy and facilitation.

3. Theological Ethics and Political Leadership

The application of theological ethics in political leadership offers the potential for a more comprehensive understanding of Theological ethics, a branch of knowledge rooted in the religious heritages of the world's major religions, focuses on the fundamental concepts of justice, equity, and peace, to shape the moral foundation of future governance and public policies. This section examines ways these principles play out in leadership and governance regarding justice, equity, peace, and human rights.

3.1 Principles of Justice, Equity, and Peace

¹⁴ Ewuoso, Cornelius, and Susan Hall. "Core aspects of ubuntu: A systematic review." *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 12, no. 2 (2019): 93-103.

¹⁵ Worthington, Everett L., Camilla W. Nonterah, Shawn O. Utsey, Brandon J. Griffin, Caroline C. Carneal, Athena H. Cairo, Annabella Osei-Tutu et al. "Forgiveness research in Africa: The present status and future prospects." *Handbook of forgiveness* (2019): 223-233.

¹⁶ Hecllo, Hugh. "Is America a Christian Nation?" *Pol. Sci. Q.* 122 (2007): 59.

¹⁷ Alridge, Derrick P. "The limits of master narratives in history textbooks: An analysis of representations of Martin Luther King, Jr." *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 4 (2006): 662-686.

¹⁸ Younker, Michael F. "The American Socio-Political Spider Web and the Rise of Global Christianity." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (2014): 16.

¹⁹ Møller, Jens G. "The beginnings of Puritan covenant theology." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14, no. 1 (1963): 46-67.

²⁰ Safari, Peter. "Church, state and the Rwandan genocide." *Political theology* 11, no. 6 (2010): 873-893.

²¹ Kerber, Guillermo. "Caring for Creation and Striving for Climate Justice: Implications for mission and spirituality 1." *International Review of Mission* 99, no. 2 (2010): 219-229.

Religious principles have always supported and promoted components of justice, equity, and peace as virtues of political leadership. These principles prompt leaders to prioritize the public's and society's interests, thereby promoting the well-being of society.

Justice

There is agreement that justice is a central moral virtue in the theological context. Biblical tenets herald the principles of justice, which include the proper distribution of resources, respect for people's rights, and equality in leadership.²² For example, the Hebrew Scriptures pay much attention to the term 'mishpat,' which means justice is a divine command to rulers to do right by the people. This concept still holds today, as decision-makers utilize it to address issues such as economic disparity, prejudice, and the absence of constitutional rights to education and health care.²³ In practice, as Glaukonas and Polearkos have shown, leadership in political authority must develop laws that address social injustice. For instance, implementing progressive taxation and social welfare initiatives manifests theological interests in justice, as it generates income for developing people in need.²⁴ However, justice-oriented policies can enhance social stability, thereby fostering public trust in the stability of society.

Equity

Equality is not equity, which means that each person and every group have different contexts requiring different treatment to arrive at equality.²⁵ Theological ethics raises the principle of fairness as a moral requirement because every individual is—in the Christian tradition—made in the image of God. This principle advocates for representation in the workplace that respects diversity and actively promotes its integration.²⁶ The ability of policies to counter the lockout of certain groups in resource distribution and decision-making processes represents equity in the current management and leadership system. For instance, affirmative action

programs and specific educational initiatives in Europe align with theological perspectives by enhancing the social status of the disadvantaged population.²⁷ There is also equity, which means that the marginalized groups are not suffering from climate change or the destruction of the environment.

Peace

In theological ethics, 'peace' extends beyond the absence of conflict to encompass wholeness, also known as 'shalom.' This scriptural concept from the Old Testament emphasizes cohesion within societies, sound business practices, and resource conservation. With this vision of peace, political leaders can gain ideas on reconciling, reducing tension, and building stable societies.²⁸ Therefore, examining various aspects, such as poverty levels, inequality, and political instability, is crucial to advocating for peace. Diplomatic efforts, conflict resolution, and the creation and advancement of education and healthcare systems manifest theological concerns for peace.²⁹ In addition, respect and compliance with human rights standards and the coordination of international cooperation are critical for introducing equal values of peace around the world.

3.2 Theological Contributions to Human Rights and Governance

Human Rights

Still, theological ethics has played a crucial role in defining what modernity understands as human rights. For instance, Christian and Judeo cultures emphasize the value and personal worth of life. These principles are foundational to important statements of international human rights law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the acknowledgment of

²² Schwarz, Thomas SJ. "Teaching ethics and computer forensics: the Markkula center for applied ethics approach." In *Proceedings of the 2nd annual conference on Information security curriculum development*, pp. 66-71. 2005.

²³ Voth, Steven. "Justice vs. Righteousness: A Contextualized Analysis of 'tsedeq' in the KJV (English) and RVR (Spanish)." *성경원문연구* 20 (2007): 279-310.

²⁴ Chodorow, Adam S. "Biblical Tax Systems and the Case for Progressive Taxation." *Journal of Law and Religion* 23, no. 1 (2007): 51-96.

²⁵ Dworkin, Ronald. "What is equality? Part 2: Equality of resources." In *The notion of equality*, pp. 143-205. Routledge, 2018.

²⁶ Braveman, Paula A., Shiriki Kumanyika, Jonathan Fielding, Thomas LaVeist, Luisa N. Borrell, Ron

Manderscheid, and Adewale Troutman. "Health disparities and health equity: the issue is justice." *American journal of public health* 101, no. S1 (2011): S149-S155.

²⁷ Fu, Jerry, Chen Fu, Robert S. Wang, Daniel M. Geynisman, Pooja Ghatalia, Shannon M. Lynch, Sharon R. Harrison, Erin K. Tagai, and Camille Ragin. "Current status and future direction to address disparities in diversity, equity, and inclusion in prostate cancer care." *Current Oncology Reports* 25, no. 7 (2023): 699-708.

²⁸ van der Walt, Chris. "Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of a relationship founded by God—(shalom) in Isaiah and Micah." *In die Skriflig* 55, no. 2 (2021): 1-8.

²⁹ Cramer, Christopher. "Does inequality cause conflict?." *Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association* 15, no. 4 (2003): 397-412.

rights to life, liberty, and security.³⁰ The theological interpretation of human dignity provides a theological rationale for combating societal evils such as slavery, human trafficking, and genocide, among others. The goal of all religious teachings is to respect the divine image of people and defend marginalized groups of people from injustice and inequality in law.³¹ Therefore, incorporating theological resources into human rights advocacy enhances practices that address global issues. For instance, faith-based organizations play a significant role in advocating for and implementing various programs, including those focused on poverty reduction and eradication, gender issues, and refugee support.³² These endeavors provide examples of how theological ethicists can mobilize people to be agents of the rights of persons and sociopolitical justice.

Governance

Organizations can benefit from theological ethics by incorporating morality into their governance systems. Spiritual or religious sources offer excellent ethical templates, primarily integrity, responsibility, and sustainability, upon which policy and practice can be based.³³ Servant leadership represents a significant shift in governance, drawing inspiration from theological ethics. This model shares characteristics with Jesus and Mahatma Gandhi, prioritizing the welfare of others over their own. Leaders who implement this approach establish a foundation of trust, transparency, and collaboration with their administrative team.³⁴ Moreover, theological ethics revolves around moral responsibility in leading the nation. Religious traditions regulate the morality of leaders and promote the growth of ethical personality and reasonable actions.³⁵ Policies including checks/balances, anti-corruption, and acceptance of the outcome of social audits are among a raft of measures that indicate ASU's commitment to accountability and integrity.

Practical Applications

Numerous historical and contemporary examples demonstrate the incorporation of theological concepts into governance. For example, the African American civil rights campaign in the United States used Christianity to campaign for the equal rights of the Blacks. People non-violent activists like Martin Luther King Jr. employed the narrative from the Old Testament to mobilize the masses in the right direction, even if some traveled a 'slightly' more crooked path toward change.³⁶ Theological reflections can enhance modern governance by incorporating ethical considerations into the political agenda. For instance, incorporating principles of justice or equity into climate change measures ensures the protection of the appropriate societal populations.³⁷ Furthermore, implementing intercultural dialogue fosters understanding and cooperation among people of different religions, which is essential for addressing existing and emerging global issues.

Theological ethics gives an appropriate approach to political leadership since it is based on justice, equity, and peace. It is possible to use religious beliefs in the service of the state by referencing these traditions to develop legislation that protects human rights, pursues the common good, and provides moral guidance for officials and lawmakers.³⁸ Exploration of theological models on human rights and governance reveals the value of theological ideas on human rights today. These ideas provide valuable lessons on the qualities of ethical leadership, which are crucial in addressing various challenges in society and fostering the construction of a harmonious world. This research addresses the need for theological ethics to serve as a force for unity and social change, particularly in the context of polarization and inequality.³⁹ Thus, by encountering these principles, leaders can mobilize the trust of the people, unite the people, and leave a worthy legacy for essential values such as justice and peace for future generations.

³⁰ Villa-Vicencio, Charles. "Christianity and human rights." *Journal of Law and Religion* 14, no. 2 (2000): 579-600.

³¹ Lysaught, M. Therese. "Introduction: Complex Situations." *Journal of Moral Theology* 13, no. 2 (2024): 1-5.

³² Clarke, Gerard. "Faith-based organizations and international development: An overview." *Development, civil society and faith-based organizations: Bridging the sacred and the secular* (2008): 17-45.

³³ Bielefeld, Wolfgang, and William Suhs Cleveland. "Defining faith-based organizations and understanding them through research." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2013): 442-467.

³⁴ Modise, J. M., and K. Raga. "Servant Leadership Is Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership, A Leader Is a Servant First." *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology* 8, no. 2 (2023): 1929-1936.

³⁵ Renjen, Punit. "How leaders are navigating the Fourth Industrial Revolution." *Deloitte Review* 24, no. 1 (2019): 39-43.

³⁶ Horrigan, Brian, and Kathleen Franz, eds. "The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom." (2015): 185-188.

³⁷ Amorim-Maia, Ana T., Isabelle Anguelovski, Eric Chu, and James Connolly. "Intersectional climate justice: A conceptual pathway for bridging adaptation planning, transformative action, and social equity." *Urban climate* 41 (2022): 101053.

³⁸ Plantak, Zorislav. "Ethical Analysis of Abuses of Power in Christian Leadership—A Case Study of "Kingly Power" in the Seventh-day Adventist Church." *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 56, no. 2 (2019): 12.

³⁹ Kelly, Conor M. "Everyday Solidarity: A Framework for Integrating Theological Ethics and Ordinary Life." *Theological studies* 81, no. 2 (2020): 414-437.

4. Engaging Pluralistic and Secular Political Systems

4.1 Challenges in Theological-Political Dialogue

The definition of the theology-politics relationship is complex even in the best of times, but especially in a fluid, pluralistic, and secular world. They possess distinct religious and ideological characteristics, which often present a challenge when integrating religious beliefs with policymaking. One major issue arises from the inherent religious diversity in this type of spirituality. Pluralist countries require policymakers to consider several theological systems, most of which are opposed.⁴⁰ This divergence makes implementing policies acceptable to all interested parties challenging to achieve. For instance, discussions of abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia often include arguments about religion in contrast with state authority. On matters of morality, especially the Human Rights Act, people of different faiths have their own understanding, which may not tally with the other.⁴¹ Hence, political organizations may struggle to integrate theological views without excluding other segments of society.

However, the principle of secularism frequently aims to restrain and minimize religion's impact on society. Secular governance aims to prevent what it perceives as religious interference in state activities and vice versa. Although this division helps enhance the participation of various other disciplines for inclusion, it may also 'exclude' theological suggestions when evaluating policy.⁴² Sometimes, religious associations can get the impression that secularism does not consider their ethical systems; therefore, they can feel left out. Further, religious politicization involves certain risks. Political assistance can also be dangerous.⁴³ Finally, he argues that the politicization of religion also carries risks. Unless applied politically, religious language aids in resolving conflicts and addressing specific societal issues, but when politicized, it merely intensifies societal divisions. Policymakers may engage in theological debates in an attempt to mobilize supporters who are opposed to the purpose of having knowledgeable conversations.⁴⁴ Such practices, which have already

distanced us from this process, undoubtedly hinder theological or political engagement.

The issue of how secular and religious individuals learn to respect each other in education and culture also bears relevance. Societies that adhere to secularism often prioritize reason and experience, which presents a significant challenge, along with faith-based epistemologies.⁴⁵ Applying theological principles in ways not commonly used in society poses a significant challenge. Addressing this research gap calls for methods that do not reject one view and embrace another while acknowledging their differences.⁴⁶ International relations also play a significant role in the second issue. Globalization transforms the world into a single cultural village, forcing Kalish's theological and political discussions to grapple with diverse values and standards.⁴⁷ This is why contentious issues like human rights, gender, and speech freedoms often associate religious practices with secularism. This paper aims to identify factors influencing intercultural communication, outline necessary interventions to address these differences, start with the culture of recognition, tolerance, and understanding of one's counterpart, and conclude with conflict-solving procedures.

4.2 Opportunities for Collaboration in Diverse Contexts

The current pluralistic and secular settings offer significant advantages for fostering partnerships. Reconstructing theological best practices can enhance political discussions based on comprehensible ethical guidelines across cultural and religious divides. For instance, justice, compassion, and human dignity, which remain the non-negotiable principles in religious belief systems, are general and provide stakeholders with reasons to cooperate.⁴⁸

Thus, multifaith activities are a perfect example of how cooperation can address global challenges. By incorporating the religious aspects of diverse religions, these initiatives leverage shared moral principles to tackle pressing global issues like climate change,

⁴⁰ Bader, Veit. "Religious diversity and democratic institutional pluralism." *Political theory* 31, no. 2 (2003): 265-294.

⁴¹ Lockhart, Christopher, Carol HJ Lee, Chris G. Sibley, and Danny Osborne. "The sanctity of life: The role of purity in attitudes towards abortion and euthanasia." *International Journal of Psychology* 58, no. 1 (2023): 16-29.

⁴² Musni, Siti Norhanani Binti, Sharifatul Nadiyah Binti Sulim, Muhamad Helmi Md Said, and Fatima Abdel Rahim Ali. "Secularism: Freedom of Religion or Freedom from Religion?" The chapter on religious sects 19, no. Shamara Weijah (2023): 145-166.

⁴³ Campbell, David E. "The perils of politicized religion." *Daedalus* 149, no. 3 (2020): 87-104.

⁴⁴ Pinkevich, Vasily K. "The Politicization of Society and the Religious Issues in Modern Russia." *RUDN Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 4 (2020): 647-663.

⁴⁵ Széll, György. "Religions and society." *La Sociologia Sovranazionale di Roberto Cipriani. Milano: Franco Angeli* (2021): 113-131.

⁴⁶ Casanova, José. "The secular and secularisms." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1049-1066.

⁴⁷ Mayall, James. "Globalization and international relations." *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 239-250.

⁴⁸ De Carvalho, José Jorge. "An enchanted public space: Religious plurality and modernity in Brazil." *Through the kaleidoscope: The experience of modernity in Latin America* (2000): 275-296.

poverty, and social justice.⁴⁹ For example, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) created the so-called "Faith for the Earth Initiative," which encourages religious actors to protect the environment. Such initiatives are reconciliatory because they present ecological responsibility as a moral responsibility obligatory in all religions.⁵⁰ Moreover, diverse societies provide a conducive environment for promoting discussions that foster understanding. It is evident that theological contributions can foster a symbiotic relationship and provide a shared context between opposing cultures and ideologies.⁵¹ For instance, interfaith educational programs are helpful since they foster the elimination of misconceptions and associated prejudices to make policy systems more welcoming.

Besides ethical directions, theology may help introduce innovative solutions in the sphere of governance. There is, however, recognition of the role of religion in nurturing communal interest, which is a concept as dear to today's world as social justice. Integrating these values into policy instruments will help various governments ensure that the developed policies meet the needs of these vulnerable groups.⁵² Organizations can also reap benefits from interacting with theological perspectives. For instance, religious organizations possess significant assets and capacities that could serve as alternatives to the government in various sectors, such as disaster operations, health, and social services, or even education. Religious and secular actors have highlighted that both are mutually beneficial and that the involvement of faith-based NGOs has positive outcomes in overthrowing the state failure and delivering aid to populations needing it.⁵³

Pluralistic settings facilitate the development of tools for interlocutors' dialogue. Such forums, which bring together theologians, policymakers, and competently engaged civil society stakeholders, foster valuable dialogues. You can best use these to find common ground and minimize controversy on relevant issues. For instance, the Parliament of the World's Religions has played a crucial role in organizing global gatherings that bring people of different faiths together for interfaith

dialogue and to advance the cause of sustainable development.⁵⁴

Technology and Social Media: These platforms enhance the potential for cooperation in pluralistic societies. Social media offers avenues for disseminating theological knowledge and fosters interpersonal understanding. Social media, along with information and communication technology-based forums and campaigns, continue to successfully unite various groups of people toward shared objectives such as famine relief and environmental protection.⁵⁵ The arts and culture also present opportunities for partnerships. There is a need for religious and secular communities to partner in cultural projects that enhance cultural exchange and socially approved standards. Celebrations, fairs, and shows are the most effective media for exchanging information and communication. Thus, it provides a platform for creative art that transcends language and ideologies, serving as a unifying force. The diversification of modern societies compels open-ended strategies of theological-political interaction.⁵⁶ Thus, the general emphasis on diversity as an asset with religious and secular stakeholders means everyone can fashion the appropriate solution for the modern world together. Any society benefits from it, as it aids in problem-solving while upholding values.

Therefore, despite the tensions in the regenerative relationship between theology and politics in pluralistic and secular societies, the prospect of a positive alliance is enormous. This way, the challenges indicated keep stakeholders from effectively utilizing theological ideals and dominate them with a view of harmony, race, shared justice, and common global issues. When diverse groups are willing to work together to express their understandings and intentions, pluralistic cultures can build a better world for everyone.

5. Practical Implications for Nation-Building

5.1 Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Efforts

⁴⁹ Webber, Matthew. "Faith for Earth: A Call for Action by Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme and Parliament of the World's Religions." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 41, no. 2 (2021): 405-406.

⁵⁰ Rollososon, Natabara. "The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) working with faith representatives to address climate change: the two wings of ethos and ethics." *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 3 (2010): 419-431.

⁵¹ Kimani, S. "The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Social Behavior and Community Cohesion." *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2024): 60-73.

⁵² Kemp, Steffie. "Effective Faith Partnerships during COVID-19: Lessons Learned from Development Practitioners: Policy & Practice Note." *Religion and Development* 2, no. 2 (2023): 309-320.

⁵³ Sheikhi, Rahim Ali, Hesam Seyedin, Ghader Qanizadeh, and Katayoun Jahangiri. "Role of religious institutions in disaster risk management: A systematic review." *Disaster medicine and public health preparedness* 15, no. 2 (2021): 239-254.

⁵⁴ Oommen, T. K. "Reconciling pluralism and equality: The dilemma of 'advanced' societies." *International review of sociology* 3, no. 1 (1992): 141-172.

⁵⁵ Owiny, Sylvia A., Khanjan Mehta, and Audrey N. Maretzki. "The use of social media technologies to create, preserve, and disseminate indigenous knowledge and skills to communities in East Africa." *International journal of communication* 8 (2014): 14.

⁵⁶ Wanjohi, J. G., and G. W. Wanjohi. "Social and religious concerns of East Africa." *Footform, Nairobi* (2005).

Reconciliation and peacebuilding with nation-building, particularly in societies in the process of coming out of conflict. Such settings explicitly employ theory as an ethical framework and a tool for mending relationships. The importance of these efforts lies in their potential to rebuild social trust among communities and restore national harmony, which becomes crucial when social or political unrest occurs.

Particularly in situations where historical injustices have injured certain societies, one can see the function of theology in reconciliation and peacebuilding. We discussed the TRC in South Africa, one of the most famous examples of theology in reconciliation. The TRC, established post-apartheid, aimed to provide information about human rights violations and provide a platform for perpetrators and victims of violence to express their views. The commission bases its work on Christianity, which advocates for forgiveness, the likelihood of compassion, and the expatriate need for confession and dialogue.⁵⁷

Desmond Tutu, a prominent supporter of the TRC, believed that reconciliation could only fully manifest on the foundation of forgiveness. The theological concepts of grace and redemption, which do not require a change in outcome but rather an actual change in the client's and deliverer's hearts, underpinned this focus on restoring the health of an individual or a community.⁵⁸ The restorative justice process, which addresses injustice for forgiveness and reconciliation, replaced theologically rooted punishment in South African society. Moreover, the achievement of the TRC has shown that theological concepts can help establish citizens' shared moral responsibility and reconciliation in a country. People in many post-conflict societies divide into hateful segments, necessitating both political and spiritual unity for their integration.⁵⁹ In peacebuilding, theology can fill this gap by promoting understanding, forgiveness, and unity based on equality and respect. God and theology, with their centrality, help people understand that everyone is redeemable, thereby easing reconciliation processes, which are the foundation for rebuilding society.

Another way the theological schools engage in peacebuilding is by producing interfaith dialogue and interaction platforms. Therefore, religious modality can be essential in global contexts, particularly in divided countries, where theological work is crucial in promoting cross-cultural empathy among religious believers. This aspect not only checks sectarian hostility and reduces

religious violence but also serves as a reference point for fostering unity and cooperation. For instance, the capacity of Islamic leaders to advocate for unity and peace restoration following the Rwandan genocide demonstrates the adaptability of theological doctrines to various religious beliefs.⁶⁰ Therefore, theology is the primary source for mediation and conflict resolution, based on principles of forgiveness, restorative justice at the community level, and interreligious dialogue. These principles aid societies in understanding conflict trauma and promote peace and unity within society.

5.2 Advocacy and Policy Development

Religious moralities have always occupied an essential position in prodding engagement and strategy formation. Churches, governments, and other religious bodies have, in the past, played active roles in championing social justice causes, including compassion for the needy, power for the poor, and respect for human rights. As a result of this collaboration with policymakers, theologians can guarantee that development policies are moral and ethical, thus helping realize sustainable development.

The theology that underpins advocacy and policy is based on the idea that ethics should precede politics and economics. Across numerous fields, religious people have been keen to bring about policy agendas of human dignity, justice, and the common good. For example, in Latin America, the liberation theology movement emerged as a response to injustices and inequalities. The free grace theology contends that the church should aggressively promote social justice for the oppressed and fight for the poor. It has shifted its focus toward social justice and human rights, leading to its influence on most regional policy changes, including land reform, redistribution, and economic development policies.⁶¹

More recently, religious leaders have also called on humanity to pursue policies dealing with structural concerns such as climate change, economics, and migration. By looking at things through a religious lens, especially the moral one that supports the idea of duty and caring for the weak, theology can make a big difference in achieving social policy goals that aim to reduce suffering and improve the well-being of everyone. For instance, when Francis of the Catholic Church issued the encyclical "Laudato Si," he demanded action on climate change, arguing that environmental issues are

⁵⁷ Gibson, James L. "The contributions of truth to reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa." *Journal of conflict resolution* 50, no. 3 (2006): 409-432.

⁵⁸ Meiring, P. G. J. "Forgiveness, reconciliation and justice à la Desmond Tutu." *Acta Theologica* 42, no. 2 (2022): 86-103.

⁵⁹ Maluleke, Tinyiko. "Forgiveness and reconciliation in the life and work of Desmond Tutu." *International Review of Mission* 109, no. 2 (2020): 210-221.

⁶⁰ Peltonen, Tuomo. "The role of religion in cross-cultural management: Three perspectives." *The SAGE handbook of contemporary cross-cultural management* (2020): 240-254.

⁶¹ Huda, Nurul, Arqom Kuswanjono, and Agus Himmawan Utomo. "Redefining the Meaning of Freedom in Liberal Theology and Liberation Theology, and Its Implementation in Religious Life." *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 21, no. 1 (2023): 1-24.

more ethical than political or economic ones.⁶² At one point in his leadership, he advocated for sustainable development, and his emphasis on fostering interconnectedness provides theological backing for policies aimed at protecting the planet and its inhabitants, particularly those in need.

Theology Ethics also contributes to the establishment of social policies by elevating the dignity of human beings and recognizing their rights. In most countries in the world, religious organizations have played central roles in advocating for legal changes that assess the rights of women, children, and other minorities. For instance, in South Korea, the involvement of Christian organizations in women's rights has compelled the government to implement measures aimed at ending violence and improving the social status of women. Likewise, theological ethics have formed the basis of Christian justice, race, labour, and education movements, providing the ethical rationale for the support and liberation of the oppressed and the provision of justice for the common good.⁶³

Religious players have the potential to actively participate in policy making, acting as intermediaries between the government and the governed. Religious institutions present some social capital in post-conflict countries or areas that lack proper confidence in the government. Religious leaders are considered credible messengers who can deliver information on behalf of largely powerless groups and thereby help bring marginalized people's concerns about policy decisions to the attention of policymakers. In the recent conflict between Christians and Muslims in the southern Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, Catholic agencies have played a crucial role in promoting peace and justice.⁶⁴ The institutions of these countries have served as a mediating interface for negotiations and have provided support for policies aimed at resolving the underlying issues of conflict and fostering societal cohesion.

In international relations, theological views are also used to elaborate on the concept of human rights at the international level and on the assistance to the fighting countries' policies. Caritas Internationalis, a Catholic aid organization, is one of the many organizations that have supported efforts to have immigration policies that respect refugees, seekers of asylum status, and displaced people. Similarly, religious actors have advocated for global regulations tackling climate change, fair trade, and conflict resolution.⁶⁵ Religious leaders have employed religious reasoning to

explain that these demands are the moral urgency of solidarity, justice, and stewardship of shared resources.

The advocacy work that considers theological beliefs also plays a crucial role in providing ethical solutions and counterbalancing secularism, which often overlooks people's needs in favor of wealth or political power. In this vein, theological beliefs not only assign an ethical principle for one's conduct but also serve as a tool for influencing societal legislation and advocating for the common good.⁶⁶ Thus, when formulating policies, theologians and religious leaders justify their interventions in favor of proper and ethical policies that foster just, compassionate, and sustainable societies.

Therefore, they believe that theology is crucial in advocacy and policymaking. Using ethical principles, religious personalities, and institutions have actively participated in advocacy campaigns for a new social order to implement policy measures that enhance justice, respect for human rights, and environmental conservation. Thus, theological knowledge can complement public policymaking processes by introducing ethical perspectives for development and human rights protection for every citizen, particularly for the vulnerable ones.

6. Conclusion

We can conclude that theology and politics are interrelated and outcomes-transformable disciplines that hold enormous potential to change the course of societies. Lest we misunderstand, the numerous historical examples outlined herein demonstrate that theology and politics provide a foundation for leaders to address social and ethical issues, especially those related to justice, equity, and peace. The integration of theology into politics serves as a source of authority, enabling leaders to govern through their conscience and the will of the governed. Not only does theology provide ethical advice, but it also provides a philosophical rationale for governance since its application results in social change.

Therefore, political change entails the active involvement of theology in constituting, challenging, and reshaping national groups and social movements, as well as government practices. Political leaders have mobilized theological imaginations and religious and spiritual passages to advocate for justice and human rights movements, particularly in the emancipation of enslaved people and people of African descent, civil rights for African Americans, and gay rights.

⁶² Basedau, Matthias, Birte Pfeiffer, and Johannes Vüllers. "Bad religion? Religion, collective action, and the onset of armed conflict in developing countries." *Journal of conflict Resolution* 60, no. 2 (2016): 226-255.

⁶³ Palley, Marian Lief. "Women's status in South Korea: tradition and change." *Asian Survey* 30, no. 12 (1990): 1136-1153.

⁶⁴ Hurights, O. "Mindanao Conflict: In Search of Peace and Human Rights." *Focus* (2008).

⁶⁵ Cruz, Gemma Tulud. "Tradition in liberation: Women, the transnational family, and Caritas in Veritate." *Feminist theology* 24, no. 1 (2015): 79-92.

⁶⁶ Lestari, Arabatzi Amyras, and Fotini Adamou Brougham. "Role of Religion in Shaping Ethical and Moral Values Among the Youths in Athens, Greece." (2023).

Furthermore, the moral and ethical principles offered by theology can assist leaders in comprehending the roles and issues of power and governance, thereby ensuring the implementation of the proposed guidelines. When political and religious leaders have mutual aspirations, the outcome of the leadership is usually that of a unitary society.

However, having theology in politics is possible only when specific measures are necessary to show general respect for diversity of opinions and points of view. One indicates that to maintain positive political change; theology must engage in a constructive dialogue with politics and other academic disciplines. These dialogues provide an opportunity for information sharing that guarantees the concerted approach of religious and political leaders to address social issues. Therefore, theologians should develop a proper positive dialogue with policymakers to avoid implications and misunderstandings that can hinder the realization of theological and political goals for the well-being of society.

Considering our diverse society, ensuring that any theological inputs acknowledge the rich theological environment is essential. Religiously diverse societies require theological paradigms that respect the divergent belief systems characteristic of such societies. By acknowledging and incorporating diverse perspectives from the theological spectrum, policymakers can create a political framework that considers the perspectives of all individuals. This inclusivity ensures that procedures don't favor one religion over another but aim to foster shared behaviors upon which individuals from diverse religions can concur.

The second significant recommendation is to incorporate the ethical data from theology into policymaking. Theology directs decision-making, especially intending to serve society and its goals. For instance, mercy, fairness, and responsibility are among the faith-based concepts that can inform policymakers' ideas about how to create prosperity for the needy community, defend the natural world from destruction, and avoid excluding minorities from the main developmental processes. This is true, as integrating these ethical principles will empower leaders to make informed decisions, leading to the development of fair, just, and sustainable policies. Theological ethics can also influence the political environment, alerting leaders to combat corruption and demonstrating its effectiveness.

Last, education and advocacy should help inculcate a better understanding of the theological and political contextual approaches. Such programs equip current and future leaders with sufficient understanding and practical knowledge of how the two aspects relate, enabling them to handle nationwide leadership's moral and ethical challenges. These programs can assist in cultivating a new generation of leaders who possess the readiness, willingness, and ability to govern and the ethical foundation that theology provides. The political implication will be that educated leaders will be better

placed to make compassionate decisions that uphold integrity, thus improving political ethical standards.

Therefore, theology can learn from politics to popularize, promote, and advance a progressive theology of justice, equality, and peaceful coexistence. By fostering discussions between religious scholars and policymakers, promoting a diversity of theological approaches, incorporating ethical considerations into the policymaking process, and promoting education and advocacy, nations can harness the political potential of theology for their collective benefit. This integration could pave the way for a future where governance aligns with the highest moral principles of social change, fostering a sustainable and equitable society. Thus, these efforts could result in the proper application of theological and political principles, leading to the construction of harmonious global political structures that effectively address the problems of the common good while emphasizing the values of justice and peace.

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