


Pastoral Letters and the Church in the public square: An assessment of the role of Pastoral Letters in influencing democratic processes in Malawi

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Dates:

Received: 07 Feb. 2018
Accepted: 07 May 2018
Published: 03 July 2018

How to cite this article:

Jere, Q. & Magezi, V., 2018, 'Pastoral Letters and the Church in the public square: An assessment of the role of Pastoral Letters in influencing democratic processes in Malawi', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), a1844. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1844>

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The contributory role Pastoral Letters play in Malawi's democracy cannot be underestimated. Historically, Pastoral Letters have been the voice of the Malawian people, and these have forced authorities to accommodate social and political reforms. From colonialism, federations and independence to the birth and consolidation of democracy, Pastoral Letters have been issued by the Church to State authority demanding political change and improvement in governance issues. For instance, Pastoral Letters issued by the Church put pressure on the British to end colonialism in Malawi, and in 1992, Pastoral Letters hugely contributed to the dismantling of Dr Kamuzu Banda's, and the Malawi Congress Party's, three-decade autocratic rule. Even in the multiparty dispensation, which was ushered in during 1994, Pastoral Letters have provided checks and balances to government in the consolidation of democracy. Thus, Pastoral Letters represent the voice of the voiceless in every political dispensation. The article is informed by the Pauline Pastoral Letters' conceptual framework. The main argument governing this article is that unless there is continuity in the issuing of Pastoral Letters by the Church in addressing specific challenges within a democracy, sustainability of democratic value will always be compromised and not realised.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This is an interdisciplinary article that touches on practical and public theology focusing on Church history and polity in assessing the role of Pastoral Letters in influencing the sustainability of democratic processes in a public square. The article contributes to a wider debate on the role the Church's Pastoral Letters play in determining the sociopolitical landscape in Malawi. However, this is the only article written from a Pauline Pastoral Letters' conceptual framework.

Introduction and background

Pastoral Letters play a significant role in Malawi's political economy. From colonialism, independence and democracy, Pastoral Letters have been pivotal in disseminating important messages from the Church leadership to the congregants and government as a whole. However, after three decades of autocratic rule, the official downfall of Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party began through the issuing of the most liberative and confrontational Pastoral Letter by the Catholic bishops on 8 March 1992 (Mijoga 1996:55). The bishops' statement was the first public criticism of the Malawi Congress Party regime in the country since 1964 and called for far-reaching social and political reforms (Ross 1995c:32). Rarely, in modern times, has a Church document had such an immediate, explosive effect on the life of a nation (Ross 1996c:38–39). If it was not for liberative push through the 1992 Pastoral Letter, democracy, freedom and human rights could not have been officially attained in the country. It is beyond comprehension that a mere Pastoral Letter could set the nation on fire in dismantling the 30-year dictatorship of Dr Banda and the Malawi Congress Party. As a way of laying the foundation and background for this article, the researcher will present a brief analysis of Pastoral Letters issued as a response to critical issues globally, regionally and locally so as to appreciate the significance of such epistles. Globally, the Church has issued Pastoral Letters as a response to the social, political and economic situations affecting the lives of people. For instance, on 1 July 2016, the Church of England (Diocese in Europe) issued a Pastoral Letter responding to the concern over the United Kingdom's Referendum on EU membership. The Pastoral Letter (Pastoral Letter, Church of England 2016) indicated that:

'The UK's Referendum on EU membership is one of the most significant political events of our time, for British people and for Europeans more generally. For some it is seen as an opportunity, for many others of

us it has generated profound feelings of sadness, grief and shock. These feelings may exist within the membership of our chaplaincies and if so need to be recognised. We encourage you to talk to your clergy about what has happened, and to seek mutual support and understanding. We know that many with British connections in our diocese are fearful and uncertain about the future'. (pp. 1–2)

The JPIT (Joint Public Issues Team), which is an ecumenical body composed of major Churches in the United Kingdom (Baptist Church, Church of Scotland, Methodists and United Reformed Church), in response to the United Kingdom's referendum results, issued a Pastoral Letter stating that the voting patterns revealed differences within the British people. The Pastoral Letter further noted that the difference in voting patterns should not become the tools of division but should rather spur the people on to find common resolve and respect to overcome such divisions (Pastoral Letter, JPIT 2016).

In response to the abuse of children within the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Ireland, Pope Benedictus XVI issued a Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland in which he expressed his dismay and shock at the abuse of children by the Church and how the Church of Ireland dealt with them. The Pope stated (Pastoral Letter, Pope Benedict XVI 2010):

'I have been deeply disturbed by the information which has come to light regarding the abuse of children and vulnerable young people by members of the Church in Ireland, particularly by priests and religious personnel. I can only share in the dismay and the sense of betrayal that so many of you have experienced on learning of these sinful and criminal acts and the way Church authorities in Ireland dealt with them'.

In the United States, the Mississippi Valley Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) issued a Pastoral Letter to all the Churches in the Mississippi Presbytery agreeing that racism remains a current and on-going Pastoral issue, whereby the pursuit of biblical racial reconciliation was not merely a matter of acknowledging the wrongs of the past, but of endeavouring to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God (Pastoral Letter, PCA-Mississippi Presbytery 2016:1–2).

Regionally, the Church has been critical in issuing Pastoral Letters to communicate the message to its members. For instance, in Zimbabwe, the Church led by the Catholic and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (Pastoral Letter, Zimbabwe Council of Churches 2006) has released more than 50 Pastoral Letters. In addition, during Easter of 1983, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop Conference issued the Pastoral Letter entitled 'Reconciliation is still possible' over the death, murder, rape, pillaging and burning of thousands of people in Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South and part of Midlands by the fifth brigade (Pastoral Letter, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop Conference 1983:1–3) in what is popularly known as the Gukurahundi Massacre (Martin 2006:249). In June 2017, the Catholic Bishop issued a Pastoral Letter in order to prepare for the Zimbabwean 2018 National Election;

it called on the people to reject all forms of violence and instead register and vote in the 2018 General Elections (Pastoral Letter, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop Conference 1983 2018:1–4).

In Zambia, on 15 August 2012, the Council of Churches of Zambia (CCZ) issued a Pastoral Letter in which the government was called on to nullify the deportation order for the Catholic Priest, Father Viateur Banyangandora, of Lundazi (Pastoral Letter, Council of Churches of Zambia 2012). Consequently, on 18 July 2016, the Catholic Bishop reminded the Zambian nation that it is their duty to vote and elect new leaders in the country (Pastoral Letter Zambia Episcopal Conference 2016), and in their joint communiqué, the Zambian main Churches (CCZ, EFZ and ZEC) rebuked the dictatorship of the Edgar Lungu Government (Joint Pastoral Letter CCZ, EFZ, ZEC 2017).

In 1986, the South African Bishop Conference issued a Pastoral Letter on Christian hope in the struggle against apartheid. More recently, on 18 May 2017, the South African Council of Churches issued a Pastoral Letter to all council member congregations in which it released the Unburdening Panel Report concerning corruption and the capture of State entities by a powerful elite that is associated with President Zuma. Furthermore, on 4 October 2017, the South African Council of Churches called on the South Africa Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) to conduct a comprehensive professional enquiry on the Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) saga in connection with South African Revenue Services (SARS) and Gupta-owned companies (Pastoral Letter, South African Council of Churches 2017). On 21–22 January 2016, the executive council of the Uniting Reformed Church in the Southern Africa General Synod issued a Pastoral Letter in which they highlighted and condemned racism as sin (Pastoral Letter, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa 2016).

In Malawi, Pastoral Letters have been at the heart of the nation's politics since colonialism. For instance, in 1958, the Presbyterian Mission issued a Pastoral Letter in opposition to the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, which was instituted in 1953, in which the Church indicated that from its inception the federation was bitterly resented by the entire African population in Nyasaland (Ross 1996a:195). In 1960 and 1961, the Catholic Bishop issued Pastoral Letters which indicated that the Church supported the peoples' desire for freedom, prosperity and a creation of a great, happy and new nation (Pastoral Letter, ECM 2013:5). Soon after independence in 1964, the ministry of the Church in Malawi was effectively restricted to matters of personal morality and spirituality. Under the Banda and Malawi Congress Party (MCP) regime, the only social and political comment that was tolerated was lavishing praise on the policies of then President Banda, leaving the Church in total silence (Ross 1995b:57–58). However, on 08 March 1992, the silence was dramatically broken through the issuing of the Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishop entitled 'Living our Faith' (Emmanuel 2013:424;

Ross 1996a:203; Van Dijk 1998:172) with full support from the Presbyterian Church (Schoffeleers 2000:125). The revolutionary Pastoral Letter denounced the Banda regime of corruption, poverty, nepotism, regionalism, indiscipline, repression and human rights abuse (Ihonvber 1997:227; Newell 1994:12–14; Ross 1996a:205–206). Thus, both Catholics and Presbyterians have issued various Pastoral Letters addressing issues of national interest since the referendum days (1993) to present in the consolidation of democracy (Ross 1996a:217, 223).

This article, therefore, presents an assessment of the role of Pastoral Letters in influencing democratic processes in Malawi. This article contributes to a wider debate on the role of Pastoral Letters in the public square in consolidating democracy in Malawi. This is the only article which is governed and informed by the Pauline Pastoral Letters' conceptual framework with similarities in the issues, usage and delivery of the letter to the Church in modern-day democratic Malawi. Just as the Pauline Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus address vital challenges affecting the ministry of the Church and society during the Apostle Paul's days, the Pastoral Letters in Malawi address issues that affect the ministry of the Church today.

The main argument governing this article is that unless there is continuity in the issuing of Pastoral Letters by the Church in addressing specific challenges within a democracy, sustainability of democratic values will always be compromised and not realised. Every political dispensation has its own unique challenges that demand unique approaches to address them. The issuing of Pastoral Letters do not end with the attainment and realisation of democracy, but opportunities are present for the issuing of many more Pastoral Letters within the democratic dispensation in addressing critical issues affecting the Church and society.

Pauline Pastoral Letters' conceptual framework

Pastoral Letters have been issued and dispatched to communicate the gospel message throughout Christendom. The researcher defines a Pastoral Letter as an open letter written by the Church leadership Council to fellow clergy and congregants to encourage, rebuke and give general instructions on the management and governance of the Church within society. Pastoral Letters are written to communicate the Church leadership's position on certain critical issues pertaining to faith, doctrine and the Church's societal interaction. In some instances, Pastoral Letters are written by the Church to communicate their position on certain critical societal issues, criticise and advise government. Although in this article Paul's conceptual thought focuses on addressing the inner critical matters affecting the Church in Ephesus and Crete the scenario in this article, the author advances the notion that Pastoral Letters are not limited to addressing internal matters in the Church but may be used also to inform, critic and rebuke every kind of stakeholder

that deals with people who are created in the image of God, which in this case includes the state.

In terms of its originality, Guthrie (2009:19) and Easton (1947:1–3) agree that the title 'Pastoral Letter' was given by D.N. Berdot in the early part of the 18th century (1703), and was popularised by Paul Anton in 1726. Enslin (1963:34), Kelly (1963:2) and Kent (1982:19) add that Timothy and Titus, as young ministers, were like senior pastors and apostolic representatives in their respective churches in Ephesus and Crete. The researcher postulates that Paul's theoretical and thought processes that govern the applicability of the content of the Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus are a way of achieving the main goal of the letters within the larger Pauline theological framework.

The main Pauline Pastoral Letter conceptual argument is that unless the ideas and main factors behind the drafting and issuing of Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus are understood, the reason why the apostle saw it fit to have the two co-workers dispatched to Ephesus and Crete will not be known. Such remains the burning issues and desire geared to have all prevailing problems in the two missionary sites addressed. However, in dealing with Pauline Pastoral Letters, many scholars (Fee 1988; Harrison 1921; Metzger 1958; Moule 1965; Neumann 1990; Wilson 1979; Young 1994) have reduced the Pauline Pastoral Letters discourse into focusing on the authenticity of the letters with little attention to the main reason behind the writing of the letters (Porter 1995:106). This section of the article focuses on the specific issues that persuaded the Apostle Paul to have Timothy and Titus sent to Ephesus and Crete. These are issues that underpin the concept of Pastoral Letters, which will be used to assess the Pastoral Letters' impact within Malawi's democracy.

In terms of authorship of the letters, some argue against Paul's ownership of the letter. The researcher is of the view that the Apostle Paul is the legitimate author of the letters to both Timothy and Titus, having written I Timothy and Titus in 62 AD–63 AD after his release from Roman imprisonment, while staying in Macedonia and writing II Timothy while in the Roman prison in 67 AD during the second arrest (De Welt 1961:15–16). However, Guthrie (1995:607–649) tentatively states that the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles has come under serious attack by modern liberal scholars who maintain that they are pseudepigraphal and that they are written by a Paulinist, a follower of Paul who wrote in the name of the great apostle sometime after his death. The letters have traditionally been accepted as authentic and written by the Apostle Paul (De Welt 1961:13; Stephen 1985:340–345). Johnson (1996:212–213) says that while Titus is addressed to a Church that was recently established in Crete, Timothy focuses on issues surrounding the Church in Ephesus, which had existed for a number of years. Barclay (1975:1–2) states that Tertullian shares the view that Paul wrote 'two letters to Timothy and one to Titus' which were composed concerning the state of the Church. The letter of

Paul to Timothy is seen to have been patronised by Theophilus of Antioch, Tertullian, Muratorian Canon and Clement of Alexandria (Kent 1982:30–32; Roberts & Donaldson 1981:34), Polycarp (Holmes 2005:226), Origen (Heine 2000:117–133) and Ignatius (Foster 2005:185).

Critical to Pauline Letters' conceptual framework is responding to why the apostle wrote the letters and gave out instructions to Timothy and Titus over the churches in Ephesus and Crete. The letters deal with three dominant Pastoral challenges that needed urgent attention, which include sound doctrine (I Tm 6:3), Church leadership and ethics (I Tm 3:14), and dealing with false teachers (I Tm 1:3–4, 19–20, 4:1–8, 6:3–5). According to Simpson (1954:94, 97–100) and De Welt (1961:14, 20–21), the letters were written as a way of addressing critical existing issues in Ephesus and Crete where Timothy and Titus were assigned to minister. De Welt (1961:21) comments that the letters were there to prepare both of them to do effective work for Christ in Ephesus and Crete. For Wei Hu (2013:193), they were written to address various issues, particularly false teaching, in the early Church, and to offer instructions and encouragement to the believers of this day. De Welt (1961:21) asserts that the letters were not only personal but also official because of the formal salutation used and because they were expected to be read in the churches in Ephesus and Crete. Simpson (1954:24) adds that inasmuch as the letters seem to address private matters between Paul and the two co-workers, Paul's inscription of his official title reveals the authoritative nature of his message. Though addressed to Timothy and Titus, they contain intimations of a wider reference, which makes the letters public rather than private.

Fee (1985:141) agrees that the letters are seen as a response to the encroachment of alien ideas in some Pauline Churches with a view to setting the Churches in order as a proper antidote to heresy and to give instruction on Church order in light of Paul's advanced age and impending death. Fee (1985:141), Wei Hu (2013:194) and Easton (1947:1) support the notion that the dominant goal of the letters was to command certain people not to teach false doctrine and to encourage and strengthen the small house Churches to lay their foundation on the gospel of Christ, and to enlighten individual members in these Churches on daily Christian life, which reflects the very practical aspect of Paul's writings.

Pastoral Letters' Revolution and the Church in a public square in Malawi

In Malawi's ecclesiological thought, the position of Pastoral Letters in Church advocacy dates back to precolonialism, colonialism and democracy. The role of the Church was central in bringing an end to the three-decade dictatorship of Dr Banda and forging towards the birth of multiparty democracy in Malawi (Newell 1995; Nzunda & Ross 1995; Ross 1996b; Schoffeleer 1999). Within the framework of the designing and issuing of Pastoral Letters, the researcher has

established two major categories in the dispatching and communicating of Pastoral messages for the total liberation of the voiceless poor. These two categories include the individual constructive and institutional liberative Pastoral Letters. The researcher defines individual constructive Pastoral Letters as the kind of Pastoral communication by individual clergy to congregants or fellow clergy, addressing the internal matters of faith and Church growth, whereas institutional liberative Pastoral Letters refer to Pastoral communiqué by the institutional Church responding to issues of governance (poverty, corruption, human rights, abortion, etc.) on behalf of the congregants in which the Church states its position and maps a way forward. Pauline–Timothean and Titusian constructs are part of the individual constructive Pastoral Letter, because they by and large deal with internal matters of faith and Church management, while the majority of Pastoral Letters issued in Malawi are institutional liberative Pastoral Letters, dealing with how the Church handles such issues in a public square.

Individual constructive and institutional liberative Pastoral voices, mainly from the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches, represent the poor and voiceless. The individual constructive Pastoral voice dates back to precolonialism in support of the local people who included the Rev Joseph Booth's voice through the most famous 'Africa for the African of 1897' where he condemns colonial governments for taking land away from the African people (Ross 1996a:181–191). Also, Yesaya Zerenji Mwase's letter of 1933 to the Livingstonia Mission states that it was because of the mission's double standards that he broke away to create his own independent Church (Ross 1996a:169–178). Pastoral efforts were also seen through Rev Sangaya who openly preached against the oppressive rule of Dr Banda (Ross 1996b:115–117); Rev Saindi Chiphangwi, who in 1976 warned Malawians of personality cult (Ross 1996b:118–120); Rev Kaleso (Lwanda 1993:264–265); Rev Ncozana (Ross 1996b:123) and Bishop Kalilombe (Lwanda 1993:265), who questioned the moral and political climate in Malawi.

The institutional liberative Pastoral voice has been the transformative voice emanating from the Church in the emancipation of the hopeless, poor and voiceless towards their political, social and economic transformation. This transformative journey was championed by the Catholics and Presbyterians. To begin with, Presbyterians who operated within the Church of Central African Presbyterian Synod (CCAP) were the first to express their displeasure against the colonial government in 1958, and through the CCAP Blantyre Synod, a communiqué against the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was issued (Ross 1996a:195, 1997:385–386; Schoffeleers 1999:182). According to Ross (1996a:196–197), the federation imposed against the will of the majority of people produced a deep and widespread feeling of unrest, which was like a poison amongst the people, destroying race and relations and leaving bitterness and hate where trust and love prevailed before. Ross (1996a) also indicated:

The Synod continued [...] Synod therefore feels it urgently necessary to say that it is unanimously opposed to Federation as it has been seen in practice over these years. We see no hope of a peaceful and righteous future for all the people of this land under the present form of Federal Government. (pp. 196–200)

From 1959 to 1991, there were no Pastoral Letters issued by the Presbyterian Church until 1992, when, through the Catholic's revolutionary Pastoral Letter, help to dismantle the three decades of Banda's dictatorship and Malawi Congress Party rule was offered (Ross 1995a:57–58; Schoffeleers 1999:125–126). The Presbyterians took the first step to support the Pastoral Letter and played a critical role in the formation of the Public Affairs Committee to oversee political transitions leading to the referendum and the first ever multiparty general election (Moyo 1995:125–130). Their first Pastoral Letter came through the CCAP Blantyre Synod, who in 1993 issued a Pastoral communiqué to advise its faithful on how to vote during the referendum (Ross 1996a:217–222). Seven years into democracy, when hopes and aspirations of the people were not being met, the Presbyterian mother body (CCAP General Assembly) issued Pastoral Letters against the United Democratic Front (UDF) government's plan to change the constitution so as to give the incumbent President a third term in office (Pastoral Letter, CCAP General Synod 2001b:1–10). In addition, the CCAP Nkhoma Synod issued a Pastoral Letter in 2012 against government's general poor governance and human rights abuse (Van Dijk 1998:172). The Nkhoma Synod's Pastoral Letters were received with mixed feelings within the body of the Church because this was the same Synod that was in total support of the MCP and Dr Banda's rule, and was also expelled from the Malawi Council of Churches for failing to be in solidarity with the entire Malawi Church (Ross 1995c:40–41) in the fight for multiparty democracy. Ross (1996c:47) says that in 1992, while other Church leaders were making their risky and costly prophetic social witness, Nkhoma Synod acted in solidarity with the oppressive MCP and Banda regime, which made other Churches felt betrayed and hence later in 1992 have it suspended from membership of the Malawi Council of Churches. Even so, the Synod continued to work hand in hand with MCP to resist the forces of political change in that they told the people that the Banda regime was from God. Thus, the Synod broke its silence, amongst others, in 2012 and it issued one of its most profound Pastoral Letters calling government to improve on general poor governance, which included corruption, poor economy, political violence, moral and ethical issues (CCAP Nkhoma Synod 2012:1-1-6).

As for the Catholics, though their contribution to the process of democratisation from 1960 to 1992, is generally regarded by many observers as insignificant (Chakanza 1995:59); the popular view is that it was the Catholic Church that broke the Church's long silence in social political engagement in Malawi through the Lenten Pastoral Letter, 'Living our Faith', which was issued on 8 March 1992 (Ross 1995c:32; Schoffeleers 1999:125, 181). It was from the Catholic Church's Pastoral Letters of 31 October 1960 and 20 March 1961 where the bishops provided a response over the attacks by the MCP for

the Church's closeness to the Christian Democratic Party and outlining principles, which guided people towards the building of a happy nation (Pastoral Letter, ECM 1961:3). However, for three decades, the Church remained silent in a state of fear during the dictatorial rule of Dr Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (Mitchell 2002:5–6; Newell 1995:250) until, in 1992, it issued its Pastoral voice for the liberation of the nation (Chakanza 1995:70–71; Ihonybere 1997:227; Newell 1995:248). The Pastoral Letter issued in 1992 was the very turning point of the nation after three decades of the Church's silence in a public square (Ross 1997:387). In 1993, the Church issued yet another Pastoral Letter, 'Choosing Our Future', to educate the people about how they needed to vote during the referendum (Ross 1996a:196–223).

On 02 March 2013, the bishops issued another Pastoral Letter in which they spoke against homosexuality, abortion and artificial birth control measures (Pastoral Letter ECM 2013: 1–4), and on 1 December 2013, they released another one following the revelation of massive looting of public resources dubbed as Cash Gate where the bishops proposed a critical reflection on the impact of looting to national development and called for appropriate, proportionate and timely action (Pastoral Letter, ECM 2013:1–3). The bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on 10 March 2014 entitled 'Strengthening the Vision of Our Destiny–Preparing for 2014 Tripartite Elections' in which they invited all Catholics to make the best of the Tripartite Elections as they provided a golden opportunity to rediscover their national identity (Pastoral Letter, ECM 2013:10–19). In the Pastoral Letter issued a year later on 13 March 2016, government was called on to deal with regionalism, nepotism and insecurity (Pastoral Letter ECM 2016:1–20).

Towards assessing the impact of Pastoral Letters in a democracy

The assessment of the impact of Pastoral Letters focuses on the nature of the letters, the situation that prompted and forced Apostle Paul to issue the Pastoral communiqué, the reaction of various stakeholders towards the Pastoral Letters, the consistence in the production and release of Pastoral Letters, as well as the theological reflection and quality of the letters and their impact. To begin with, what kind of Pastoral Letters has the Church been issuing in Malawi? And what kind of Pastoral Letter did Paul send to Timothy and Titus? An assessment of the nature of Pastoral Letters issued by the Apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus revealed that Paul's Pastoral Letters have been of individual, constructive pastoral voice dealing with specific internal matters of Church growth, faith, sound doctrine and leadership management (1 Tm 3:1–7), whereas the Pastoral Letters issued in Malawi have been institutional liberative Pastoral Letters with a focus on addressing external challenges affecting the Church and State governance, including corruption, poverty, abortion, homosexuality, nepotism, regionalism and many forms of poor governance issues, with little attention given to issues of faith and Christian growth (Pastoral Letter,

CCAP General Synod 2001b; Pastoral Letter CCAP Nkhoma Synod 2012; Pastoral Letter ECM 1961, 2013, 2016).

An assessment of what actually forced Apostle Paul to issue such a Pastoral message to Timothy and Titus shows that there were critical issues in the Churches at Ephesus and Crete. On the contrary, in Malawi, issues affecting the governance of the state for many years forced the Church to issue Pastoral Letters. For instance, the Church has released Pastoral Letters in response to corruption, nepotism and regionalism, to mention but a few (Pastoral Letter, CCAP General Synod 2001b). For Presbyterians, the issuing of Pastoral Letters has been caused by the decay of the nation's economy, politics and social lives of the people; the same is true for the Catholics, in addition to issuing Pastoral Letters every year during Lent in March, during Easter (Newell 1994:10).

There have been three major responses to the issuing of Pastoral Letters: from government, from Malawians and from international agencies. From government, the first reaction on the 1992 Pastoral Letters was to declare them seditious and illegal, which led to the immediate arrest of hundreds of people (African Confidential 1992; Newell 1994:14; Schoffeleers 1999:126) and had seven bishops summoned at Kanjedza Police Station for interrogation, which lasted 8 hours (Africa Research Bulletin 1992; Schoffeleers 1999:127). As a result, the letter brought the type of freedom where citizens began to express themselves through open strikes and defiance against the regime (Newell 1994:21, 23–24). The other response from government was aligning the Pastoral Letter critic to the voice of the opposition.

In terms of the consistence in the production and release of Pastoral Letters, Catholics and Presbyterians have so far been the only Churches able to craft and release Pastoral documents to respond to national issues. The researcher is of the view that the Catholic Church has the system and capacity to sustain the issuing of Pastoral Letters, which is part of their annual Lent tradition (Newell 1994:12). For Presbyterians, consistence depends on when the Church leadership decides to respond to specific societal issues, which means that if there is no serious issue warranting the Pastoral voice, then it may take long before a Pastoral response is crafted.

Theological reflection and quality assessment of the Pastoral Letters shows that Catholic Pastoral Letters have theological focus with scriptural text, while for Presbyterians, Pastoral Letters are composed of lists of detailed issues within the state to be addressed – though with weak theological reflection (Mbaya 2014:251). For instance, in the Presbyterian General Pastoral letter of 2001 entitled 'Some worrisome trends which undermine the nurturing of our young democratic culture', there are only two verses (Neh 5:1–7; Is 32:1–5) with a huge focus on stopping a constitutional amendment for a third term for Bakili Muluzi (Pastoral Letter, CCAP General Synod Pastoral Letter 2001b:1–11).

Even the Nkhoma Presbyterian Synod's Pastoral Letter of 2 April 2012 contained three scriptures (Mt 5:13–16, Jer 29:7, Jn 8:12) with no theological reflection on issues as it sounded like litany of prayers, exhortations to government and lacking sting (Mbaya 2014:258). However, Pastoral Letters from the Catholic Church are written from years of experience and tradition, so that they have a theological direction with sound scriptural backing on all issues addressed (Mbaya 2014:259).

Regarding the impact of Pastoral Letters, Newell (1994:13) states that they have been dramatic and remained a dominant feature within democratic discourse for Malawi because they help create a conducive atmosphere for the birth and sustainability of political and governance institutions within a democratic Malawi (Newell 1994:31–32).

Towards a better execution of the Pastoral Letter for the sustenance of democratic values in Malawi

From the Pastoral Letters of the 1950s, to the letters of 1992 that helped dismantle the three decades of dictatorship in Malawi, to the many Pastoral Letters that continue to flood Malawian political terrain in a democratic dispensation, the surprising thing has been that even though the Church had made such efforts, little change has been realised. The same problems of poor governance, regionalism, nepotism, corruption and poverty, which the earliest letters addressed, still exist two decades into democracy. What has been the problem? Have Pastoral Letters achieved the intended purpose? Have they managed to effectively help address the challenges Malawi face? Below is a presentation of what Pastoral Letters ought to be so as to help maintain the political momentum in Malawi.

Pastoral Letters must be crafted and executed scripturally and theologically

Unlike Pastoral Letters from the Catholics, Pastoral communiqué from Presbyterians tend to have a weak theological content and lack scriptural support on critical issues raised (Pastoral Letter, CCAP Blantyre Synod 1993; Pastoral Letter, CCAP General Assembly 2001a; Pastoral Letter, CCAP Nkhoma Synod 2012; Pastoral Letter ECM 1992; Pastoral Letter ECM 2014, 2016). A look at Paul's Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus shows that the letters had sound theology, which must embody the crafting and execution of Pastoral Letters in the Church today. The absence of a theological reflection and scriptural support on issues addressed in Pastoral Letters makes the Pastoral Letter weak and turns it into a sociopolitical statement. It would be the Church leading through their sociopolitical statement and not a Pastoral Letter because it is the scriptural backing and theological reflection on issues addressed that distinguishes the Pastoral Letter from other documents. The theology and scriptural content governing the crafting and execution of the letter defines how far it is able to reach and effectively address challenges facing society.

Pastoral Letters must prioritise heart transformation, faith and spiritual growth

Matters of heart transformation, faith and spiritual growth need to be made a priority when it comes to the crafting and execution of Pastoral Letters. The Church has focused on addressing societal issues that affect state governance at the expense of internal matters of the heart, faith and spiritual growth. Even though in some circumstances where the Pastoral Letter contains rich words of spiritual exaltation, the emphasis has always been the specific societal issues that are mentioned and publicised. For instance, inasmuch as the 1992 famous Pastoral Letter highly talked of the doctrine of God and creation (Ross 1996a:204–205) and Christian participation in a public square (Ross 1996a:211–214), the publicised material had been narrowed to oppression, freedom and human rights. It thus seems to the researcher that in the case of Malawi, the public tends to choose the part of the content to publicise and many times the spiritual part is put aside. In the 1958 and 2001 Pastoral Letters of the Presbyterians, anti-federation and the anti-third-term bill were the key publicised issues (Pastoral Letter, CCAP Blantyre Synod 1958; Pastoral Letter, CCAP General Assembly 2001a), just like the Catholics had anti-abortion and anti-gay sentiment in their Pastoral communiqué of 2014 and 2016 (Pastoral Letter, ECM 2014, 2016). The Church must design Pastoral Letters that have something to do with addressing the inner problems of people in society so as to have transformed people who would be of great benefit to societal reformation.

Pastoral Letters must have a specific audience for specific issues

Traditionally, the crafting of Pastoral Letters reveals that there has been a general approach to the drafting and execution of Pastoral Letters where Pastoral documents are compressed covering multiple and assorted issues affecting the Church and society. Because of this general approach, Pastoral Letters tend to have weak content on specific issues and some tend to have no sound theological touch on the issues. For instance, the Church must craft Pastoral Letters that are specific and address specific issues with in-depth details for a specific audience such as Church membership, general audience, religious and political leaders, as well as administrators and management. For instance, a single Pastoral Letter released contained assorted issues such as politics, health, education, economy, regionalism, nepotism and tribalism.

Pastoral Letters must not be the voice of opposition

The critical dilemma with Pastoral Letters has been that those in government look at Pastoral messages as being part of the voice of the opposition, whereas those in opposition look at the Pastoral Letter's message as targeting those in government. This scenario is like this because architects and crafters of Pastoral Letters have, for years, focused on key areas that government is failing to deliver on; no or little

attention has been given concerning the weakness of those in opposition. This has led government and those in authority not to take the content of Pastoral Letters seriously as both the Pastoral Letters and opposition tend to have the common language. Therefore, the researcher submits that for Pastoral Letters to be more effective, they must address the weakness of both those in government and the opposition in equal measure so that both camps can add value in the development of the country. This is bearing in mind that the opposition is a government in waiting; hence, they have an equal role to play in providing checks and balances in state management.

Pastoral Letters must be consistent – in season and out of season

Critical to Pastoral Letters is that they must be consistent in the issuing of such to various stakeholders, in season and out of season. Of great concern has been that some Church leaders have been connected to political parties, undermining and compromising their pastoral advocacy in a public square. For instance, during the fight for democracy, the Presbyterian CCAP Nkhoma Synod aligned itself with the then ruling MCP and Dr Banda (Newell 1994:30) and when MCP lost power in 1994, they began to issue Pastoral Letters against the new government. Would the Synod have continued to issue Pastoral Letters if MCP was still in power, or would they have reverted to their old status of aligning the Church with the party? On the same note, the southern-based CCAP Blantyre Synod leadership is currently (2017) allegedly reported to have aligned the Synod with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in that the Church leadership is not able to raise its prophetic voice within the current political, social and economic challenges the nation faces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article has looked into the role of Pastoral Letters in the consolidation of democracy in a public square and with special focus on the application of the Pauline Pastoral Letters theoretical framework. The article has argued that even though many of the Pastoral Letters in modern political and economic dispensation in Malawi have been issued through institutions and not individual approach, there is a need to have some individual prophetic voice in a public square rebuking and critiquing both the Church and State. The article has also looked into the quality of Pastoral Letters – unless the content is theological and scriptural, the Pastoral Letters issued are likely to be just social advocacy documents. Therefore, those responsible in the drafting and execution of Pastoral documents need to consider these two as the heart of any Pastoral Letter. In addition, in as much as citizenry and congregants appreciate the space Pastoral Letters fill in the public space within Malawian society, these Pastoral Letters must equally be crafted to address not only issues affecting citizenry within the state but also the Church. Here the focus has to be dealing with internal matters that affect congregants within the Church.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the following stakeholders for their support in the writing of this article: NWU-Vaal Library, UP-Library, Government of Malawi, CCAP Livingstone Synod, Catholic Church Secretariat-Malawi, CCAP Blantyre Synod and CCAP Nkhoma Synod.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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