

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE AGE

Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age

PART IV

INSTITUTIONS, POWER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE MANAGED FUTURE

CHAPTER 19

Political Religion, Human Rights, Ideological Justice, and Global Pressure

Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

Open Christian University | Center for Faith and Work

[ORCID 0000-0001-8650-1444](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8650-1444) | ssangwa@openchristian.education

Edited by Prof. Dr. Placide Mutabazi

First Open Christian Press edition, 2026

Open Christian Press, an Open Christian University imprint

books.openchristian.education

CHAPTER PUBLICATION METADATA

Abstract

This chapter examines political religion as the conversion of delegated public authority into a rival moral and salvific jurisdiction. Building upon the preceding analysis of secular catechesis, it argues that schools, media, workplaces, and cultural institutions first form assumptions about truth, identity, justice, and freedom, after which governments, courts, political movements, donors, corporations, and international organisations translate those assumptions into law, policy, funding conditions, professional standards, and public conformity. Through sustained exposition of [Psalm 146:1-10](#), [Isaiah 10:1-4](#), [Micah 6:6-8](#), [Romans 13:1-7](#), [Revelation 13:1-10](#), and related passages, the chapter presents government as a genuine but limited ordinance of God, distinguishes ordinary submission from idolatrous obedience, and explains when resistance becomes necessary. It evaluates progressive political messianism, Marxist and structural accounts of injustice, identity politics, collective guilt, conservative civil religion, Christian nationalism, strong-leader politics, human-rights development, judicial interpretation, democracy, global governance, aid conditionality, African sovereignty, environmental stewardship, religious liberty, and the political captivity of churches. The strongest arguments for public reason, universal rights, structural reform, national solidarity, donor responsibility, international coordination, and environmental urgency are represented fairly before being answered biblically, historically, philosophically, and evidentially. The chapter rejects both reactionary suspicion and institutional idolatry, distinguishing documented influence from unsupported conspiracy. It concludes with a constructive Christian public ethic of truth, justice, rights joined to duties, accountable authority, conscience, civic service, principled resistance, protection of the vulnerable, and hope in the returning Christ. In the last second before midnight, the church must honour rulers without worshipping power and serve society without surrendering the gospel.

Keywords

political religion; human rights; ideological justice; Christian nationalism; global governance; religious liberty; rapture readiness

Publication details

Book: The Gospel According To The Age: Exposing Modern Deceptions, Counterfeit Christianity, and the Church's Captivity to the Spirit of the Age

Chapter: Chapter 19: Political Religion, Human Rights, Ideological Justice, and Global Pressure

Author: Prof. Sixbert SANGWA

Book editor: Prof. Dr. Placide Mutabazi

Publisher: Open Christian Press, an Open Christian University imprint

Edition: First edition

Publication year: 2026

Language: English

Suggested citation

Sangwa, S. (2026). Political religion, human rights, ideological justice, and global pressure. In P. Mutabazi (Ed.), The Gospel according to the age: Exposing modern deceptions, counterfeit Christianity, and the church's captivity to the spirit of the age (Chapter 19). Open Christian Press.

Rights and Scripture notice

Copyright © 2026 Sixbert Sangwa. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the publisher, except as permitted by applicable copyright law. Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Publisher: books.openchristian.education | editor@openchristian.education

When the Crown Forgets It Was Borrowed

A crown can rest lawfully upon a human head only because it is borrowed. The ruler did not create the people, invent conscience, establish truth, or give the breath by which citizens speak. The judge did not make justice. The legislature did not make good and evil. The nation did not give humanity its image. Political authority may command taxes, punish crime, administer courts, defend borders, build roads, protect worship, and organise common life. It may not sit where God sits.

Yet borrowed crowns have a recurring temptation. They begin as instruments and learn to speak as origins. The state that was appointed to restrain evil begins to define evil. The court that was commissioned to judge disputes begins to judge creation. The movement that arose to correct injustice begins to distribute innocence and guilt by group identity. The nation that received a history begins to treat itself as sacred. The international institution that coordinates cooperation begins to announce a moral future to which every people must conform. The political leader who was elected or appointed as a servant becomes a protector in whom citizens place the hope once reserved for providence.

The ballot box becomes an altar. The manifesto becomes a creed. The flag becomes a vestment. The activist becomes a priest of public innocence. The courtroom becomes a sanctuary in which new meanings of personhood are pronounced. The state promises resurrection through administration, development, redistribution, security, recognition, or control. It cannot raise the dead, but it asks for the allegiance due to the One who can.

Chapter 18 showed how schools, universities, media, entertainment, advertising, pornography, workplaces, and cultural institutions form the moral imagination. They teach societies what counts as knowledge, whose pain deserves recognition, which identities require affirmation, what freedom means, and which futures appear inevitable. That catechesis does not remain private. Ideas formed in classrooms and screens enter professional codes, funding conditions, judicial reasoning, electoral platforms, corporate standards, development programmes, and international policy. The school teaches the grammar. The screen gives it emotional force. The workplace rewards its performance. Political power then writes the lesson into public order.

The issue is not that every law, human-rights claim, development programme, court, donor, civil servant, or international organisation is hostile to God. Such a claim would be historically false, pastorally reckless, and intellectually lazy. Government is a divine ordinance. Law can protect the innocent. Rights language has helped expose slavery, torture, arbitrary imprisonment, persecution, racial domination, and violence against the weak. International cooperation can prevent disease, coordinate humanitarian relief, protect refugees, reduce conflict, and strengthen lawful institutions. Development can expand access to clean water, medicine, education, transport, energy, and dignified work. A Christian critique that cannot acknowledge these goods has already surrendered truth to outrage.

The danger begins when a genuine good is required to bear the weight of salvation. Government becomes political religion when it claims authority to define humanity, morality, guilt, righteousness, belonging, hope, and the future independently of the Creator. Human rights become ideological when dignity is detached from the image of God and rights are expanded into autonomous claims without corresponding duties, moral limits, or accountability. Justice becomes counterfeit when it no longer means impartial conformity to what is right, but conformity to the approved interpretation of history, identity, power, and harm. International cooperation becomes ideological globalism when coordination for common goods is converted into moral centralisation, conditional access, and pressure to receive contested anthropologies as universal truth.

This chapter therefore refuses two easy refuges. The first is political idolatry, which expects salvation from elections, revolutions, constitutions, courts, markets, nations, charismatic rulers, or global institutions. The second is political irresponsibility, which withdraws from public duty, despises lawful authority, circulates unverified accusations, or treats every policy disagreement as persecution. The biblical path is narrower. It honours government without worshipping it, pursues justice without creating a rival gospel, protects rights without enthroning desire, cooperates across borders without surrendering conscience, resists evil without becoming evil, and remembers that every ruler will kneel before Jesus Christ.

This argument develops convictions already present in the author's work. Sangwa (2024a) affirmed that Christians may serve in public office and use lawful rights while warning that power, status, and political ambition can corrupt discipleship. Sangwa (2024b) distinguished the opportunities of cross-border cooperation from the spiritual danger of centralised human power, while Sangwa (2025a) located political conflict within the wider biblical drama of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation rather than within a single ideological story. Sangwa (2025b) examined the tension between public accountability and religious liberty in Rwanda. Sangwa (2025c) warned that Christian nationalism can recode discipleship into a national moral project and weaken the church's prophetic independence. Sangwa (2026a) described the managed public square in which faith may be tolerated privately while Christian conviction is pressured to disappear from public reasoning. The present chapter gathers and extends those arguments. Its concern is not whether Christians should care about politics. It is whether politics has become a rival account of creation, fall, sin, salvation, church, judgment, and hope.

The hour gives the question unusual weight. Scripture warns that political power can become beastly, demand worship, persecute the saints, and organise allegiance against God ([Revelation 13:1-10](#)). Yet Scripture does not permit the church to label every disliked government, treaty, technology, or international initiative the beast. Prophetic sobriety is not prophetic sleep. It is the refusal to invent certainty where God has not given it. In the last second before midnight, the Bride must be neither politically seduced nor conspiratorially intoxicated. She must be awake, truthful, holy, compassionate, and ready.

The Words Must Be Ordered Before Power Is Judged

Political language is dangerous when one word carries several incompatible meanings. Government refers broadly to institutions and persons authorised to make, administer, and enforce public decisions. The state is the continuing legal and institutional order that claims jurisdiction over a territory and population. A government may change while the state continues. A nation is a historical community marked by some combination of memory, culture, language, ancestry, territory, law, and shared political imagination. A state may contain several nations, and a nation may exist across several states.

Sovereignty ordinarily names final political authority within a jurisdiction. In constitutional systems, sovereignty may be distributed through institutions, constrained by law, and justified through popular consent. Biblically, no state possesses absolute sovereignty. God alone is sovereign in the unqualified sense. Every human authority is received, bounded, accountable, and temporary.

Democracy is a family of arrangements through which citizens participate in public rule, directly or through representatives. It normally includes elections, political competition, participation, and accountability. A republic is a polity in which public office is not the private possession of a monarch and is ordinarily exercised through law and representatives. A monarchy locates the headship of the state in a king or queen, often by inheritance, though monarchies vary from absolute to constitutional. Scripture records monarchies, empires, judges, councils, local authorities, and imperial administration. It does not canonise one modern constitutional form as the kingdom of God.

Constitutionalism subjects political power to fundamental law, divided authority, procedures, and enforceable limits. The rule of law means that public power is exercised through known, general, and fairly administered norms rather than the arbitrary will of rulers. Judicial review allows courts to assess whether laws or official actions conform to superior law. These mechanisms may restrain tyranny, but none makes judges morally infallible. A constitution may protect injustice. A lawful procedure may produce an evil result. Legality is evidence of public authorisation, not proof of righteousness.

Civil religion is the use of religious symbols, narratives, rituals, sacred memory, and transcendent language to give a political community moral unity. It may include prayers at national ceremonies, memorials, founding myths, public martyrs, sacred documents, and claims of providential destiny. Bellah (1967/2005) used the term to describe a public religious dimension in American life that was not identical to any church. Civil religion becomes idolatrous when the nation occupies covenantal space, its wars become redemptive, its leaders become anointed, or criticism of the state is treated as betrayal of God.

Political theology examines how claims about God, authority, law, sovereignty, community, and history shape political order. Political religion describes political movements or regimes that acquire religious functions. Gentile (2006) analysed the sacralisation of the nation, state, race, class, party, or leader through myths, rituals, commandments, martyrs, and promises of regeneration. The analogy must be handled carefully. A parliament is not literally a church because it has ceremony, and a constitution is not literally Scripture because citizens honour it. The analogy becomes morally significant when political power claims ultimate allegiance and offers a comprehensive account of guilt, purification, redemption, and destiny.

Political messianism is the investment of saving expectation in political agency. It appears when a leader promises national rebirth, a revolution promises a new humanity, a market promises universal flourishing, a bureaucracy promises a managed end to suffering, or a rights regime promises moral peace once every institution has adopted the approved anthropology. Political action can relieve suffering. It cannot regenerate the heart.

Human dignity is the intrinsic worth of the human person. Christian theology grounds it in creation in God's image ([Genesis 1:26-28](#)), not in intelligence, productivity, autonomy, sexuality, citizenship, health, wantedness, or recognition. Human rights are justified claims to protection, liberty, participation, or provision that persons possess because of their humanity or lawful social standing. Civil rights concern protections and participation within a political order. Religious liberty protects belief, worship, practice, witness, association, and institutional life. Freedom of conscience protects the person from coercion to profess, deny, or perform what conscience forbids, while not making conscience itself infallible.

Equality may mean equal dignity, equal protection, equal standing before law, equal opportunity, or equal treatment in relevantly similar circumstances. Equity is often used for fairness attentive to different conditions, barriers, or needs. Neither word interprets itself. Equal dignity does not mean identical function, capacity, outcome, relationship, or moral claim. Equity can correct unequal burdens, but it can also become a discretionary label by which institutions distribute advantage according to ideological categories.

Justice is the faithful giving to persons and communities what is rightfully due under God's moral order. It includes impartial judgment, truth, protection of the innocent, punishment of wrongdoing, restitution, mercy, covenant faithfulness, and care for the vulnerable. Biblical justice is not exhausted by criminal punishment or material distribution. It judges rulers, merchants, families, courts, and worship. Ideological justice begins with a theory of history or identity that assigns moral meaning before evidence is heard. It may treat a group as presumptively guilty, another as presumptively innocent, and disagreement as proof of oppression.

Structural injustice refers to harms produced or sustained through interacting institutions, norms, incentives, histories, and ordinary actions, even when no single actor intended the complete outcome. Young (2011) rightly insisted that injustice can exceed individual misconduct. A housing system, labour market, school network, policing practice, or inheritance pattern may reproduce unequal burdens through dispersed processes. The category is useful when it does not erase personal agency, evidence, moral distinction, or the possibility that structures can burden different people in different ways.

Identity politics organises political claims around shared characteristics and experiences such as race, sex, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, or sexuality. Intersectionality originally named the way legal and political frameworks can overlook persons who experience overlapping forms of disadvantage. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) analysis arose from concrete failures to recognise the situation of Black women within categories that treated race and sex separately. The concept becomes more totalising when every relationship is interpreted through intersecting systems of power and group position becomes a primary source of moral authority.

Nationalism gives the nation heightened political and moral significance. Patriotism is grateful attachment, service, responsibility, and affection toward one's country. Nationalism becomes idolatrous when national interest overrides truth, the nation is imagined as uniquely righteous, outsiders are dehumanised, ethnic descent defines political worth, or the church's mission is subordinated to national destiny. Christian nationalism combines Christian symbols, narratives, or identity with a political project that treats the nation as specially authorised to embody or defend Christianity. The term should not be used to condemn every Christian who seeks laws consistent with moral conviction. It applies most precisely where national belonging and Christian faith are fused into a sacral political identity (Gorski & Perry, 2022; Whitehead & Perry, 2020).

Globalisation refers to the intensification of cross-border flows of trade, finance, information, people, culture, law, and institutional influence. International cooperation is coordinated action among states and organisations for shared purposes. Global governance is the network of treaties, institutions, standards, courts, agencies, corporations, donors, expert bodies, and informal arrangements through which transnational problems are managed. Ideological globalism is not simply cooperation across borders. It is the attempt to normalise a comprehensive moral or anthropological vision through transnational institutions while weakening meaningful national, local, familial, religious, or democratic resistance.

Donor conditionality links funding, debt relief, market access, or partnership to specified policy actions or institutional standards. Policy diffusion describes the spread of laws and practices through learning, imitation, professional networks, advocacy, competition, and conditional incentives. Soft power shapes preferences through attraction, legitimacy, expertise, prestige, education, funding, and cultural influence rather than direct coercion. None of these mechanisms proves a secret central plan. They describe ordinary pathways through which ideas acquire institutional reach.

These distinctions matter because sloppy categories create false accusations. A Christian who calls every transnational agreement globalism will be unable to recognise lawful cooperation. A rights advocate who calls every moral disagreement discrimination will be unable to protect conscience. A nationalist who calls every critic an enemy will be unable to repent. A progressive who calls every unequal outcome oppression will be unable to distinguish injustice from difference, tragedy, responsibility, and providence. Truth begins by refusing verbal shortcuts.

Government Under God: Servant, Not Saviour

The biblical doctrine of government begins neither with the divine right of rulers nor with the autonomous will of the people. It begins with God. He creates humanity, establishes moral order, judges violence, disperses Babel, raises and removes kings, commands justice, hears the oppressed, and announces a kingdom that will outlast every empire. Political authority is real because God is sovereign. It is limited for the same reason.

After the flood, God addresses the violence that had filled the earth and declares the gravity of shedding human blood because humanity bears His image ([Genesis 9:5-6](#)). The text does not provide a complete constitution, but it establishes that public justice is not a human invention. The protection of life is grounded in the Creator's claim upon the person. Government therefore does not create the worth it protects.

Moses commands Israel's judges to hear cases impartially, not favour the powerful, and refuse intimidation because judgment belongs to God ([Deuteronomy 1:16-17](#)). [Psalm 72](#) presents the ideal ruler as one who judges with righteousness, defends the afflicted, saves the children of the needy, and crushes oppression ([Psalm 72:1-14](#)). [Psalm 82](#) summons unjust rulers before the divine assembly and condemns their partiality toward the wicked while the weak and fatherless remain undefended ([Psalm 82:1-8](#)). Authority is therefore ministerial. The ruler serves a justice that precedes him.

Isaiah pronounces woe upon those who enact unjust statutes and write oppressive decrees, depriving the poor of fair judgment and making widows and the fatherless their prey ([Isaiah 10:1-4](#)). The sin is not merely personal cruelty. It is institutionalised injustice. Wickedness has entered law, procedure, and administration. Scripture therefore recognises structural evil without treating structure as an impersonal excuse. People enact the decrees, write the regulations, administer the system, and will answer to God.

Micah summarises covenant duty through justice, covenant loyalty, and humble walking with God ([Micah 6:6-8](#)). The text does not reduce faith to social ethics. It rejects religious performance that coexists with injustice. Public righteousness cannot be purchased through ceremony, and political legitimacy cannot be secured by placing God's name upon a corrupt order.

[Psalm 146](#) then sets the boundary that political religion continually crosses: "Do not trust in nobles, in a son of man, who cannot save" ([Psalm 146:1-10](#)). The psalm does not teach contempt for rulers. It teaches theological proportion. The prince dies. His plans perish. The Lord remains faithful forever, executes justice for the exploited, gives food to the hungry, frees prisoners, opens blind eyes, protects resident aliens, and sustains the fatherless and widow.

Government may perform analogous duties in a limited sphere, but it cannot become the Lord whose faithfulness, life, and kingdom do not end.

This distinction protects both politics and the gospel. A government asked to be saviour becomes tyrannical because salvation demands the whole person. A church asked to become a party loses its catholic witness because the body of Christ cannot be reduced to an electoral coalition. Law can restrain theft; it cannot create generosity. Courts can punish assault; they cannot produce love. Policy can reduce hunger; it cannot make bread the body of Christ. Education can increase literacy; it cannot raise the spiritually dead. Redistribution can relieve material suffering; it cannot justify the guilty. Security agencies can disrupt violence; they cannot deliver humanity from the fear of death.

Political order remains necessary because human beings are fallen. The alternative to limited government is not unregulated innocence. It is often the rule of the strong, the clan, the militia, the oligarch, the mob, or the criminal network. Scripture condemns rulers who oppress and also portrays lawlessness as ruin. The Christian does not despise institutions merely because they are imperfect. He seeks truthful laws, competent administration, impartial courts, lawful policing, fiscal stewardship, and public accountability because neighbours are harmed when institutions collapse.

The state's competence, however, is not unlimited. Family, church, school, market, association, local community, and conscience possess responsibilities the state should not absorb. Political power may protect these institutions, regulate genuine harms, and adjudicate conflicts. It should not ordinarily replace them. When the state treats every social problem as a reason to enlarge administrative jurisdiction, citizens gradually cease to be neighbours and become managed units. The state then weakens the very communities on which humane order depends.

Romans 13 in the Whole Counsel of God

Few passages have been used more carelessly in political theology than [Romans 13:1-7](#). Paul commands every person to submit to governing authorities because no authority exists except from God. Rulers are described as God's servants for good, bearing the sword against wrongdoing. Christians are to submit not only because of wrath but because of conscience and to pay taxes, revenue, respect, and honour.

The passage establishes several truths. Political authority belongs within divine providence. Christians are not authorised to treat government as inherently illegitimate. Public punishment of wrongdoing has a lawful place. Taxes and honour may be owed even to governments that do not confess Christ. Submission is ordinarily an act of conscience toward God, not mere fear of force.

Yet the text does not teach that every ruler is righteous, every command is binding, every regime enjoys divine approval, or resistance is always rebellion against God. Paul defines the authority's vocation: it is God's servant "for your good" and an avenger against wrongdoing. The state does not become good merely by possessing force. Its authority is morally intelligible because it is ordered toward justice. When rulers reward evil and punish good, they contradict the office they occupy.

The whole canon prevents absolutist reading. Pharaoh commands Hebrew midwives to kill newborn boys. They fear God, disobey the king, and are blessed ([Exodus 1:15-21](#)). Nebuchadnezzar commands worship of the image. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse and accept the furnace ([Daniel 3:1-30](#)). Darius's decree forbids prayer to any god or man except the king. Daniel continues praying openly and accepts the lions' den ([Daniel 6:1-28](#)). The Sanhedrin commands the apostles not to teach in Jesus' name. They answer, "We must obey God rather than people" ([Acts 5:27-32](#)).

These acts are not autonomous self-assertion. The midwives do not disobey because personal preference is sovereign. Daniel does not resist because he rejects all authority. The apostles do not claim exemption from law whenever obedience is inconvenient. They refuse commands that directly contradict God's authority. Their resistance remains truthful, non-idolatrous, and willing to bear consequences.

Jesus provides the governing pattern when asked about tribute to Caesar: "Give, then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" ([Matthew 22:15-22](#)). The answer recognises Caesar's limited claim

while placing it inside God's unlimited claim. The coin bears Caesar's image. The human person bears God's. Caesar may receive tax. He may not receive worship, conscience, or the definition of humanity.

Peter likewise commands believers to submit to human authority for the Lord's sake, honour everyone, love the brothers and sisters, fear God, and honour the emperor ([1 Peter 2:11-17](#)). The order matters. The emperor is honoured. God is feared. No emperor receives the reverence due to God. Peter writes within an imperial order that would later persecute Christians, yet he refuses both servile worship and reckless contempt.

Revelation completes the political theology by showing authority corrupted into beastly power. The beast receives authority from the dragon, blasphemes God, makes war on the saints, and receives worship from the earth ([Revelation 13:1-10](#)). [Romans 13](#) and [Revelation 13](#) do not contradict each other. They show the vocation and corruption of political authority. Government is ordained to serve good. It becomes beastly when it claims divine prerogative, demands idolatrous allegiance, persecutes faithful witness, and makes coercion a sacrament of power.

The Christian response therefore requires discernment rather than one slogan. Obedience is ordinary. Worship is never owed. Lawful appeal may be used, as Paul used Roman citizenship ([Acts 16:35-40](#); [Acts 22:22-29](#)). Public testimony may expose injustice. Conscientious refusal becomes necessary when the state commands sin or forbids obedience to God. Flight may be prudent when persecution makes continued presence impossible. Suffering may be unavoidable when faithful refusal carries punishment.

Neither cowardice nor theatrical rebellion honours Christ. Some believers call every regulation persecution because they dislike accountability. Others call direct moral coercion a minor administrative matter because they fear losing employment or approval. The faithful question is not, "Will obedience cost me?" It is, "What does God require, what does the law actually say, what lawful remedies remain, who will be affected by my action, and how can I remain truthful and loving while refusing sin?"

[Romans 13](#) cannot be used by rulers to demand unconditional obedience. It is addressed first to Christian consciences, not handed to the state as a certificate of immunity. Nor may citizens use [Revelation 13](#) to demonise every official. The same Bible that unmask the beast commands prayer for rulers so that society may enjoy peace and the gospel may advance ([1 Timothy 2:1-6](#)). Christian political theology must be capable of honour, critique, prayer, resistance, patience, and hope at the same time.

When the State Becomes a Rival Church

Political communities inevitably cultivate loyalties. They remember wars, honour founders, bury the dead, teach civic duties, mark holidays, and tell stories about national purpose. These practices are not automatically idolatrous. Shared memory can restrain ingratitude. Public mourning can honour sacrifice. A flag can identify a people without becoming an object of worship. The moral question is not whether a society possesses symbols, but what those symbols claim and what allegiance they demand.

The state becomes a rival church when political belonging becomes ultimate. It then develops a functional theology. Its doctrine of creation explains how the nation or revolutionary subject came to be. Its doctrine of fall identifies the enemy class, race, ideology, foreign power, or inherited order responsible for present suffering. Its saints are founders, soldiers, liberators, victims, activists, or leaders whose memory legitimises the movement. Its heretics are those who dispute the official narrative. Its confession is public loyalty. Its sacrament is participation in the movement's approved rituals. Its eschatology is national rebirth, classless society, universal recognition, managed peace, or permanent security.

Gentile (2006) distinguished the ordinary politicisation of religion from the sacralisation of politics. The latter does not merely use religious language for decoration. It turns a political entity into an object of faith and a source of moral meaning. Twentieth-century totalitarian regimes displayed the danger visibly through leader cults, mass rallies, revolutionary calendars, sacred violence, and promises to create a new humanity. Liberal democracies usually operate more softly, but they are not immune. A nation may regard its founding principles as morally self-authenticating. A court may be treated as a final theological authority. A movement may demand public affirmations that function less as policy agreement than as proof of moral purity.

Political religion prospers because it answers real needs. People need belonging, memory, justice, protection, and hope. They fear chaos, humiliation, decline, poverty, violence, and loss of identity. A strong political story gathers these fears into a meaningful drama. It tells citizens who they are, who betrayed them, what sacrifice is required, and which victory will restore wholeness. The story becomes especially powerful when churches have failed to teach the biblical drama or have used the gospel to protect privilege.

The state cannot finally carry this weight. Every political community contains sinners. Every national memory is selective. Every revolution produces new elites. Every bureaucracy creates incentives for self-protection. Every court is staffed by finite interpreters. Every movement is tempted to excuse in its friends what it condemns in enemies. When politics becomes religion, repentance becomes almost impossible because the movement cannot confess its own sin without threatening its claim to save.

The church must therefore preserve a public distance that is neither indifference nor hostility. She should praise what is just, cooperate in genuine goods, pray for rulers, serve communities, and speak truth into policy. She must also remain free to tell the nation that it is not the kingdom, the leader that he is not the Messiah, the court that it is not the final Judge, and the movement that its victims do not make it sinless.

The Long Search for Political Salvation

Political messianism did not begin in modernity. Ancient rulers claimed divine descent, sacred kingship, cosmic mandate, or priestly authority. Pharaoh was more than an administrator. Roman emperors received cultic honour. Empires portrayed conquest as the extension of order against chaos. Scripture's confrontation with political idolatry therefore predates modern democracy, nationalism, Marxism, and global governance.

Israel's monarchy was itself bounded by covenant. The king was not to multiply horses, wives, or wealth, and was to copy and read the law so that his heart would not be exalted above his brothers ([Deuteronomy 17:14-20](#)). The prophetic office stood beside political authority as a permanent rebuke to royal self-deification. Nathan confronted David. Elijah confronted Ahab. Isaiah spoke to kings. Jeremiah announced judgment upon rulers and nation. No Israelite king could claim that divine appointment placed him beyond divine correction.

Christendom later joined church and political order in ways that produced both goods and grave corruptions. Augustine (ca. 426/1998) had already distinguished the city ordered by love of God from the city ordered by disordered self-love, while later Christian political theology continued to wrestle with how earthly authority may witness imperfectly to divine justice without becoming the kingdom itself (O'Donovan, 1996). Christian moral language helped shape law, education, care for the poor, restraint of certain abuses, and conceptions of human worth. Yet rulers also used the church to legitimise conquest, coercion, dynastic ambition, and social hierarchy. Churches sometimes confused the spread of empire with the advance of the gospel. The lesson is not that Christian conviction must be excluded from politics. It is that proximity to power can make the church unable to distinguish providence from patronage.

Early modern theories of sovereignty arose amid religious conflict, state formation, and the search for public order. Hobbes located decisive authority in the sovereign as the remedy for violent insecurity. Locke defended limited government, natural rights, property, consent, and toleration, though his framework contained exclusions and historical contradictions. Rousseau treated political legitimacy through the general will and explicitly proposed a civil religion capable of sustaining civic unity. These thinkers disagreed sharply, but modern politics increasingly sought a ground of legitimacy that did not depend upon a shared confession of divine revelation.

The French Revolution displayed political religion in dramatic form. It attacked inherited privilege and articulated powerful claims of citizenship and equality. It also produced revolutionary festivals, new calendars, cultic symbolism, ideological purification, and terror. The revolution's history should not be reduced to one moral. It exposed real injustice and also showed how the promise of liberation can turn violence into virtue when the movement identifies itself with history's righteous future.

Liberalism developed as a broad and internally diverse tradition committed to individual liberty, limited government, rights, consent, legal equality, property, and protection from coercive authority. These goods can restrain tyranny. Yet liberalism becomes philosophically unstable when it presents itself as neutral while assuming a contested

anthropology of the autonomous individual. The state may claim not to define the good life while steadily privileging self-definition, expressive freedom, and release from inherited moral limits.

Nationalism supplied another source of meaning. It helped peoples resist imperial rule, recover language, and organise self-government. It also produced ethnic exclusion, territorial ambition, myths of purity, and wars of national destiny. Anticolonial nationalism often mobilised communities against genuine domination. Postcolonial states then inherited borders, bureaucracies, armies, and economies formed under empire, sometimes reproducing coercive structures in national hands.

Marxism offered a comprehensive diagnosis of alienation, class exploitation, property, ideology, and history. It exposed ways in which economic power hides beneath claims of neutrality. It also relocated human evil into material relations and class structure, interpreted religion principally through alienation or ideology, and invested revolutionary transformation with redemptive expectation. Where Marxist regimes captured the state, the promised withering away of coercion often yielded centralised party authority, censorship, economic compulsion, and persecution. This historical record does not prove that every critique of capitalism is Marxist or false. It proves that structural change cannot abolish sin.

Fascist movements fused nation, leader, mass mobilisation, violence, and myth. Communist and fascist regimes were enemies, but both demonstrated how modern administrative capacity, propaganda, ideology, and charismatic authority could absorb the person into a political totality. The twentieth century's mass crimes gave new urgency to international human rights and restraints upon sovereignty.

Postwar welfare states expanded public responsibility for health, education, unemployment, housing, and social security. These arrangements relieved real suffering and expressed social solidarity. They also enlarged administrative power and created continuing debates over dependency, fiscal sustainability, family responsibility, market freedom, and bureaucratic reach. The moral question is not whether public provision is always righteous or always corrupt. It is whether provision serves persons and communities without treating the state as the source of life.

Decolonisation, civil-rights movements, women's movements, labour activism, disability advocacy, and struggles against apartheid exposed grave exclusions. Their achievements should not be dismissed because later movements sometimes extend rights language in disputed directions. A Christian account of public life must be capable of gratitude for emancipation and criticism of moral revision.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries added dense networks of international law, development finance, professional standards, corporate governance, philanthropic influence, and advocacy. Sovereignty did not disappear. It became layered. Governments remained formally independent while policy was increasingly shaped through treaties, lending conditions, rankings, accreditation, elite training, research funding, judicial dialogue, market access, and reputational pressure. This is not proof of one hidden ruler. It is evidence that political power now circulates through institutions wider than the state.

The genealogy reveals a recurring pattern. A genuine disorder is identified: violence, arbitrary power, poverty, exclusion, discrimination, war, disease, or environmental harm. A political mechanism is proposed. The mechanism may accomplish real good. It becomes ideological when its limited competence is forgotten, its assumptions are shielded from examination, and dissent is treated as moral contamination. The tool is placed upon the altar.

Justice After God: The Progressive Political Gospel

Progressive political movements often begin with wounds that conservative societies ignored. Slavery was defended through law. Colonial systems extracted labour and resources while preaching civilisation. Women were denied education, property, legal standing, and protection. Workers endured dangerous conditions. Ethnic and racial hierarchies were built into institutions. Disabled persons were hidden, sterilised, or treated as burdens. Sexual abuse was concealed by families, churches, and governments. Any Christian critique that speaks of ideological excess without confessing these realities is morally unprepared.

The prophets do not permit comfortable neutrality. Amos condemns those who hate the one who convicts in the city gate, trample the poor, take bribes, and deprive the needy of justice ([Amos 5:10-24](#)). Isaiah rejects fasting that coexists with exploitation and commands the breaking of wicked restraints and care for the oppressed ([Isaiah 58:1-12](#)). Scripture recognises institutional wrongdoing, economic injustice, corrupt courts, and the moral duty to protect the vulnerable.

The strongest progressive argument is therefore serious. Personal morality alone cannot correct systems whose ordinary operation produces exclusion. A hiring manager may harbour no conscious prejudice while recruitment networks reproduce unequal access. A school may apply one rule to all while students arrive with profoundly different resources. A legal category may fail to see a person harmed at the intersection of race and sex. Historical theft can shape present wealth even when current beneficiaries committed no original crime. Political institutions must therefore examine structures, not merely individual intentions.

This argument contains truth. Young's (2011) account of structural injustice shows why liability cannot always be assigned to one wrongdoer. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) work shows how single-axis categories can obscure the experience of those burdened by multiple forms of disadvantage. Fraser (1995) showed that justice involves both material distribution and cultural recognition, while warning against allowing recognition to replace economic concern. Christians should not dismiss these insights merely because their theoretical frameworks are not biblical. Common grace permits unbelieving analysis to identify patterns believers have ignored.

The problem begins when a partial lens becomes a total anthropology. If power is treated as the deepest reality beneath truth, family, worship, knowledge, language, and morality, every relationship becomes a struggle between domination and resistance. The teacher and student, parent and child, pastor and congregation, husband and wife, citizen and state are interpreted principally through unequal power. Authority is presumed oppressive until reconstructed. Tradition is presumed to conceal privilege. Moral boundaries are judged by their psychological or social effects upon identity groups.

Marxism intensifies this tendency by locating decisive moral meaning in class relations and material history. Marx and Engels (1848/1978) interpreted history through class struggle and revolutionary transformation. Their critique of exploitation, commodification, and economic power remains influential because markets can indeed treat workers as costs and persons as consumers. Yet the Marxist account of sin is too narrow. Owners can exploit workers, and workers can exploit one another. The poor can be covetous, and the rich can be generous. A revolution can remove one ruling class and create another. The human heart does not become righteous when property relations change.

Liberation theology arose in contexts where churches had often blessed oppressive orders or reduced salvation to private destiny while the poor suffered. Its insistence that God hears the oppressed and that faith has public consequences is biblical. Its error appears when the exodus, kingdom, cross, and salvation are reorganised around political liberation, class struggle, or revolutionary history. Jesus did announce good news to the poor ([Luke 4:16-21](#)), but He did not reduce poverty to material lack or salvation to political emancipation. He forgave sins, cast out demons, called oppressors and victims to repentance, died as the atoning Lamb, rose bodily, and will judge every class.

Identity politics similarly begins with the legitimate need of unseen people to speak about specific harms. A universal rule can be applied in a way that conceals unequal burdens. Representation can reveal experiences dominant groups have ignored. The danger appears when identity becomes destiny, moral authority, or permanent innocence. A person's argument is then accepted or rejected according to social location. Guilt attaches to membership. Victimhood supplies epistemic privilege. The person becomes a representative body carrying inherited righteousness or inherited stain.

Biblical solidarity is richer and more demanding. Scripture can speak corporately. Israel confesses ancestral sin. Daniel identifies with the sins of his people ([Daniel 9:4-19](#)). Communities may inherit institutions, benefits, wounds, and obligations. Yet Scripture also rejects indiscriminate moral transfer. Children are not punished for the personal guilt of parents, and each person answers for his own sin ([Ezekiel 18:1-32](#)). Corporate responsibility does not abolish personal responsibility. Historical repair should be evidence-based, proportionate, directed toward actual injustice, and capable of reconciliation rather than permanent hostility.

The language of privilege can name real unearned advantage. It becomes morally careless when it assumes that visible group membership reveals the actual story of a person. A poor rural man may possess one social advantage and suffer several disadvantages. A wealthy member of a historically marginalised group may possess extensive institutional power. Human lives do not fit neatly inside political matrices. Justice must see patterns without ceasing to see persons.

Permanent victimhood also wounds those it claims to defend. A person can be genuinely victimised without victimhood becoming the deepest identity. The gospel does not deny wounds. It refuses to let the wound become a throne. In Christ, the oppressed person is not merely the object of history but a moral agent, neighbour, worshipper, servant, and heir of resurrection. Healing includes truth, protection, restitution, lament, accountability, forgiveness, and restored agency.

Ideological justice often creates a new doctrine of justification. The approved victim is declared righteous because of location within the system. The approved ally is justified through confession and activism. The dissenter is condemned not only as mistaken but as unsafe, harmful, or complicit. Public rituals of denunciation replace patient judgment. Language becomes evidence of purity. Institutions require statements whose purpose is not to clarify conduct but to display allegiance.

This system cannot sustain impartial justice. If wrongdoing is evil when committed by an oppressor group but excusable when committed by a victim group, justice has become revenge. If evidence is subordinated to narrative, false accusation becomes morally useful. If inherited guilt is unlimited, reconciliation becomes betrayal. If every unequal outcome proves oppression, freedom, responsibility, excellence, culture, family, geography, and ordinary contingency disappear from analysis.

The biblical correction is not conservative indifference. It is justice freed from ideological captivity. It asks what happened, who acted, who was harmed, what structures contributed, what evidence supports the claim, what remedy is proportionate, what duties are owed, and how truth and reconciliation can coexist. It protects the vulnerable without canonising a movement. It confronts exploitation without treating revolution as regeneration. It honours lament without making resentment a sacrament.

The Flag at the Altar: Conservative Political Religion

Conservative political religion grows from different wounds. Communities experience rapid moral change, loss of religious influence, economic displacement, migration, demographic anxiety, crime, weakening families, institutional distrust, and contempt from cultural elites. They fear that inherited goods will disappear and that their children will enter a country they no longer recognise. These concerns are not automatically irrational or hateful. Traditions can preserve wisdom. Borders can protect political responsibility. Public order matters. Families and churches can be weakened by policy and culture.

The temptation is to seek salvation through recovery of a sacred nation. The past is purified. National founders are treated as near-prophets. A preferred constitutional order becomes almost canonical. Military power is clothed in redemptive language. Political opponents become enemies of civilisation. A leader's moral failures are excused because he defends the tribe. The church is valued as a provider of votes, legitimacy, ceremony, and cultural memory.

Christian nationalism does not describe every attempt to apply Christian ethics to public life. All politics rests upon moral convictions, and Christians have the same civil right as others to reason publicly from their deepest beliefs. The term is most useful when Christianity is fused with national identity so that belonging to the nation carries sacred meaning and the nation's political success is interpreted as the advance of God's kingdom. Whitehead and Perry (2020) describe Christian nationalism as a cultural framework that idealises a particular relationship between Christianity and civic life. Gorski and Perry (2022) show how national myth, racial history, violence, and Christian symbolism can combine in political identity.

Sangwa (2025c) extends the concern beyond one country. Christian nationalist frames can travel through media, conferences, funding, advocacy networks, and culture-war narratives. Churches elsewhere may import foreign

political battles, slogans, and enemies that do not fit local histories. The result is not resistance to global influence but another form of dependency.

Patriotism can be virtuous. A believer may love a country, honour lawful sacrifice, preserve language, serve in public office, defend neighbours, and seek national flourishing. Paul expressed anguish for his people ([Romans 9:1-5](#)). Jeremiah instructed exiles to seek the welfare of the city ([Jeremiah 29:4-7](#)). Christian universalism does not erase particular duties.

Nationalism becomes idolatrous when the nation is exempted from judgment. The prophets never permitted Israel to turn election into moral immunity. Privilege increased accountability. Amos declared that covenant knowledge intensified judgment ([Amos 3:1-2](#)). No modern nation possesses Israel's covenant, and the church is a people gathered from every tribe, language, people, and nation ([Revelation 7:9-10](#)).

Ethnonationalism is especially destructive because it treats ancestry as political destiny. Ethnic memory and cultural continuity are real goods. They become sinful when blood, tribe, race, or indigeneity determines whose life matters, who may rule, or who belongs securely. Africa's history of colonial boundaries, ethnic mobilisation, genocide, civil war, and patronage shows the cost of turning communal identity into a political absolute. Western histories of racial supremacy and exclusion show the same spirit in different forms.

Conservative hypocrisy strengthens progressive ideology. A church that condemns sexual revision while excusing corruption teaches that morality is a weapon rather than a law. A leader who speaks of family while exploiting women makes traditional language contemptible. A movement that defends unborn life while despising refugees, disabled persons, the poor, or ethnic minorities contradicts its own anthropology. A nationalist who invokes Christian civilisation while lying, threatening opponents, or celebrating cruelty has placed the flag above the cross.

The political right can also practise a doctrine of permanent victimhood. It may portray itself as the only persecuted group, interpret every institutional loss as totalitarianism, and excuse falsehood because enemies allegedly control the system. Conspiracy becomes a political sacrament that converts uncertainty into certainty and anger into belonging. Documented coordination, censorship, corruption, and elite capture should be investigated. Suspicion is not evidence merely because institutions have lied before.

The church must refuse the conservative bargain: moral language in exchange for prophetic silence. A ruler may appoint judges, protect religious liberty, defend borders, or oppose harmful policy. These actions can be praised. They do not baptise his character or make criticism disloyal. Providence can use a ruler without turning that ruler into a shepherd of the church.

The Strong Leader and the Borrowed Messiah

Political messiahs rise where fear and humiliation meet institutional weakness. Citizens lose confidence in courts, parties, media, police, markets, and ordinary procedures. Economic insecurity deepens. A charismatic figure promises to break paralysis, punish enemies, restore dignity, recover greatness, or protect the people from chaos. The leader becomes a vessel into which the public pours abandoned hope.

Weber (1978) described charismatic authority as resting upon devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character attributed to a person. Charisma can mobilise courage and reform. It can also suspend ordinary judgment. Followers interpret criticism as persecution, institutional restraint as sabotage, and personal loyalty as moral clarity.

The church intensifies the danger when it supplies prophetic endorsement. A pastor announces that a candidate is God's chosen instrument. An election becomes spiritual warfare. Critics are accused of resisting divine purpose. A victory is treated as confirmation of prophecy, while defeat is explained through hidden enemies, demonic obstruction, or stolen destiny. The leader receives not only votes but anointing.

Scripture records God using rulers who did not worship Him. Cyrus is called God's anointed instrument for a particular historical purpose ([Isaiah 45:1-7](#)). This does not make Cyrus a covenant teacher or place all his conduct beyond judgment. Divine use is not divine endorsement of everything an instrument does. Judas fulfilled Scripture and remained guilty. Assyria served as a rod of judgment and was judged for arrogance ([Isaiah 10:5-19](#)).

The strong leader argument deserves fairness. Fragile states face violence, corruption, factionalism, and administrative incapacity. Citizens may prefer decisive action to procedures captured by elites. Some leaders have restored order, built infrastructure, reduced crime, resisted predatory interests, or defended national independence. Institutional strength is not the same as tyranny.

The test is whether strength remains under law, truth, accountability, and the dignity of persons. Can courts rule against the executive? Can journalists investigate without manufactured charges? Can elections or succession occur without violence? Can religious communities worship without political loyalty tests? Can the leader admit error? Can public institutions outlive his personality? Strength that destroys correction is weakness wearing armour.

A political messiah eventually consumes the people he promised to save because no finite person can sustain absolute expectation. When outcomes fail, enemies must multiply. When evidence contradicts the narrative, evidence must be managed. When succession approaches, institutions must be bent. The leader's image becomes inseparable from national survival.

Christians should honour rulers, pray for them, cooperate in justice, and resist dehumanising speech. They should never promise a leader the heart. Jesus refused the kingdoms offered through worship of the tempter ([Matthew 4:8-10](#)). He redefined greatness as service rather than domination ([Matthew 20:20-28](#)). The church betrays Him when it crowns a protector whose power depends upon fear, falsehood, or hatred.

Human Dignity Before the State

Human rights are strongest when the human person is not a product of the state. If government grants dignity, government may withdraw it. If autonomy grounds dignity, those with diminished capacity become less secure. If recognition grounds dignity, the unwanted child, prisoner, foreigner, dissenter, disabled person, and forgotten elderly person remain dependent upon social approval. Christian theology begins before every constitution: humanity is made in God's image ([Genesis 1:26-28](#)).

The image of God is not a measurable capacity. It is not intelligence, independence, speech, productivity, self-awareness, or political status. These capacities vary and may be lost. The image names humanity's created relation, vocation, embodied nature, moral accountability, and representative place within creation. Therefore, the unborn child, person with profound disability, unconscious patient, refugee, political enemy, and aged person possess dignity that no majority can vote away.

Modern human-rights language developed through several streams, including natural-law traditions, struggles over religious liberty, constitutional limits, abolitionism, democratic revolutions, labour movements, resistance to totalitarianism, anticolonial claims, and the horror of world war and genocide. No single civilisation or philosophy owns the whole inheritance. Glendon (2001) shows that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted by representatives from diverse legal, cultural, philosophical, and religious backgrounds. Moyn (2010) cautions against telling a simple story in which contemporary human rights developed inevitably from ancient ideas. The history is contested because the language changed meaning across periods.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 as a common standard rather than a treaty. Its preamble grounds freedom, justice, and peace in the "inherent dignity" and equal rights of the human family. It protects life, liberty, legal recognition, due process, conscience, religion, expression, association, family, property, political participation, work, education, and social security (United Nations, 1948). Christians can recognise many of these protections as consistent with neighbour-love and the restraint of political evil.

The Declaration is also less individualistic than later public rhetoric sometimes suggests. Article 16 calls the family the natural and fundamental group unit of society. Article 26 recognises parents' prior right to choose their children's education. Article 29 states that everyone has duties to the community and that rights may be limited by law for the rights of others, morality, public order, and general welfare in a democratic society. Rights were never presented as limitless assertions of desire.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights deepens the relationship between rights and duties. It protects dignity, life, equality, conscience, expression, family, culture, political participation, development, and peoples' rights. It also affirms duties toward family, society, the state, the international community, national independence, social solidarity, work, taxation, and positive African cultural values (African Union, 1981). The Charter can itself be interpreted in disputed ways, but its structure resists the fiction that the person flourishes as an isolated chooser.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights gives binding treaty form to many protections for state parties (United Nations, 1966). Article 18 protects thought, conscience, religion, adoption of belief, worship, observance, practice, and teaching. The Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 22 emphasises that the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief is not subject to derogation, though manifestation can be subject to lawful and necessary limits (United Nations Human Rights Committee, 1993). Religious freedom is not merely permission to think privately. It includes communal and public dimensions.

A biblical account can affirm rights without making modern rights discourse the final authority. Rights are moral shields against domination and claims that correspond to duties. The right to life imposes duties not to murder and to protect the innocent. Freedom of religion imposes duties not to coerce worship and to permit communities to teach and associate. Parental rights carry duties of nurture, protection, education, and refusal of abuse. Property rights carry duties of honesty, generosity, stewardship, wages, and concern for the poor. Freedom of speech carries duties of truth, evidence, restraint, and refusal of slander.

Wolterstorff (2008) argues that rights language can be grounded in the worth bestowed by God's love. Waldron (2012) connects dignity to the high rank attributed to every person. These approaches differ, but both resist reducing dignity to preference. Glendon (1991) warned that a highly individualistic rights discourse can impoverish social imagination by neglecting responsibility, community, and the goods that law cannot create.

Rights conflict because human beings live together. Freedom of expression can injure reputation. Religious liberty can conflict with nondiscrimination rules. Parental authority can be abused. Public health can justify limited restrictions that threaten liberty if unchecked. Security measures can protect life while eroding privacy. Reproductive autonomy claims collide with the life and interests of unborn children. Sexual autonomy can affect the rights of children to origins, stable care, and truthful education. Institutional inclusion can conflict with a church's doctrinal integrity.

A rights claim therefore requires moral reasoning. What is the human good being protected? What account of the person is assumed? Who bears the corresponding duty? What competing rights are affected? Is the limitation lawful, necessary, proportionate, and open to review? Does the claim protect a person from unjust harm, or require others to affirm a disputed moral proposition? No label can answer these questions in advance.

When Rights Become Moral Leverage

Rights language carries moral prestige because it arose in response to grave abuses. That prestige can protect the powerless. It can also be used strategically. Once a political demand is named a human right, disagreement appears not merely mistaken but inhuman. The burden of proof shifts. Courts, donors, corporations, schools, and professional bodies may act as though the moral question has already been settled.

This does not mean that new rights claims are automatically false. The application of general principles to previously neglected harms is part of legal development. The abolition of racial discrimination and the recognition of equal legal standing required institutions to see what they had normalised. Yet interpretation can also alter the substance of inherited texts. Courts and expert bodies may derive contested claims from broad concepts such as dignity, privacy, equality, family life, or nondiscrimination.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Advisory Opinion OC-24/17 illustrates this process. Requested by Costa Rica, the Court interpreted provisions of the American Convention concerning identity, privacy, equality, family, and nondiscrimination in relation to gender identity and same-sex couples (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2017). The opinion is an advisory interpretation within the regional system, not a universal treaty text drafted with those specific conclusions. One may agree or disagree with its reasoning, but its legal form matters. It demonstrates how institutional interpretation can give older rights language new anthropological content.

The Yogyakarta Principles provide another example of status requiring precision. Drafted by experts in 2006 and later supplemented, they present principles concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. They are a soft-law instrument and are not independently binding upon states, though advocates argue that they articulate applications of existing international obligations (Thoreson, 2016). To describe them as a United Nations treaty would be false. To dismiss them as irrelevant would also be false, because soft-law texts can influence advocacy, professional standards, policy language, and judicial reasoning.

The critical distinction is between protection and compulsory affirmation. A state should protect persons from assault, arbitrary arrest, torture, blackmail, mob violence, and denial of due process regardless of identity or conduct. A Christian should defend that protection without hesitation. It does not follow that every citizen, school, church, parent, clinician, or professional must affirm every contested identity claim as morally true.

Religious liberty becomes fragile when public institutions redefine disagreement as harm. A Christian teacher may be willing to treat every student with courtesy and still be unable to profess that sex is self-created. A church may welcome visitors while refusing to solemnise a union Scripture does not recognise. A physician may protect a distressed patient while questioning whether a requested intervention is clinically or morally justified. The state must distinguish refusal to harm from refusal to confess.

Conscience is not a licence for arbitrary discrimination. A business cannot invoke conscience to defraud, abuse, or deny ordinary service on every personal preference. Public roles can carry legitimate duties. The question is whether accommodation is possible without defeating the essential purpose of the law or imposing serious harm. A free society should seek narrow, proportionate arrangements that protect both access and conscience rather than using professional exclusion to produce ideological uniformity.

Rights language also enters donor and corporate systems. Funding criteria may require policies on gender, sexuality, reproductive health, environmental reporting, diversity, or public communication. Some requirements protect staff and beneficiaries from genuine abuse. Others embed contested moral assumptions. A recipient institution may sign because it needs funds, accreditation, or market access, not because its community freely embraced the anthropology.

The problem is not merely foreign influence. Domestic elites often welcome external standards because they strengthen local authority, unlock resources, or provide moral prestige. Citizens may then experience a policy as international pressure when local actors actively sought it. Accurate analysis must trace documents, institutions, incentives, and implementation rather than invoke an undefined "globalist agenda."

The church must be especially careful. Christians sometimes demand religious freedom only for themselves while supporting coercion against neighbours. Religious liberty is credible when it protects conscience across disagreement, including the right to reject Christianity. Coerced worship is not conversion. At the same time, pluralism cannot mean that only secular moral claims may shape public life. A state that permits religious belief only after it has been translated into secular conclusions has not protected conscience. It has licensed private sentiment under public unbelief.

Democracy, Courts, and the Limits of Legality

Democracy is a method of ordering political participation, accountability, and succession. It is not a source of moral truth. A majority can choose wisely or wickedly. An election can remove a corrupt ruler or enthrone a demagogue. Popular consent can restrain arbitrary power, but it cannot redefine good and evil.

The democratic case is strong. Periodic elections permit peaceful transfer of authority. Public competition can expose failure. Citizens can organise, speak, vote, petition, and replace leaders. Divided institutions can slow tyranny. Constitutional rights can protect minorities against majority passion. These goods should not be mocked merely because democratic states remain sinful.

Democracy's vulnerabilities are equally real. Wealth can purchase influence. Parties can become patronage systems. Media can manipulate perception. Electoral districts and registration rules can distort representation. Citizens can be mobilised through fear, ethnicity, religion, resentment, or disinformation. Courts can become politicised. Majorities can oppress minorities. Minorities with institutional power can frustrate legitimate majority rule.

International IDEA's 2025 assessment reported that in 2024, 94 countries, representing 54 percent of those assessed, had declined in at least one factor of democratic performance compared with five years earlier, while 55 advanced in at least one factor (International IDEA, 2025). Such measures depend upon definitions and indicators, but the pattern supports a sober conclusion: democratic forms do not maintain themselves automatically.

The Christian case for democracy should therefore be prudential, not messianic. Democracy acknowledges human fallibility by distributing power and permitting correction. It also depends upon virtues it cannot manufacture: truthfulness, restraint, patience, respect for opponents, willingness to lose, concern for common good, and refusal of violence. When these virtues collapse, procedures become weapons.

Courts occupy a crucial but limited place. Judicial review can protect persons against unlawful government, clarify rights, and enforce constitutional limits. It can also convert judges into final arbiters of disputed moral realities. A court can decide what the law recognises. It cannot make a man a woman, an unjust act righteous, or a created relation meaningless. Judicial authority concerns legal judgment, not ontological creation.

The same applies to legislatures and referenda. Law teaches by naming conduct, distributing benefits, and expressing public values. Yet law can be wrong. Slavery was legal. Racial segregation was legal. Persecution has been legal. Abortion and euthanasia may be legal where Christians judge them gravely immoral. The fact of legality affects civic duty and available remedies, but it does not end moral inquiry.

A mature church does not confuse political defeat with the defeat of God. It may campaign, vote, litigate, advocate, and persuade. It should accept lawful outcomes when compliance does not require sin, continue witness, and protect fellowship from party hatred. When law commands evil, the church must refuse faithfully. When law permits evil, the church must not assume coercion is the only faithful response. It may build alternatives, care for victims, persuade conscience, and demonstrate a better way.

No political form is automatically divine. Monarchy can provide continuity and symbolise unity, or concentrate unaccountable power. Republics can distribute authority, or hide oligarchy behind elections. Traditional leadership can preserve communal memory, or protect abuse. Technocracy can supply competence, or treat persons as variables. The biblical test concerns justice, truth, accountability, lawful order, protection of life, and humility before God.

Global Cooperation Without Global Idolatry

Transnational problems are real. Viruses cross borders. Refugees flee across them. Rivers, oceans, financial systems, supply chains, digital networks, war, organised crime, and environmental damage exceed the capacity of one government. International cooperation is not rebellion merely because it is international. Joseph managed famine across regions. Paul collected relief across churches. Christians belong to a global body and should not confuse national isolation with holiness.

The United Nations, African Union, regional courts, development banks, health agencies, humanitarian organisations, and treaty systems have contributed to peacekeeping, vaccination, disaster relief, refugee protection, technical standards, documentation of abuse, and conflict mediation. Their work is uneven, political, and fallible, but wholesale denunciation is unjust.

Global governance becomes morally dangerous when coordination acquires hidden supremacy. Most international institutions do not possess a world government's direct legislative power. Influence operates through agreements, recommendations, funding, expertise, rankings, data standards, professional networks, courts, procurement, and reputational consequences. A state may remain formally sovereign while practical policy space narrows.

The United Nations Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in 2024, illustrates both the scale and limits of contemporary global coordination. It is a political commitment addressing sustainable development, peace and security, digital cooperation, youth, future generations, human rights, and reform of global governance (United Nations, 2024). It is not a secret world constitution or a self-executing treaty. It is nonetheless significant because agreed language can shape programmes, funding priorities, institutional expectations, and later negotiations.

Christians should evaluate such documents clause by clause. Peace, poverty reduction, disaster preparedness, accountable institutions, and cooperation can serve neighbour-love. Terms such as inclusion, gender equality, reproductive health, misinformation, sustainability, and future generations can carry contested implications depending upon definition and implementation. Discernment requires reading the actual text, identifying legal status, tracing implementation, and distinguishing stated aims from inferred risks.

Soft power often works through professional formation. Officials attend international conferences. Judges cite foreign jurisprudence. universities receive grants. NGOs adopt reporting frameworks. corporations standardise policies across markets. Consultants translate global templates into national plans. None of these actors must be secretly coordinated for ideas to converge. Shared education, incentives, prestige, risk management, and funding can produce alignment.

This convergence can be beneficial. Accounting standards can reduce fraud. Medical protocols can improve safety. Anti-corruption rules can protect public resources. Child-protection standards can expose abuse. It can also reduce democratic accountability when contested norms are presented as technical necessities rather than moral choices.

Global governance should therefore be judged by subsidiarity, transparency, consent, accountability, evidence, and room for conscience. Decisions should be made as close as reasonably possible to those affected, while higher levels address problems lower levels cannot solve. Institutions should disclose funding, methods, conflicts, legal authority, and mechanisms of review. Universal claims should not be insulated from cultural and philosophical examination merely because they carry expert language.

Aid, Development, and the Price of Agreement

Development assistance can save lives. Grants and loans support roads, schools, hospitals, sanitation, agriculture, energy, public finance, and emergency response. Poor countries often face capital constraints, debt burdens, fragile institutions, and exposure to global shocks. Refusing all external assistance would not produce sovereignty. It could deepen suffering.

Aid is never merely money. It carries models of knowledge, measurement, governance, procurement, accountability, and human flourishing. Donors decide which problems are fundable, which indicators define success, which experts are credible, and which reforms count as progress. Recipient governments and organisations negotiate, adapt, resist, or strategically perform compliance.

The World Bank's Development Policy Financing provides budget support linked to agreed policy and institutional actions. Its official framework emphasises country ownership, consultation, coordination, results, and prior actions before disbursement (World Bank, n.d.). The language of ownership matters, but the asymmetry remains. A country seeking finance negotiates with an institution that controls access to resources and evaluates compliance.

OECD studies have long recognised the problem. Mold and Zimmermann (2008) argued that policy conditionality can be ineffective, counterproductive, and corrosive of ownership. OECD's wider work on policy ownership and conditionality called for reduced reliance upon externally imposed reforms and greater alignment with country-led priorities (OECD, 2009). Conditionality may sometimes protect funds, prevent corruption, or secure agreed reform. It becomes domination when donors use material dependency to impose contested moral visions unrelated to the core purpose of assistance.

The World Bank's relationship with Uganda supplies a documented example requiring careful language. In August 2023, the Bank announced that Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act contradicted its values and paused new public financing while it developed mitigation measures (World Bank, 2023). In June 2026, the Bank endorsed a new ten-year Country Partnership Framework for Uganda focused on jobs and private-sector-led transformation (World Bank, 2026). The episode should not be simplified into permanent abandonment or secret control. It demonstrates that a major development lender can use financing decisions to respond to a state's contested moral law, and that such relationships are subsequently renegotiated.

Supporters of conditionality argue that funders bear moral responsibility for the uses and effects of money. A bank should not finance systems it believes discriminate or harm. Donor citizens also possess democratic claims over public resources. This argument has force. No recipient has an unconditional right to another institution's funds.

The corresponding danger is that wealth becomes moral jurisdiction. If access to essential development finance depends upon adopting definitions formed in more powerful societies, consent becomes ambiguous. A state may choose compliance, but the choice occurs under material pressure. The question is not whether donors may have values. It is whether the relationship permits genuine negotiation, local moral agency, proportionality, and distinction between protecting persons from violence and compelling contested affirmation.

Churches and Christian institutions face similar pressures. A grant may support education, health, peacebuilding, or poverty relief while requiring policies incompatible with biblical conviction. The institution may rationalise that doctrine can remain private while programmes use approved language. Over time, funding forms mission. Staff are hired to satisfy indicators. Reports reshape vocabulary. Leaders avoid teachings that threaten partnership. The ministry does not deny Christ in one public declaration. It mortgages the conscience in instalments.

Development becomes a counterfeit gospel when poverty replaces sin, expertise replaces wisdom, funding replaces providence, indicators replace persons, and institutional expansion replaces faithfulness. Material deprivation is a grave evil, but a society with higher income can remain corrupt, lonely, violent, sexually disordered, spiritually dead, and afraid of death. Development is a servant of human flourishing, not its definition.

Sen (1999) rightly broadened development beyond income to substantive freedoms and capabilities. Scott (1998) warned that large schemes can fail when states simplify complex local realities into administratively legible categories. Ferguson (1994) showed how development discourse can depoliticise power while expanding bureaucratic intervention. These critiques do not require rejecting development. They require humility about what experts see and what local communities know.

A Christian model receives economic growth, health, education, infrastructure, enterprise, and institutional competence as goods under God. It also asks whether development strengthens families, protects life, honours work, equips local responsibility, restrains corruption, and leaves room for worship and conscience. The goal is not merely a population integrated into global systems. It is neighbours capable of truthful, responsible, and generous life.

Africa Between External Pressure and Internal Corruption

Africa is not one political, moral, religious, or economic environment. Its states differ in colonial history, language, law, demography, conflict, institutions, religion, natural resources, and development. The phrase "Africa" can conceal more than it reveals. Yet common patterns justify careful continental analysis: borders formed through empire, externally oriented economies, debt, aid dependence, rapid urbanisation, youth unemployment, unequal bargaining power, fragile public systems, and strong religious communities.

External pressure is real. Funding priorities can shape education, healthcare, research, family policy, reproductive programmes, civil-society agendas, and legal reform. International NGOs may possess budgets larger than local ministries. Consultants can write policy in language communities did not generate. Academic grants can determine which questions become visible. Corporate standards can make market access conditional upon contested social policies.

Sangwa's (2025b) study of faith-based organisation regulation in Rwanda captures the double bind. Governments have legitimate reasons to require safe buildings, financial accountability, child protection, and competent leadership. Religious institutions can exploit believers, create unsafe spaces, and conceal financial abuse. Yet registration rules, educational requirements, and administrative control can also narrow religious freedom and make the state an arbiter of ecclesial legitimacy. Accountability and autonomy must be held together.

African resistance to external moral pressure is not automatically righteous. Leaders may invoke sovereignty to protect corruption, suppress dissent, persecute minorities, steal public resources, or evade accountability. A government that rejects foreign interference while abusing its citizens has not defended biblical order. Sovereignty is stewardship, not immunity.

Nor is traditional culture automatically biblical. Extended family, communal responsibility, respect for elders, hospitality, and intergenerational identity can carry profound wisdom. The same traditions may conceal forced marriage, ethnic hierarchy, property theft from widows, violence against women, stigma toward disability, witchcraft accusations, and suppression of converts. Decolonisation cannot mean placing culture beyond Scripture.

The African Charter's union of individual rights, peoples' rights, family, community, development, and duties offers resources for resisting both atomistic individualism and authoritarian communalism. Its language should not be romanticised, but it demonstrates that rights need not be conceived as isolated claims against every inherited relation.

Religious communities in Africa possess significant public influence. They can advocate peace, provide education and health care, protect families, and confront corruption. They can also become extensions of ruling parties, ethnic coalitions, donor programmes, or prosperity networks. The pastor who receives political favour may cease to speak about theft. The denomination that depends upon a development grant may soften doctrine. The prophet who predicts electoral victory may convert worship into campaign mobilisation.

Africa also faces severe climate and development pressures that require cooperation rather than ideological theatre. The World Meteorological Organization's State of the Climate in Africa 2025 reported that the continent is warming faster than the global average, with floods, drought, coastal risks, disappearing glaciers, and major gaps in early-warning systems (World Meteorological Organization, 2026). The suffering is not a Western invention. Farmers, pastoralists, coastal communities, and the urban poor experience it directly.

At the same time, policy must consider energy poverty, employment, food systems, infrastructure, and fiscal capacity. Wealthy societies that developed through abundant energy should not demand symbolic compliance from poorer countries while withholding realistic finance, technology, or transition pathways. Climate justice cannot mean preserving poverty in the name of global targets.

African Christian leadership requires moral sovereignty. This is not isolation. It is the capacity to receive evidence, cooperate internationally, reject manipulation, confess local sin, and formulate policy from truthful anthropology and actual conditions. It refuses both donor dependency and nationalist defensiveness. It asks not whether a policy is foreign or African, but whether it is true, just, effective, lawful, and accountable before God.

Creation Care Without Ideological Ecology

The earth belongs to the Lord ([Psalm 24:1-2](#)). Humanity receives dominion as stewardship, not permission for waste, cruelty, poisoning, and short-term extraction without regard for neighbours or future generations. Scripture celebrates soil, rain, animals, seasons, trees, rivers, and creaturely dependence. It condemns greed that consumes land and people. Christians should therefore resist the false choice between worshipping nature and abusing it.

Environmental evidence should be received honestly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that human activities, principally greenhouse-gas emissions, have unequivocally caused global warming and that climate-related impacts are already widespread (IPCC, 2023). Christians do not honour the Creator by denying well-supported evidence because some proposed policies are ideological. Scientific conclusions remain open to refinement, but ideological misuse of a finding does not make the finding false.

Environmental policy nevertheless contains moral and economic choices that science alone cannot settle. Data can estimate emissions, temperatures, risks, and projected effects. It cannot decide how burdens should be distributed, which technologies deserve priority, how much uncertainty justifies coercion, or whether a poor community should bear costs designed by wealthy states. These are questions of justice, prudence, development, and moral responsibility.

Ideological ecology appears when creation is treated as sacred while humanity is treated as a contaminant, when population becomes the principal enemy, when abortion or coercive fertility reduction is promoted as environmental responsibility, when technical models are used to close legitimate debate, or when policies impose severe costs upon the poor without proportionate benefit. Nature worship and anti-humanism are not creation care. Human beings are creatures within creation and also image-bearers entrusted with its care.

Conservative reaction can be equally idolatrous. Economic growth is not a moral absolution. Property rights do not permit poisoning a neighbour's water. National interest does not justify exporting waste or exploiting communities unable to resist. A company that invokes jobs while concealing harm treats workers and land as instruments. Biblical stewardship requires truth about costs, accountability for damage, restoration where possible, and special concern for those least able to absorb risk.

The faithful approach is evidence-based, human-centred, locally attentive, and globally responsible. It supports adaptation, early warning, resilient agriculture, clean air and water, biodiversity, reliable energy, responsible extraction, and innovation. It refuses both panic and denial. It asks whether policy protects life, distributes burdens justly, preserves room for development, and remains open to correction.

When the Church Becomes the State's Chaplain

Political captivity is most dangerous when the church believes it has gained influence. Leaders receive invitations to state ceremonies, seats on commissions, access to officials, media visibility, grants, land, security, or regulatory favour. These relationships may permit genuine service. They can also purchase silence without an explicit transaction.

The captured church blesses the ruler more readily than it corrects him. It denounces the sins of political opponents and explains the sins of allies. It prays publicly for national success while ignoring prisoners, displaced families, corruption, and manipulated courts. It turns the pulpit into a campaign platform. It treats proximity to power as evidence of spiritual importance.

The progressive version becomes chaplain to the movement. Biblical words such as justice, liberation, dignity, inclusion, and peace are repeated, but their meanings are received from ideology. The conservative version becomes chaplain to the nation. Biblical words such as order, family, freedom, authority, and heritage are repeated, but their application is governed by party loyalty. Both retain Scripture as decoration after another authority has decided the sermon.

Political prophecy deepens captivity. A minister claims revelation that a candidate will win, a government will endure, or an opponent is demonic. Congregants are pressured to vote as an act of obedience. When predictions fail, correction rarely follows. The prophecy is reinterpreted, the election is blamed, or the congregation is accused of insufficient prayer. God's name becomes insurance for political ambition.

The church has public responsibilities, but its authority differs from the state's. It proclaims the gospel, forms disciples, practises discipline, cares for the poor, reconciles enemies, teaches truth, and bears witness to the coming kingdom. It does not wield the sword. The state may punish crime. The church may exclude an unrepentant member from fellowship under biblical order. Confusing these powers produces coercive religion or politically impotent Christianity.

The church should pray for rulers without becoming their publicity department. Prayer can ask God to grant wisdom, restrain evil, protect citizens, preserve peace, and open doors for the gospel. It should not flatter. The prophets prayed and confronted. John the Baptist addressed Herod's sin and lost his head ([Mark 6:17-29](#)). Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and judgment ([Acts 24:24-27](#)).

Financial independence is not always possible, but moral independence is non-negotiable. A church may lawfully receive public funds for a transparent service if terms do not control doctrine or favour one party. It must ask whether the funding changes what may be taught, who may be served, which data must be surrendered, or which moral statements must be signed. The decisive question is whether assistance supports mission or purchases jurisdiction.

Churches should also resist partisan sorting within the body. Believers may reach different prudential judgments about taxation, welfare design, policing, trade, immigration, foreign policy, and institutional reform while sharing biblical doctrine. Not every political disagreement is a gospel issue. Pastors should identify clear moral boundaries and teach principles, but should not bind conscience where Scripture permits judgment.

The church's prophetic credibility depends upon equal standards. It must confront abortion and racism, sexual immorality and exploitation, family breakdown and domestic violence, ideological coercion and ethnic supremacy, corruption and lawlessness. Selective righteousness is political branding in biblical clothing.

Obey, Appeal, Refuse, Endure

Christian public faithfulness requires a grammar of action. The believer should obey lawful authority in ordinary matters, even when inconvenient, because order and conscience matter. Taxes may be burdensome without being theft. Regulations may be imperfect without being persecution. A democratic loss may be painful without requiring revolt.

When a law appears unjust, Christians should first understand it accurately. Rumour is not legal analysis. A headline is not a statute. The actual text, jurisdiction, exemptions, enforcement history, and available remedies matter. Churches should consult competent legal counsel, not build strategy from viral messages.

Lawful appeal is biblical. Paul used citizenship, demanded public accountability after unlawful beating, appealed to Caesar, and defended himself before rulers ([Acts 16:35-40](#); [Acts 25:1-12](#)). Christians may vote, petition, litigate, testify, publish, organise, and seek exemptions. These actions do not show lack of faith. They can be forms of stewardship.

Conscientious objection becomes necessary when compliance directly requires sin, false confession, participation in injustice, or abandonment of an essential Christian duty. Refusal should be specific. A believer should not reject all authority because one command is wrong. The midwives continued living under Pharaoh's government while refusing murder. Daniel served the empire while refusing idolatry. The apostles obeyed many laws while continuing to preach Christ.

The manner of refusal matters. Christian resistance should be truthful, nonviolent unless immediate protection of innocent life requires proportionate force under lawful moral principles, respectful toward persons, and willing to accept consequences. It should not spread fabricated claims, threaten officials, dehumanise opponents, or exploit end-time fear.

Civil disobedience is public, conscientious breach of law intended to protest injustice and appeal to a higher moral standard. Its justification depends upon seriousness of wrong, exhaustion or inadequacy of lawful remedies, proportionality, protection of others, and willingness to bear penalty. Not every policy disagreement warrants it. Performative rebellion can harm neighbours and trivialise genuine persecution.

Religious persecution also requires definition. It includes violence, imprisonment, confiscation, exclusion, forced conversion, prohibition of worship, suppression of witness, punishment for belief, and severe discriminatory restrictions. It can be state-sponsored or socially organised. It is not identical to criticism, loss of cultural privilege, or being required to follow neutral laws that do not compel sin.

The boundary can be difficult. A formally neutral law may burden one religion disproportionately. A licensing regime may appear administrative while making worship practically impossible. Professional rules may permit belief while excluding public manifestation. Sangwa (2026a) calls this the managed public square, where faith is tolerated if it remains private and non-disruptive.

Current evidence shows both the persistence and complexity of restriction. Pew Research Center's latest global study, based on 2023 data across 198 countries and territories, found 58 with high or very high government restrictions on religion. It also reported that high or very high social hostilities had risen for a third consecutive year (Majumdar & Jacobs, 2026). These indexes cannot capture every lived reality, but they warn against assuming that modernisation automatically produces religious freedom.

Christians should defend the liberty of others as well as their own. A Muslim should not be assaulted for worship. An atheist should not be forced to confess belief. A convert should be protected from family violence. A minority church should not be closed through arbitrary procedure. Religious freedom serves the gospel because the gospel does not need the sword to create faith.

When appeal fails and obedience to God carries loss, the church must prepare believers to suffer without hatred. Jesus did not promise permanent institutional safety. He promised His presence, the Spirit's witness, and eternal reward ([Matthew 10:16-33](#)). Rapture readiness is not escape from present faithfulness. It is obedience without knowing whether deliverance will come before the prison door closes.

The Strongest Case for Modern Political Order

A serious Christian argument must hear the strongest defence of the systems it critiques. The defender of political liberalism says that citizens hold incompatible religious and philosophical doctrines. If the state governs through one revelation, minorities may become subjects rather than equals. Public justification should therefore rely upon reasons all reasonable citizens can assess, while religion remains free in civil society. Rawls (1993) sought a political conception of justice capable of an overlapping consensus among competing worldviews. Habermas (2006) later acknowledged that religious voices should not be excluded from the public sphere, though he retained a requirement of translation into generally accessible reasons within formal institutions.

The defender of human rights argues that universal standards are necessary because states and cultures can oppress their own members. Appeals to sovereignty have protected genocide, torture, slavery, persecution, and violence against women. A person's dignity cannot depend entirely upon local tradition or majority approval.

The defender of structural justice argues that individual repentance does not dismantle institutions. A sincere employer cannot correct a labour market alone. A family cannot repair a segregated school system. Historical injustice shapes wealth, land, language, health, and political voice. Public policy must address patterns, not only intentions.

The defender of strong government argues that poverty, inequality, crime, disease, and environmental crisis require coordinated action. Weak states leave the poor at the mercy of private power. Markets do not automatically supply public goods. Rights without capacity become paper promises.

The defender of nationalism argues that democracy needs a people capable of trust and sacrifice. Shared language, memory, borders, and attachment sustain solidarity. Global institutions are distant and often unaccountable. National sovereignty protects communities from domination by transnational elites.

The defender of international governance argues that climate, pandemics, finance, migration, war, trafficking, and digital systems exceed national competence. Coordination is not optional. Donors also have responsibilities. They should not finance policies they judge discriminatory, corrupt, or harmful. Conditions can protect beneficiaries and taxpayers.

The defender of environmental urgency argues that delay imposes irreversible harm upon the poor and future generations. Incremental action may be inadequate. Governments must sometimes regulate conduct, redirect investment, and coordinate globally even when citizens resist costs.

The defender of politically aligned churches argues that neutrality is impossible. Silence protects the status quo. If a movement is opposing racism, poverty, abortion, persecution, or family destruction, churches should mobilise clearly rather than hide behind abstract balance.

These arguments contain substantial truths. Plural societies require restraint. Rights can protect persons against cultures and states. Structures matter. Government capacity matters. Nations can sustain responsibility. International cooperation is necessary. Donors should not be morally indifferent. Environmental delay can harm the vulnerable. Churches should not use neutrality as cowardice.

The Christian answer is not rejection of every concern. It is refusal of totalisation. Public reason becomes exclusionary when secular assumptions are treated as neutral while theological reasoning must translate or disappear. Universal rights become imperial when contested anthropologies are imposed without meaningful consent or conscience protection. Structural analysis becomes unjust when group categories replace evidence and personal responsibility. Strong government becomes tyranny when coordination has no limit. National solidarity becomes idolatry when nation becomes sacred. Global cooperation becomes domination when distant institutions cannot be

corrected by those they govern. Environmental policy becomes anti-human when people become variables. Church engagement becomes captivity when a movement defines the gospel.

The deepest limitation is theological. Every political system is administered by fallen people and inhabited by fallen citizens. Institutions can restrain sin, redirect incentives, and protect victims. They cannot create the new heart promised in the new covenant ([Ezekiel 36:25-27](#)). Political prudence is necessary precisely because political salvation is impossible.

Why No Earthly Power Can Save

Political religion fails first in its doctrine of humanity. It imagines that evil can be isolated in the wrong class, identity, institution, nation, party, or information environment. Scripture locates sin within every heart and every structure formed by sinful hearts. This does not make all actors equally guilty. It prevents any group from claiming moral innocence by location alone.

It fails in its doctrine of truth. Ideology tends to protect the narrative that justifies power. Contrary evidence becomes misinformation, reaction, betrayal, or internalised oppression. Biblical truth judges the church's preferred story as readily as its enemy's. God cannot be recruited into propaganda.

It fails in its doctrine of justice. Justice without transcendence eventually depends upon will, consensus, procedure, or institutional authority. These may help identify public rules, but they cannot make cruelty righteous. The law requires a moral horizon it did not create.

It fails in its doctrine of salvation. Politics can change conditions. It cannot atone. A revolution may redistribute property while hatred remains. A nationalist victory may restore pride while idolatry deepens. A rights judgment may secure recognition while guilt before God remains. A development programme may extend life while death still comes.

It fails in its eschatology. Every political order passes. Empires become ruins. Constitutions are amended. parties divide. Movements forget their founders. Courts reverse doctrine. Nations rise and fall. The person who gives the state ultimate hope gives eternity to what cannot survive a century.

[Psalm 146](#) is therefore not political pessimism. It redirects hope. The Lord executes justice, feeds, frees, opens eyes, raises the oppressed, watches over the foreigner, and sustains the vulnerable ([Psalm 146:1-10](#)). Christians participate in these goods because God acts and commands, not because they expect policy to become providence.

The kingdom of Christ is not apolitical. Jesus is Lord of rulers, Judge of nations, defender of the weak, and King whose justice will fill the earth. His kingdom is not established by sinful coercion. He conquered through the cross, gathers a people by the gospel, rules the church by His Word and Spirit, and will return personally to judge and reign. Political action is penultimate because His kingdom is ultimate.

Consequences of Political Captivity

When politics becomes religion, doctrine is reorganised. Sin becomes social location, misinformation, privilege, exclusion, disloyalty, or backwardness. Salvation becomes awareness, activism, national recovery, policy compliance, election victory, development, or inclusion. Repentance becomes public alignment. Sanctification becomes ideological education. Apostasy becomes dissent.

The church then divides according to party and identity. Believers who share one Lord cease to recognise one another because they voted differently. Sermons become predictable. Pastors fear donors, officials, activists, or online audiences. Mission is replaced by mobilisation. The unconverted hear political anger where they should hear the call to reconciliation with God.

Families suffer when political identity governs affection. Parents and children treat disagreement as betrayal. Marriages are strained by media ecosystems that reward outrage. Ethnic and national stories are passed to children without repentance for ancestral wrongs or gratitude for neighbours outside the group.

Victims also suffer. Ideological systems often use wounded people as symbols. Their stories are selected, edited, and deployed. If a victim's experience no longer serves the movement, the movement may abandon the person. Biblical care refuses to turn suffering into political capital.

Public institutions lose trust when they conceal moral assumptions behind technical language. Citizens who discover one distortion may begin to distrust every expert. This creates fertile ground for demagogues and conspiracy entrepreneurs. Institutional dishonesty and reckless counter-narratives feed one another.

The eternal consequence is most severe. Political idolatry directs worship away from God. A person may gain influence, belonging, moral approval, and a sense of purpose while remaining unreconciled to the Creator. Christ asks what it profits a person to gain the whole world and lose his life ([Mark 8:34-38](#)). The question applies to movements as well as individuals.

Repentance in the Public Square

Rulers must repent of treating authority as ownership. Public office is stewardship. Corruption is not merely inefficiency. It is theft from neighbours and contempt for God. Leaders should disclose conflicts, submit to lawful scrutiny, protect opponents, punish wrongdoing impartially, and leave institutions stronger than personal rule.

Judges and lawmakers must repent of judicial and legislative pride. Authority to interpret law is not authority to rewrite creation. They should reason transparently, distinguish law from personal ideology, protect conscience, and remember that every judgment will be judged.

Civil servants, police officers, soldiers, diplomats, and development professionals must refuse the excuse of role. "I followed policy" does not cleanse injustice. They should obey lawful command, document abuse, protect the vulnerable, resist corruption, and seek counsel when conscience is threatened.

Donors, international organisations, corporations, and NGOs must repent where assistance has become domination. Transparency should include moral assumptions, not only budgets. Partnership should preserve local agency. Conditions should be proportionate to programme purpose. Protection from violence should not be converted into compulsory affirmation.

African leaders must resist unjust external pressure without using sovereignty as a shield for domestic sin. They should strengthen courts, protect religious liberty, confront ethnic favouritism, steward resources, and negotiate internationally from evidence and moral clarity rather than dependency or pride.

Progressive activists must repent where righteous concern has become ideological certainty, collective vengeance, false accusation, contempt for ordinary people, or refusal of forgiveness. The oppressed need justice, not a new priesthood that requires permanent grievance.

Conservatives must repent where defence of order has become nationalism, racial or ethnic pride, authoritarian longing, cruelty toward migrants, indifference to poverty, or excusing immoral leaders. Traditional morality cannot be defended through lies and become Christian.

Citizens must repent of political hatred, slander, apathy, bribery, vote-selling, violence, and addiction to outrage. Forwarding an unverified claim is not discernment. Dehumanising opponents is not courage. Refusing every public duty because politics is corrupt leaves neighbours to the corrupt.

Pastors must renounce electoral prophecy, paid endorsement, campaign pulpits, partisan discipline, and selective preaching. They should teach believers how to think biblically about authority, rights, justice, work, citizenship, and suffering. They should prepare congregations for conscientious pressure before the crisis arrives.

Churches captured by funding or political access should disclose relationships, review agreements, restore independent governance, and withdraw from terms that purchase silence. Repentance may cost property, grants, recognition, or status. Better a smaller lamp filled with oil than a celebrated institution whose light belongs to the state.

Victims of political and institutional abuse should hear the gospel's tenderness. Your suffering is not imaginary because a movement exaggerated other claims. You are not required to call evil good. Justice, protection, lament,

legal remedy, pastoral care, and community matter. Yet no wound must become your final name. Christ receives the crushed without making resentment their saviour.

The politically exhausted should not surrender to cynicism. Cynicism appears wise because it expects betrayal. It becomes another form of pride when it refuses service, prayer, and hope. God remains active when elections disappoint and institutions fail. Faithfulness is not measured only by visible victory.

The Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

The biblical alternative begins with worship. God is sovereign. Jesus Christ is Lord. Scripture judges every ideology. The Holy Spirit forms a people whose public life cannot be reduced to national, racial, economic, or partisan identity. The church is an embassy of the coming kingdom, not a pressure group seeking baptism by the state.

This kingdom produces public virtues. Truthfulness refuses propaganda from allies and enemies. Justice hears evidence and protects the weak. Mercy does not abolish judgment. Forgiveness does not erase restitution. Authority serves. Freedom accepts moral form. Conscience stands under God rather than under appetite. Citizenship becomes neighbour-love.

Christians should participate according to calling and opportunity. Some will serve in government, law, diplomacy, education, business, journalism, advocacy, development, or international institutions. Others will serve families, churches, local communities, trades, farms, and neighbourhood associations. No vocation is spiritually pure by location. Every vocation requires competence, accountability, prayer, and willingness to refuse advancement purchased by compromise.

Christian public reasoning should be explicitly biblical and publicly intelligible. Believers need not hide the source of conviction, nor should they assume that quoting Scripture alone settles policy for citizens who do not accept its authority. They can explain how biblical anthropology connects with evidence, human experience, institutional design, and common goods. Translation should be an act of love, not surrender of revelation.

The church should recover subsidiarity without using it to protect local abuse. Families should perform family duties. Churches should perform ecclesial duties. Local communities should address problems they can govern. States should act where justice, scale, or coordination requires. International institutions should address genuinely transnational matters. Higher authority should support, not consume, lower communities.

Rights should be joined to duties. Freedom of religion should include responsibility for peace and truth. Property should include stewardship. Speech should include evidence. Parental authority should include protection. Political participation should include acceptance of lawful loss. Development should include local responsibility. Environmental care should include human flourishing.

Justice should be restorative where possible and punitive where necessary. Victims deserve protection and truthful recognition. Offenders should face proportionate consequence. Communities should repair structures that perpetuate wrong. Reconciliation must not be demanded before truth, nor postponed forever after repentance.

The church should cultivate political discipleship. Believers need more than election-season sermons. They need biblical teaching on power, law, work, money, race, ethnicity, family, nation, conscience, persecution, evidence, and hope. They should learn to read legislation, verify claims, understand institutions, listen to opponents, and distinguish principle from prudence.

The church should also practise an alternative politics. In a divided society, believers from different peoples eat at one table. The wealthy bear burdens of the poor. Former enemies forgive. Leaders wash feet. Truth is confessed. Discipline applies across status. The stranger is welcomed. Children and elderly persons are honoured. This does not replace public policy. It demonstrates that another kingdom has already entered history.

The Last Second Before Midnight

The urgency of the hour must not become a market for panic. Jesus warned against deception and commanded watchfulness ([Matthew 24:4-14](#)). Watchfulness is not the frantic identification of every treaty, institution, or ruler with a final prophetic figure. It is sustained faithfulness when deception, pressure, and lawlessness increase.

Revelation shows that political and economic power can unite around worship, exclusion, and persecution. It also shows the Lamb standing victorious. The saints overcome not by controlling the empire but by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives to the point of death ([Revelation 12:10-11](#)).

The last second before midnight is therefore a moral description, not a date-setting formula. The Bride prepares through repentance, truth, holiness, love, endurance, and longing for the Bridegroom. A church obsessed with prophetic villains while practising political hatred is not ready. A church that predicts the beast but worships a party has already failed the test. A church that fears losing legal status more than losing truth has no oil to spare.

Political systems promise security, prosperity, equality, dignity, peace, recognition, and permanence. Some can deliver limited measures of these goods. None can cancel death. None can erase guilt. None can raise the body. None can open the books of judgment and justify the sinner.

Jesus Christ alone bears the government without corruption ([Isaiah 9:6-7](#)). He does not win authority through manipulation. He receives the kingdom from the Father, conquers through sacrifice, judges with perfect knowledge, and defends the poor without partiality. His throne needs no propaganda because truth proceeds from Him. His kingdom needs no rigged election because every knee will bow ([Philippians 2:9-11](#)).

To the ruler: your term will end, even if no constitution removes you. Repent while mercy is offered.

To the activist: justice is holy, but your movement is not. Bring its methods and your anger beneath Christ.

To the nationalist: love your country, but do not give it the worship that belongs to the Lamb.

To the global official: coordinate what serves life, but do not mistake institutional reach for moral omniscience.

To the donor: give without buying conscience.

To the pastor: do not sell the Bride for access to Caesar.

To the citizen: do not hide apathy beneath spiritual language. Serve, pray, tell the truth, protect your neighbour, and refuse evil.

To the persecuted believer: the state may take employment, property, liberty, and life. It cannot erase your name from the Lamb's book.

To the unconverted: no political identity will stand in the final judgment. Republican, democrat, monarchist, nationalist, socialist, liberal, conservative, activist, official, ruler, and subject must all be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Repent and believe the gospel.

Conclusion: When Power Learns to See

Chapter 18 showed how institutions train perception. This chapter has shown how trained perception becomes law, policy, rights language, national myth, development practice, and global pressure. Political authority is a gift when it serves justice beneath God. It becomes religion when it claims the power to define the person, distribute moral innocence, compel conscience, and save the future.

The faithful response is not political withdrawal or ideological capture. It is government under God, rights joined to duties, justice disciplined by truth, nations denied worship, international cooperation bounded by accountability, development restored to service, and the church freed to speak to every ruler and movement without belonging to any of them.

Yet the machinery of power is changing. Political and corporate authority increasingly operates through digital systems that do not merely communicate decisions. They observe, classify, predict, rank, recommend, reward, exclude, and shape behaviour. A policy that once required a visible official can now be embedded in an algorithm. A

contested moral category can become a field in a database. A reputational judgment can become automated denial. A synthetic voice can speak with borrowed authority.

The next chapter therefore moves from political religion to the infrastructures through which managed power is becoming intimate, continuous, and difficult to see. Chapter 20 examines artificial intelligence, digital Christianity, surveillance, algorithms, synthetic media, and the delegation of judgment to machines. The crown has not only learned to command. It is learning to watch.

References

- African Union. (1981). *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>
- Augustine. (1998). *The city of God against the pagans* (R. W. Dyson, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published ca. 426)
- Bellah, R. N. (2005). Civil religion in America. *Daedalus*, 134(4), 40-55. <https://doi.org/10.1162/001152605774431464> (Original work published 1967)
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, Article 8. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Ferguson, J. (1994). *The anti-politics machine: Development, depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a post-socialist age. *New Left Review*, 1(212), 68-93. <https://doi.org/10.64590/4rl>
- Gentile, E. (2006). *Politics as religion*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400827213>
- Glendon, M. A. (1991). *Rights talk: The impoverishment of political discourse*. Free Press.
- Glendon, M. A. (2001). *A world made new: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Random House.
- Gorski, P. S., & Perry, S. L. (2022). *The flag and the cross: White Christian nationalism and the threat to American democracy*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197618684.001.0001>
- Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the public sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>
- Inter-American Court of Human Rights. (2017). *Gender identity, and equality and non-discrimination of same-sex couples: Advisory Opinion OC-24/17 of November 24, 2017*. https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_24_eng.pdf
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Climate change 2023: Synthesis report* (H. Lee & J. Romero, Eds.). <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>
- International IDEA. (2025). *The global state of democracy 2025: Democracy on the move*. <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2025.53>
- Majumdar, S., & Jacobs, V. (2026). *More countries had elevated levels of social hostilities involving religion in 2023*. Pew Research Center. <https://doi.org/10.58094/cv0d-0488>
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1978). Manifesto of the Communist Party. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels reader* (2nd ed., pp. 469-500). W. W. Norton. (Original work published 1848)
- Mold, A., & Zimmermann, F. (2008). A farewell to policy conditionality? *OECD Development Centre Policy Insights*, 74. <https://doi.org/10.1787/238354283445>
- Moyn, S. (2010). *The last utopia: Human rights in history*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- O'Donovan, O. (1996). *The desire of the nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2009). *Policy ownership and aid conditionality in the light of the financial crisis*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264075528-en>
- Rawls, J. (1993). *Political liberalism*. Columbia University Press.
- Sangwa, S. (2024a, July 1). *Should a Christian engage in politics?* Open Christian Education. <https://learn.openchristian.education/blog/sangwa/Christian-politicians>
- Sangwa, S. (2024b, June 9). *Should a Christian embrace or resist globalization?* Open Christian Education. <https://learn.openchristian.education/blog/sangwa/Christians-and-globalization>
- Sangwa, S. (2025a). Faith, society, and the 21st century: A biblical worldview analysis of global trends (2000-2025). *Open Journal of Stigmatized Knowledge & Suppressed Discourses*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.65655/gzpsrb63>
- Sangwa, S. (2025b). Regulating the sacred? A critical examination of faith-based organization registration in Rwanda: Between religious freedom and state control. *Open Journal of Business Theology*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.65655/4rw37w57>
- Sangwa, S. (2025c). Exporting Christian nationalism: Transnational power, religious polarisation, and the instrumentalisation of the church. *Open Journal of Science, Philosophy & Theology*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.65655/nw5xsr95>
- Sangwa, S. (2026a, July 6). *The new pressure to privatize Christ: Persecution, religious freedom, and the managed public square*. Open Christian Education. <https://learn.openchristian.education/blog/sangwa/the-new-pressure-to-privatize-christ-persecution-religious-freedom-and-the-managed-public-square>

- Sangwa, S. (2026b). Education, media, entertainment, and the secular catechesis of society. In P. Mutabazi (Ed.), *The gospel according to the age: Exposing modern deceptions, counterfeit Christianity, and the church's captivity to the spirit of the age* (Chapter 18). Open Christian Press.
- Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. Yale University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Thoreson, R. R. (2016). Yogyakarta Principles. In A. Wong, M. Wickramasinghe, R. Hoogland, & N. A. Naples (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies*. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss452>
- United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- United Nations. (1966). *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>
- United Nations. (2024). *Pact for the Future* (A/RES/79/1). <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact-for-the-future-adopted.pdf>
- United Nations Human Rights Committee. (1993). *General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of thought, conscience or religion)* (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4). <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1993/en/38547>
- Waldron, J. (2012). *Dignity, rank, and rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.
- Whitehead, A. L., & Perry, S. L. (2020). *Taking America back for God: Christian nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190057886.001.0001>
- Wolterstorff, N. (2008). *Justice: Rights and wrongs*. Princeton University Press.
- World Bank. (n.d.). *Development policy financing*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/what-we-do/products-and-services/financing-instruments/development-policy-financing>
- World Bank. (2023, August 8). *World Bank Group statement on Uganda*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2023/08/08/world-bank-group-statement-on-uganda>
- World Bank. (2026, June 4). *World Bank Group launches ten-year strategy to drive jobs and prosperity in Uganda*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2026/06/04/world-bank-group-launches-ten-year-strategy-to-drive-jobs-and-prosperity-in-uganda>
- World Meteorological Organization. (2026). *State of the climate in Africa 2025*. <https://wmo.int/resources/publication-series/state-of-climate-africa/state-of-climate-africa-2025>
- Young, I. M. (2011). *Responsibility for justice*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195392388.001.0001>