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The Catholic Church's Pastoral Communications and Their Implications for Church-State Relations in Post-Colonial Zambia (1964-2026)

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Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has historically played a significant role in shaping political, economic, and social discourse in Zambia, yet the evolution of its relationship with the State across successive political regimes requires further systematic examination. This study traces the historical trajectory of RCC–state relations in Zambia from independence in 1964 to 2026 through pastoral letters issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Zambia on matters of national concern. It aims to analyze the development and dynamics of RCC–state relations, examine the implications of pastoral communication for these relations, and propose a communication framework for reducing institutional tension. A qualitative research approach was employed, drawing on literature review, document analysis, and narrative analysis, with the data subsequently analyzed thematically. Guided by political-institutional transformation theory, the study examines changes in church–state relations across political transitions, particularly from the United National Independence Party (UNIP) era to the current United Party for National Development (UPND) administration. The findings reveal that pastoral statements on the state of the nation have a dual

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implication: they enable the RCC to advocate for social justice and freedoms and to provide institutional checks and balances, while simultaneously contributing to tensions and widening the relational gap between the Church and the State. The study concludes that pastoral communication remains an influential mechanism through which the RCC engages with governance and national development, but its effectiveness depends on communication structures capable of balancing prophetic advocacy with constructive institutional engagement. Accordingly, the study recommends the re-evaluation and adoption of communication structures that foster cooperation, sustained dialogue, and mutual understanding in the interests of the Zambian people and national development. This study contributes to the literature on church–state relations by providing a historically grounded analysis of pastoral communication in Zambia and by proposing a framework for strengthening sustainable dialogue between religious and state institutions.

Keywords: Church–State Relations; Dialogue; Pastoral Communication; Political Regime Change; Zambia

Introduction

Over the years, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has established checks and balances in state affairs in the Republic of Zambia. Since the first missionaries, the RCC has been actively involved in the country's political, economic, and social affairs. This engagement has taken various forms, including altar sermons, press conferences, and official communications such as pastoral letters and statements. However, the State has not always welcomed these communications positively. The church, however, believes that it is within its pastoral mandate to make its message relevant in Africa. Therefore, it must be grounded in African reality to offer judgment and interpretation of the social contexts in which ordinary people strive for dignity in their livelihoods. Cheyeka (1999) argues that the Catholic Church distinctively contributed to the struggle for justice, citing the church's efforts for justice during the Kaunda regime, indicating that the church has always engaged itself in issues of justice. Balancing these needs is the Church's responsibility, ensuring that society is ordered fairly and that the poor and less privileged are not left behind. Moreover, Iheanacho (2022) notes that the bishops' push for good governance and a fairer Africa aligns with Pope Francis' global vision for a just world.

The history of post-colonial Zambia urgently requires fresh scholarly attention, since the United National Independence Party (UNIP), the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy

(MMD), Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND), regarding the complex interactions between religious bodies such as the RCC and political groups (Macola 2008). Since the 1970s, the growth of charismatic movements in Zambia has revealed the evolving role of churches in political affairs, influencing how the state interacts with various denominations, like the RCC. The RCC is a significant religious body representing Zambian Christians, asserting influence in public matters and affecting state policy decisions (Cheyeka, 1999; 2008). Zambia is recognised as a Christian nation according to its 1996 constitution, while permitting the practice of other religions. Despite this development, uncertainty remains regarding the relationship between Church and State, which does not correspond to a fixed model of church-state relations.

RCC-state relationship in Zambia

Religious groups in Zambia have shaped the country's Constitution since it gained independence in 1964. These groups have contributed to the country's Constitution-making process, making substantial contributions to its development (Hinfelaar, 2011). During Kenneth Kaunda's One-Party State, churches effectively gathered individuals to resist increasing 'authoritarianism', as they were among the few organised groups able to mobilise without facing repercussions from the government. After Zambia was declared a Christian nation by President Frederick Chiluba, Christianity became more prominent in the country's governance (Hinfelaar, 2011).

Perceived Roles of the Church

Zambians, the majority of whom are Christian, believe that the Church is a trustworthy institution whose influence has had a positive impact on Zambia in the past, and they rely on the Church for their well-being (Kaunda and Hinfelaar, 2020). Among many other duties, the RCC has nurtured democracy in Zambia, advocating for civic education and voter mobilisation as a moral duty for Christians (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024). Historical research illustrates the Church's influence on political development. This provides legitimacy and acts as a check on governmental power, particularly through the lens of Zambia's self-identified Christian nation status (Munshya 2021). Evidence shows that faith-based organisations led by the Catholic bishops have enhanced democratic participation and accountability by creating platforms for citizens to engage politically (Tshimpaka and Nshimbi, 2022). The mission of the RCC, exemplified by figures like James Spaita, has

contributed to social justice and educational reform. This underscores its active role in shaping public discourse and policy (Mwale 2013).

Political-Institutional Theory of Transformation

Throughout history, the relationship between the RCC and the State of Zambia has fluctuated, especially evident in pastoral statements during and after regime changes. This scenario can be identified in the political-institutional theory of the transformation of relations between the State and the Church. This theory allows us to reflect on why the relationship between state and church changes, as well as the signs of change and the factors that lead to change in the church-state relationship. Political and institutional theories of church-state change posit changing church-state relations over time. Church-state relations in Zambia have been dynamic throughout the changing regimes, each bringing different zeal, frequency and forte of pastoral communication from the church. This signifies that the regime change is a major factor in the tone and frequency of the pastoral statements. Meyer and Rowan (1977), Meyer and Minkoff (2004) and Melissa Wilde (2007) argued that political and institutional factors such as changes in political power, social norms and legal frameworks have a significant impact on this relationship. These factors effectively lead to changes in the relationship between state and church, resulting in a shift from a close relationship to a more distant one. This is evident in Zambia, during periods of elections, the release of pastoral letters and statements has characterised constitutional amendments.

Changes in structural forces create opportunities for individuals to reassess the relationship between church and state. However, this theory does not suggest that these changes will have uniform results everywhere; rather, the outcomes of these changes will vary depending on the political conflicts that arise and the institutional environment in which they occur. The outcome of these conflicts will depend on the strength of political groups and coalitions, as well as the openness of the institutional environment. Even if all other factors are the same, differences in the timing and sequence of political battles can lead to different outcomes. Wilde (2007) argues that rather than seeking a single explanation for these changes, it is important to consider the structural forces at play and the political and coalitional issues involved, as well as limits imposed by institutional constraints on political action and policy development.

A multidimensional approach to understanding church-state relations requires considering each given scenario and circumstance. Structural forces initiate a transformation

in church-state relations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Significant social transformations can occur when changes occur in the religious composition of society, like governance, the economic system, or general demography, making the existing regime no longer suitable for new conditions. The church-state relationship can lead to numerous conflicts that may create divisions among different groups of people (Meyer and Rowan 1977). These conflicts can arise between religious people and non-religious people, within the same religious group or even between different religious groups. The nature of these conflicts can differ, often centring on preserving one group's cultural and political dominance over another. The nature of this relationship is determined by the legislature and government policies and regulations that prioritise implementation and the relationship between government actions. To better understand these conflicts, the main points of disagreement that prevail at any given time and the issues of the parties involved must be identified.

The study examines the historical development of the relationship between the RCC and the state in Zambia. It analyses the RCC-state relations exhibited in pastoral letters and statements, and government responses, in the post-colonial era from 1964 to 2026. It analyses the pastoral statements issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference and their implications on the RCC-state relationship. The study proposes a communication framework for effective communication between the church and the state. This study contributes to the identification of communication structures that promote cooperation between the RCC and the state, thereby promoting national development and dialogue. The study identifies and attempts to bridge communication gaps in pastoral communication, ensuring a sustainable relationship between church and state for national development and makes recommendations to address the gaps created by this media communication.

Methods

A qualitative research approach was employed, and literature and document reviews were used to collect data. The study examined some selected ZCCB Pastoral letters and statements since the UNIP regime, which reflected on the 'State of the Nation', newspaper articles and literature that reported on the state-church relationship between the RCC and regimes that have ruled Zambia since pre-colonial times, as sources of document data. The research explored the relationship between church and state in Zambia by combining academic articles and methods of information retrieval. Scholarly articles contributed

empirical data to this investigation. This study achieved a comprehensive analysis by employing various retrieval techniques across multiple sources and databases like Semantic Scholar, JSTOR and Google Scholar, performing keyword searches, and conducting reference mining. The reliability of the data was confirmed by triangulation techniques of data collection. The range of data sources and retrieval methods offered a credible examination of state-church relations within the pastoral communication. The data gathered for this research were analysed to uncover recurring patterns and narratives that might reveal deeper insights, often overlooked. This study investigated scholarly articles and documents through a three-phase analytical process. In the first phase, sentiment analysis was utilised to understand the emotions and tones expressed in the texts that revealed conflicts between the church and state. The second phase focused on text mining, aimed at identifying themes and trends present within the texts. The third phase involved organising the findings through text categorisation to group similar ideas together.

RCC and Political Development in Zambia

Several literature materials have indicated how RCC has shaped Zambian politics. RCC has displayed both apolitical and political characteristics, and its leadership has considerably influenced the country's political landscape and governance. It has used many tools for political influence, such as education, health and the media. The relationship between the state and the church has been a complex and evolving one.

Political Role of the RCC

The RCC significantly affected Zambia's political development from 1890 to 1964 by providing education and advocating for human rights, impacting national sovereignty despite earlier perceptions of its alignment with the colonial regime (Mwale, 2013; Hinfelaar, 2008). Political accountability and civic education have historically been promoted in Zambia by the RCC, aligning its teachings with democratic principles (Sperber and Wietzel 2024). Interestingly, the church-state relations in Zambia reflect a unique model that contrasts with European paradigms, focusing on how churches coexist with the state rather than vying for control (Munshya, 2021). The RCC has maintained its mission and actively expanded its role in Zambia, particularly in education.

Apolitical Versus Political Involvement

Despite claims of being apolitical, the Church has engaged in political matters, particularly during the one-party state era (Hinfelaar, 2008). Evidently, the Catholic bishops in Zambia have acted as influential figures advocating for democratic participation and accountability, nurturing civic education and mobilisation among citizens (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024; Tshimpaka and Nshimbi, 2022). Like other regions in sub-Saharan Africa, Zambian bishops have promoted the need for responsible governance, criticised leadership failures, and reinforced the Church's prophetic mission in the socio-political landscape. Despite its influence, there is a growing dominance of civil law over ecclesiastical law worldwide, representing a shift in the power balance between civil and ecclesiastical law, a loss of control over essential aspects of governance by the Church in various countries where it once dominated. This calls the church to Catholic leadership to give more vigorous attention and respect to often overlooked minorities and address and recognise novel activism, writings and challenges.

Leadership Influence

Priests and bishops defined the Church's political stance during Zambia's first and second republics. They often navigated conflicts with the state (Hinfelaar, 2008). The RCC has historically contributed to Zambia's political development and national independence through education and advocacy for human rights (Mwale 2013; Hinfelaar, 2008). Through its involvement in politics, the Church has evolved, which has reflected a shift from initial support of colonial governance to a more active stance advocating for democracy and human rights (Mwale, 2013; Phiri, 1999). Notable figures within the RCC, such as Archbishops Mutale and Milingo, shaped the church's political influence during Zambia's one-party state era (Hinfelaar, 2008). The relationship between state and church also includes internal conflicts within the Church, which have been utilised by state mechanisms indicative of the intertwining of religious authority and state power (Hinfelaar, 2008). Catholic bishops in Zambia have positioned themselves as key advocates for democracy. This emphasises the conviction that political participation and promoting voter mobilisation efforts are a Christian duty (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024). Catholic bishops have been pivotal in nurturing democratic engagement and advocating citizens' rights, serving as intermediaries in the relationship between the populace and the state (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024; Tshimpaka and Nshimbi, 2022).

Church-State Dynamics

During Zambia's one-party state era, the RCC's leaders shaped political discourse and addressed internal and external challenges within the Church itself (Hinfelaar, 2008). The state's evolving religious importance was clear as the RCC modified its political involvement because of Zambia's changing governance and social environments (Smith, 1999; Phiri, 1999). For instance, Zambia's designation as a "Christian nation" influenced its political landscape, where Christianity was often leveraged for political gain, complicating the church's role as an independent moral authority (Munshya, 2021; Zgambo, 2024). Despite contributing to national identity, the Church faces the challenge of maintaining its prophetic mission while navigating political pressures and the potential misuse of its teachings for state advantage (Iheanacho 2022; Zgambo, 2024).

Following Zambia's declaration as a Christian nation, Christianity emerged as a powerful force influencing political agendas and public policymaking (Cheyeka, 2018; Zgambo, 2024). While in the post-independence era, Christianity has continued to wield significant influence in the political sphere. A focal moment came in 1991 when President Frederick Chiluba proclaimed Zambia a "Christian Nation," a declaration that stirred both enthusiasm and controversy within the country (Gifford 1998). This assertion has, however, brought about its own set of challenges for the Church, giving rise to internal divisions and placing it under scrutiny whenever engaged in discussions about national issues (Magasu, Lubbungu and Zazimba, 2021). The intertwining of church-state rapport has led to Christianity being utilised as a political weapon, raising concerns about its impact on individual freedoms and democratic practices (Zgambo, 2024). There is limited governmental pursuit of covenantal pluralism, as the notion "Christian nation" solidifies the Church's role in state dynamics and governance (Haynes 2024).

Education as a Political Tool

Historically, the Church's efforts have been concentrated primarily on providing quality primary and secondary education, but in a significant development, it established the Zambia Catholic University. This initiative demonstrates the Church's dedication to advancing higher education as a vital vehicle for promoting integral development and fulfilling its broader mission within society (Mwale and Simuchimba, 2018). This strategic expansion not only underscores the changing dynamics of the RCC's engagement with

Zambian society but also its enduring commitment to nurturing the minds and spirits of the population over the past 125 years.

Carmody (2003) noted how Catholic education in Zambia has been connected to political strategies, influencing Zambian society and government from the colonial period and after independence. The RCC in Zambia has emphasised its mission through education, influencing public discourse and social justice efforts in collaboration with local clergy (Mwale, 2013). The RCC has guided Zambia's political landscape and educational framework throughout the nation's history. Initially, during the colonial era, the Church largely aligned itself with the prevailing colonial authorities, offering support to the colonial regime. However, as the tides of public sentiment began to shift, the Church gradually repositioned itself as a proponent of independence, advocating for the rights and aspirations of the Zambian people (Mwale, 2013). However, the Church, in its moral guidance, addresses socio-political injustices and promotes the common good. Furthermore, the church challenges political leaders and advocates for human rights, aligning closely with broader Catholic social teachings (Iheanacho, 2022). RCC encourages ordinary citizens to demand governmental accountability and engage in political processes, thus shaping domestic politics in Zambia (Tshimpaka and Nshimbi, 2022).

Pastoral Statements and the Church-State Relationship

The RCC in Zambia communicates with the government through sermons, round-table discussions and pastoral statements. Of these three communications, the pastoral statements are the most used. This type of communication has exhibited two results in the state church-relationship: on one hand, as a means of checks and balances, and on the other hand, as a source of tension between them.

A Brief Glimpse into the Pre-colonial Era

The RCC shaped Zambia's political landscape from 1890 to 1964, making significant contributions to the nation's quest for sovereignty through its efforts in education, healthcare services, and the dissemination of pastoral letters. The historical relationship between the RCC and the state in pre-colonial Zambia evolved significantly over time. Christianity shaped the nation's political landscape and spiritual life. By the late 20th century, roughly 75% of the Zambian population identified as Christian (Smith, 1999). Towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, European mission churches served as conduits for expanding colonial

rule, aiding the spread of Christianity and training many African leaders who later championed nationalist movements (Smith, 1999). As the colonial era progressed, the influence of Christianity became more pronounced. Various denominations, including Protestant groups, the RCC, and African Initiated Churches, navigated the challenges of colonial rule and the emergence of post-colonial states in different ways (Smith, 1999; Phiri, 1999; Mwale, 2013). This interaction between Christianity and the state has left a lasting mark on Zambia's historical narrative.

During the colonial period, churches contributed to the country's development by expanding operations and establishing schools and hospitals. Cecil Rhodes invited churches to perform missionary work and provided them with large tracts of land. The government and the church cooperated to deliver education and healthcare to local people. In 1922, the general assembly of missionaries declared taxes on Africans excessive and urged the government to reduce them. Bishop May wrote to the colonial government advocating for fair representation of indigenous interests regarding land boundaries. These actions raised awareness and fought for the rights of oppressed peoples. Following labour disputes in the mines, tensions arose between the Missionary Conference and the colonial government, culminating in a missionary conference in Ndola that sparked conflict between the church and the state (Smith, 1999; Phiri, 1999). By 1924, nearly all of Northern Rhodesia had mission centres, facilitating the spread of these services (Smith, 1999; Phiri, 1999). The church demonstrated a commitment to providing services and improving living standards. Missionary centres protected the rights of oppressed indigenous peoples before independence. The colonial government and the church had disagreements, including excessive taxation of Africans and unfair land distribution. In 1958, the Conference of Bishops issued a statement denouncing the political system for failing to promote the rights of individuals, regardless of race or affiliation.

Post-Colonial Relationship

The RCC has played a significant role in Zambia's political history, issuing pastoral statements during key moments under different administrations: the UNIP, MMD, PF, and UPND regimes. These statements often addressed pressing issues of the time and received varied responses based on their tone and perspective.

The UNIP Regime 1964-1991

Following Zambia's independence in 1964, the church's influence in politics became increasingly prominent. During the UNIP era, Christianity became deeply entrenched in Zambian society, where leaders educated in mission schools recognised the crucial support the Church provided in their political endeavours (Mwale, 2013). Upon independence in 1964, the RCC managed two-thirds of secondary schools and a higher proportion of primary schools. Nationalists acknowledged the immense contributions of the churches to education, healthcare, and welfare (Smith, 1999; Phiri, 1999). After independence, the Church remained actively involved in politics, notably through Christian media (Gifford 1998). The RCC's educational mission in Zambia began earnestly in 1891 when the White Fathers (Society of the Missionaries of Africa) established foundational schools, setting the stage for a developing relationship with the government (Carmody 2002). To combat political injustice, Kaunda and other nationalists adopted Christianity as their ideological foundation. The years immediately after 1964 were marked by relatively peaceful coexistence between the government and religious organisations, especially the RCC. Despite differences on issues like primary school transfers, abortion laws, and scientific socialism, the RCC maintained a satisfactory working relationship with the new government. However, in 1972, the situation changed after the UNIP government declared Zambia a one-party state (Hinfelaar, 2004; Cheyeka, 1999). Some Christian leaders had close ties to the ruling regime, with figures like Archbishop Elias Mutale playing key roles, which was indicative of the close relationship between church and state (Hinfelaar, 2004; Cheyeka, 1999).

During the Second Republic (1972-1991), the Zambian government introduced measures to reduce birth rates, including liberal abortion laws and family planning services. The RCC opposed these measures, expressing concern that they could lead to moral decline and regretting the legitimisation of ending human life for material reasons (Zgambo, 2013). In 1978, the government attempted to introduce Marxism's ideology into the education system, which all churches opposed. The churches successfully fought against this decision, leading to its abandonment. The Bishops' Conference of Zambia, Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), the Christian Council of Zambia (CCZ), and the Missionary Association of Zambia (MAZ) issued a joint statement opposing the state's project of scientific socialism, warning that its introduction could threaten the freedoms guaranteed by Zambia's constitution. They encouraged their members to engage in politics and oppose oppressive systems like Marxism. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Church became more involved

in national politics (Phiri, 1999:340). The Church spoke out against national crises, such as the food riots of April 1987 and June 1990, caused by economic hardship. In July 1990, the Catholic bishops issued a significant pastoral statement entitled "Economics, Politics and Justice," criticising the growing gap between the rich and poor and questioning the ruling party's self-proclaimed "supreme power." The bishops contended that it was the people, not the parties, who should claim sovereignty (Gundani 2018). Consequently, the one-party state faced criticism since 1964. The bishops' calls for justice supported the democratic movement, leading President Kenneth Kaunda to accuse them of spreading hatred and threatening the Church, contributing to a decline in church and state relations (Henriot, 2006).

The MMD Regime 1991-2011

The backing of various Christian groups was instrumental in Frederick Chiluba successfully challenging and ousting long-standing president Kenneth Kaunda (Gifford, 1998), marking a pivotal moment during the regime change in 1991. Between 1991 and 2011, church-state relations were complicated under President Chiluba due to several factors. The economic policies implemented by Chiluba had a social impact, creating conflicts between the State and the Church. Chiluba's harsh structural adjustment measures resulted in job losses for many Zambians, leading to the issuance in February 1992 of a joint pastoral letter, the RCC and Other Churches titled "The Future is Ours", which expressed concern about the impact of these measures and invited the government to develop a safety net for the poorest citizens. In early 2000, there was a fierce confrontation between the MMD government and the Catholic bishops. The Catholic bishops stated specific social concerns such as education, health, security/crime, and public order laws, on January 28, 2000. These were protests by Catholic nuns and strikes by junior doctors, drawing attention to the poor state of medical and educational facilities. In early 2001, two issues arose that caused direct conflict between the Church and Chiluba. This is in response to the government's desire to focus heavily on poverty and the growing pressure to amend the constitution to allow President Chiluba to run for a third term. On January 25, three church bodies, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia EFZ, CCZ and ZEC, jointly issued a press release titled "The candidacy of President Chiluba for a third term," in which they expressed their complete opposition to calling on the outgoing president to serve a third term and declared that this was not only unconstitutional but also undemocratic (Gundani, 2018; Gifford, 1998).

The PF Regime 2011-2021

The relationship between the Catholic Church in Zambia and the Patriotic Front government has recently been marked by tensions, particularly highlighted in pastoral statements from the ZEC and the reactions from the state. The Church released a pastoral letter in 2013 stating that the political situation in Zambia was unfortunate. It cited a high level of political intolerance that continued to characterise the political environment, manifested through repeated acts of violence and lack of harmony between and within political parties. The bishops urged leaders to show maturity, decorum, and generosity in their leadership approach. The letter discussed the lack of political integrity among leadership and emphasized the deteriorating human rights and the need for consultation among other issues (Zambian Eye, 2013).

In 2016, ZEC issued a pastoral letter, "Let There Be Peace Among Us". The letter called for peaceful, mature elections to be conducted without rancour and condescension, but instead condemned the political violence, hate speech, and one-party mentality that had all impeded democratic progress. It implored political leaders to advocate peaceful coexistence as well as responsible leadership, discussing the importance of constitutional reforms and the need for greater public understanding and inclusion in governance, especially for minority groups. It entailed issues of education and transparency to enable people to understand the process and have their feet under the table regarding participation and accountability in the Zambian democracy, which was received with reactions from the state (Lusaka Times 2016a; 2016b).

The UPND Regime 2021-2026

The UPND era has shown the relationship between religion and politics in a wider landscape. The past church-state relations influenced political haggles, with the RCC very active in public life and governance. In a pastoral letter, “Statement on the State of the Nation: A Call to Serve the People of Zambia As God Wants” (ZCCB 2022), the bishops advised the state to suspend public leaders facing investigations to prevent interference with the judicial process and to require them to declare their assets and liabilities publicly. In this pastoral statement, the Church raised concerns about poverty and inequality, urging the government to implement effective interventions to reduce the cost of living and increase the state’s shareholding in foreign mining companies. Addressing moral decay in society, the Church focused on issues like child sexual abuse, early child marriages, and gender-based

violence. The bishops criticised the political environment for being characterised by regional and tribal sentiments, calling for genuine national reconciliation and inclusive democracy. These communications received a mixture of reactions and silence from the state. On November 10, 2023, ZCCB issued a pastoral statement regarding the country's state (Vatican News, 2023). The major points pertained to the Church's position on various political, social, economic, and ethical matters in Zambia. It highlighted the need for a peaceful political atmosphere, democratic space, and respect for human rights. Political parties, the judiciary, the National Assembly, economic problems, social justice, ethical issues, cyber laws, LGBTQ+ rights, and calls for continuous consultations between public leaders and the people were expressed. The Church advocated for transparency and accountability in the country (ZCCB 2023; Lusaka Times 2023a, 2023b).

The UPND government and the RCC, including their interests, have engaged in certain tasks while neglecting others. Unity and cooperation were the focus of the discussions between the UPND and the Church. The RCC has supported government initiatives in education, social programs and infrastructure development. The Church's teachings of love, unity, justice, peace, and human development resonate with the UPND government's aspirations, claimed the state. Despite this collaboration, there have been moments of tension (Lusaka Times, 2023a). Through this pastoral statement, the Church has criticised the government for political interference in Church matters and derogatory remarks about the clergy. However, both the government and the RCC have declared their commitment to peace and national unity in Zambia. Arguably, while both recognise challenges, harmonious relationships are imperative for the country's upliftment.

The Church expressed concern over the economic and political situations, as well as efforts against corruption. Bishops were calling on the government to tackle these issues and work towards a system of governance that is transparent and accountable. The Church advised postponing constitutional changes until after the 2026 general elections, stating there was not enough time to build consensus for that process. The bishops emphasised the importance of electoral reforms for Zambia's developing democracy. They also raised concerns regarding the judiciary, urging it to prioritise resolving unresolved intra-party disputes. Acknowledging the Church, the government reaffirmed its commitment to working with it as a major partner (Sichula, 2024). Although these pastoral letters seemed tough on the state, they reflected a balanced approach, recognising the government's efforts while identifying areas needing improvement.

Implications of Pastoral Letters for Church-State Relations

The RCC-state relations exhibited the pastoral letters and statements, and the reactions from respective regimes in Zambia demonstrate a two-dimensional aspect, firstly that the form of communication acts as checks and balances, which either promote the relationship between the two entities or worsen the tension between them. Secondly, how these letters and statements are received by the government depends on their tone, either judgmental, a rebuttal or guidance.

The Contemporary Challenges and Shift in Church Authority

The interaction between the church and the state in Zambia is deeply rooted in the nation's historical and socio-political contexts. Traditionally, the RCC has occupied a dual role of spiritual authority and as an active participant in socio-political discourse (Burnell, 2001). These enduring political systems and ideological frameworks have significantly shaped the church's influence on national matters. However, contemporary realities present challenges to this traditional engagement, particularly in terms of church-driven political participation. Such challenges potentially diminish the church's capacity to influence civic participation and promote public accountability (Chilufya, Magasu and Mutale, 2022). Arguably, the Church's role is to promote the common good, covering issues of civic order and tranquillity, growth, equality, justice, and solidarity, and therefore, it cannot replace political leaders (Iheanacho, 2022). However, the challenges to religious doctrines in various parts of the world are causing a significant transition in church-state relations, which calls for new insights. Formicola, (2022) raises a critical question of how the Church can restore its ethical standing globally and exert greater political influence by becoming a worldwide champion for peace, social justice, and human rights.

Role of Pastoral Statements in Mediating Church-Political Relations

The use of pastoral statements and letters by church leaders forms a central mechanism through which the church's position on political issues is articulated. These communications serve as vital platforms for expressing the church's stance on governance, social justice, and moral concerns. Notably, during pivotal national moments, such as Zambia's declaration as a "Christian Nation" or electoral periods, regime change. These pastoral messages have either reinforced the church's alliance with government interests or functioned as moral critiques or increased tension. When pastoral letters affirmed government policies, this alignment tended to reinforce symbiotic relationships, which

undermined the church's moral authority and credibility, consequently blurring the lines between religious authority and political endorsement (Chilufya, Magasu and Mutale, 2022). Conversely, pastoral statements and letters that criticised state policies, particularly concerning human rights abuses or corruption, served to weaken the relational ties between the church and the state. These criticisms positioned the church as a moral watchdog, emphasising independence rather than partnership, yet they led to heightened tensions and a recalibration of the church's public role (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024). These letters and statements present a dilemma for their capability to alienate and reconcile church and state, therefore, calling for a deeper reflection on the part of the church on how to effectively communicate its pastoral mandate and engagement with the government.

Framing of Pastoral Communications and Public Perception

The framing of pastoral messages determines how the church's role is viewed by the public. These messages emphasising independence and moral authority tend to portray the church as an autonomous actor capable of setting moral standards independent of any consideration of political influence. This framing thus raises the perception of the church as a moral agent able to, when necessary, challenge government authority. While such positioning may serve to strengthen the moral authority of the church, it may also generate perceptions of division or opposition, particularly during sensitive political moments, such as elections, regime change, or crisis. These pastoral letters and statements function within a broader framework that either supports or challenges the legitimacy of the church's influence within the state, affecting community perceptions of authority, power, and morality. Moreover, perceptions of abuse of power and restrictions on church independence are channels through which pastoral statements have historically influenced the nature of church-state relations in Zambia (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024).

Church Influence, Clientelism and Electoral Politics

These pastoral letters point to the church's influences, which include clientelism and politics of the ballot, especially when used to influence electoral decisions as well as processes. The corresponding relationship between the church and clientelism underlines the effect that church affiliation has on the modes of elective practice and governance. Faith-based organisations, including Catholic electorates, often facilitate voters' navigation of patronage networks while simultaneously holding political leaders accountable (Musonda, 2023). This complex dynamic enables faith institutions to leverage influence over policy

outcomes and governance structures. Church-led initiatives have contributed less to developing political engagement among the youth compared to secular civil interventions. These secular efforts have shown greater success in mobilising youth participation, thereby challenging the traditional view of the church's predominant political power within Zambia (Sperber and Wietzel, 2024).

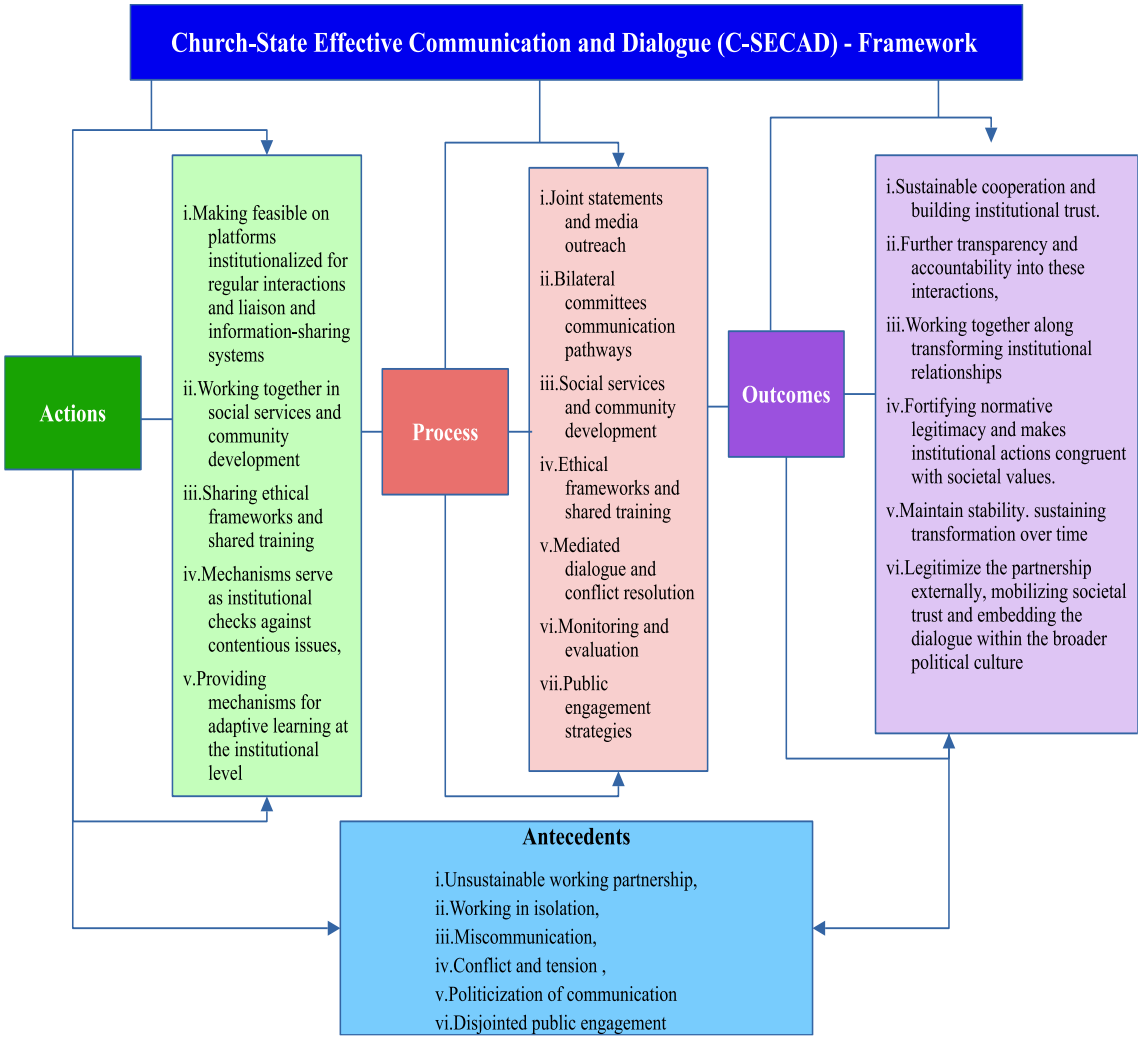
Secular Influence and Contemporary Reconfigurations of Church Relevance

While the pastoral statements have proved quite effective in raising awareness in governments, these changes increasingly introduce serious challenges to the church's traditional roles and motives in its social-political setting. Secular actors and interventions are increasingly replacing religious motives in political activism, and thus, the RCC needs to undergo a thorough reassessment and adaptation to remain relevant in this sphere (Chilufya, Magasu and Mutale, 2022). The church, therefore, needs to redefine its relevance in contemporary societies and revise the structures of its communications. Under a decentralised political authority, localised dynamics often influence local actors' priorities for community development and governance. Hence, religious institutions are called upon to reconceptualise both the forms of collaboration and boundaries with state actors to confront these modern-day political dilemmas.

Church's Evolving Moral and Spiritual Authority

Foreign interference in investments and the involvement of churches challenge the definition of multi-stakeholder engagement, juxtaposing the definition of the church's contribution to national development. Large economic projects, for instance, reveal underlying tensions while providing insight into how collaborations between state and corporate actors and churches affect community welfare and resource management (Polus and Li 2023; Kapesa, 2024). It may be argued that the socio-economic fabric in Zambia is engendered deep in the dynamics of church-state relationships, which currently evolve into that path of true partnership, accountability, and sustainable development, mutual respect, and trust. In Zambia, however, the church-state relationship needs to be understood in the light of changing socio-political realities and the formation of religious structures as independent, accountable, participatory institutions. This means that not only the traditional conceptions of political impact of faith will be rigorously contested, but also that new ideas about the political agency of the church will have to emerge.

Church-State Effective Communication and Dialogue (C-SECAD) Framework



Own illustration

Figure 1: C-SECAD-Framework

According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), Meyer and Minkoff (2004), the dynamics of church-state relations are strongly influenced by each country's institutional environment, including a variety of political and cultural factors. Grasping the complex changes in church-state relations thus requires a deep understanding of the institutional constraints that govern the nation and its branches of government. Therefore, for effective dialogue between the RCC and the State, the study proposes a framework that fits into the political-institutional theory of transformation, wherein institutional arrangements, legitimacy, and dynamic change processes in the political and social structures are duly observed. Thus, a sustained

cooperation becomes feasible on platforms institutionalised (like bilateral committees) for regular interactions and building institutional trust.

Well-established communication pathways (liaison and information-sharing systems) would help further embed transparency and accountability into these interactions, which are fundamental elements to engender legitimacy in institutional reform. Working together in social services and community development provides more tangible avenues for working together along transforming institutional relationships from a superficial level to one grounded on common goals and ethical commitments. Moreover, embedding shared ethical frameworks and shared training fortifies normative legitimacy and makes institutional actions congruent with societal values. The incorporation of grassroots voices and civil society fits into the participatory institutional model of inclusive legitimacy and resilience during periods of societal transformation.

Where conflict arises, mediated dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms serve as institutional checks against contentious issues, thereby helping to maintain stability. Monitoring and evaluation provide mechanisms for adaptive learning at the institutional level, which is, in turn, crucial for sustaining transformation over time. Public engagement strategies, including joint statements and media outreach, serve to legitimise the partnership externally, mobilising societal trust and embedding the dialogue within the broader political culture.

The Goals of the C-SECAD-Framework

I. To encourage regular communication and consultation meetings between leaders of faith, government officials, and other interested groups, so that they might discuss burning issues, share opinions, and jointly find resolutions. Use this continuous channel for dialogue to promote trust and understanding between the state and the church in a cooperative and respectful spirit.
II. To encourage awareness and educational programmes about religious freedom, tolerance, and the secular state, must be encouraged in schools, communities, and religious organisations.
III. To help recognise and celebrate instances of collaboration of these institutions in promoting such values; portray the benefits that arise from collaborative work.

IV. To induce responsiveness to the evolving nature of society and religious beliefs, adjusting policies and practices to accommodate the changes, while still upholding fundamental governance tenets.

Conclusion

This historical analysis of the post-colonial church-state relations has illustrated a complex interaction between the RCC and various political regimes, emphasising the church's influence as a moral compass. It has shown a persistent tension-and-collaboration duality, with the Church asserting moral authority while engaging with state actors. The RCC has addressed governance and social concerns, voicing the issues of marginalised communities and justice and good governance. It has shaped Zambia's political landscape through its pastoral statements and advocacy for social justice. The RCC champions democratic values and advocates for disregarded communities. The pastoral letters and pronouncements of the Church, however, serve the purpose of moral guidance and holding the government accountable, especially during transitional times of regime and simultaneously exacerbate existing tensions with state authorities. Although the church-state has evolved with periods of cooperation and tension, what remains clear is the importance of effective communication in bridging the gaps between these institutions. The durability of this relationship with the state actors is very significant to the development of the nation. RCC now finds itself in a unique position as it participates in the political arena for the cause of social justice and equality in contribution toward the quest for good governance in Zambia.

The RCC's ongoing commitment to justice, transparency, and human rights remains vital as Zambia navigates its political future. However, its relationship with state actors is crucial for prioritising the issues of vulnerable populations in national development. The RCC should make its approaches such that political messages can gradually capture public appreciation in the ever-changing political landscape, so that they would have ramifications in policymaking and still stand on their spiritual callings. Media channels for both the church and state must be utilised to spread awareness about religious rights, secular governing, and the need for cooperation between the church and the state. The church and state to create impartial bodies or mechanisms aimed at resolving church-state conflicts, such that they work to gain public trust. These bodies should report regularly on state-church activities and

decisions. Analysed through political-institutional theory of transformation, this study advances the understanding of the interaction between the church and the state co-existing in Zambia, laying the groundwork for future studies on developing models to communicate and partner in national development. Future scholarship on the relevance of this relationship will be worthwhile as both the Church and the state navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead in postcolonial Zambia.

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