

Church Participation in Building Political Civilization in Indonesia

Gilbert Lumoindong, Greivance Lumoindong

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Bethel Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: gilbertlumoidong@yahoo.com, Greivancegl@gmail.com

Correspondence: gilbertlumoidong@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT

Politics has always been a topic of great interest, especially regarding the church's role. The church is pivotal in advocating for political life aligned with its essence: achieving the common good and public welfare. However, many Christians view politics negatively, often leading to apolitical attitudes. This research aims to analyze the church's participation in reshaping political perceptions among Christians in Indonesia, emphasizing a revolution of love. Using a qualitative method with descriptive and interpretative approaches, the study records congregation perceptions and provides theological interpretations to clarify the connection between politics and the church's role. The results highlight a lack of political education within the church, contributing to Christians' minimal involvement in political arenas. The research underscores the need for the church to educate and equip its congregation for meaningful political participation, fostering integrity and social justice. The study concludes that the church has a crucial role in nurturing a political environment grounded in love, justice, and communal welfare.

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Introduction

The topic of the relationship between church and politics is a conversation that continues to surface, from coffee shop chats to rigorous discussions. Pros and cons are still heard, and it is not uncommon to create segregation among people due to differences in perspective. This happens because the church as an organization and organism (congregation) still lacks political literacy. Or the information obtained about politics has been seasoned by 'people' with agitative issues. The church must provide political education to the congregation so that the congregation understands the *core of politics*, namely as a means of creating the common good. In their writing, Gilbert Lumoindong and Grievance Lumoindong cite Anthony de Mello's introspective illustration when someone complains to God because God seems to let suffering befall a child. The prayer that 'sues' is answered by God, saying that He has done something by creating human beings to be God's challenges. (Gilbert Lumoindong & Greivance Lumoindong, 2023). This message is a whip for the church that has been less concerned about social issues, especially political problems in Indonesia.

As noted by Lombard (Denys Lombard, 1996), Indonesia is a fertile and strategic land, making Indonesia rich in natural resources and a surplus with culture (multicultural). Our ancestors managed to maintain the diversity of both culture and religion in the spirit of diversity, as written by Mpu Tantular in the book *Sutasoma*. Mpu Tantular's futuristic perspective was initially born as a solution to maintain religious differences (beliefs) at that time. However, over time, the phrase motivated the *founding parents* to adopt it as a motto that is no longer understood and inhabited by homogeneous identities.

However, our national journey is blocked by a giant wall called 'division': at least, this has surfaced around us. Fellow children of the nation are easily provoked in the name of differences, which then makes our lives filled with prejudice. Prejudice is getting stronger as the political stage is hijacked by people who deliberately understand differences as a threat. Therefore, the nature of our politics has turned into power politics. Ironically, the church (congregation) chooses to be silent about what is happening. It is as if the church only focuses on sacred matters such as worship and increasing the spirituality of the congregation alone without the slightest church entering and interacting concretely in political struggles.

It is not recommended that churches engage in politics, but churches must encourage congregations (people) who have national leadership qualifications to appear and voice the truth. That way, our political identity, smeared with violence and power struggles, is returned to the true essence of politics, namely realizing a better life. Yulius A. Widiatoro, in his writing, emphasized that politics carries the noble task of creating communal welfare. This means that politics does not have destructive genetics, organizing power to fulfill the lust for power (Widiatoro, 2022). From this, it is clear that the beginning of politics did not have dangerous tendencies. However, suppose good or right people are reluctant to get involved. In that case, it is very possible that politics will change hands to a group of people who reduce it to an arena full of intrigue and manipulation.

It is well realized that the charismatic church has not fully resolved the dichotomy between worship as something sacred and politics, which is considered profane. Churches and congregations still harbor a sense of 'shame' when it comes to discussing politics. As a result, if there are members of the congregation who decide to enter the circle of practical politics, they often do not get adequate spiritual provision. Of course, this is very dangerous if, one day, the congregation member becomes involved in a political scandal that drags him. The church exists in the world; therefore, the church must take part in presenting grace on this earth. J. Kristiadi, as quoted by Yulius A. Widiatoro and Yohanes Probo, wrote that Christian politics is a revolution of love that allows congregations or churches to become agents of change (Widiatoro & Dwi S, 2023). Furthermore, Yulius and Probo invite Christians to build healthy politics so that politics can maintain the solidarity and solidity of the Indonesian nation.

The urgency of this research lies in addressing the significant gap between the church's theological mission and its societal role in Indonesia. As a diverse nation with a complex political history, Indonesia faces ongoing challenges related to division, prejudice, and power politics. These challenges often reflect the absence of ethical leadership, which the church could address by equipping its congregation to engage constructively in political processes. Without this, the political sphere becomes dominated by self-serving demagogues, further alienating Christians and perpetuating cycles of corruption and social inequality.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a theological and sociological analysis of the church's potential to influence political life through a "revolution of love." This concept, rooted in theological principles, emphasizes politics as a means of achieving justice, solidarity, and communal welfare. Unlike previous studies, which have often focused on the church's theological or organizational aspects, this research bridges the gap by highlighting its role in shaping political perceptions and behaviors within the Indonesian context. The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for religious institutions and policymakers to foster ethical political engagement.

By addressing the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, this research aims to redefine the role of the church in contemporary politics. It argues that political involvement, when guided by spiritual integrity and moral responsibility, is not only compatible with but essential to the church's mission of serving society.

Research Methods

This paper is a comprehensive presentation that offers alternative thinking specifically to Christians who still have doubts and wrong judgments to end *apolitical* attitudes. The research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive and interpretive approach. Descriptive research allows researchers to record phenomena that occur, even experienced by the researchers themselves, regarding the political practices of churches and congregations towards the Indonesian nation (Moleong, 2021). The interpretive approach is the researcher's effort to assess the congregation's assumptions about politics while providing a theological study that must recognize that the issue of politics does not receive full attention in the Bible. This is due to two things: *First*, the Bible grew up when political correctness had not yet grown; *Second*, politics is considered not included in the doctrine of creationism. In the doctrine of creationism, God gave power to human beings (Adam and Eve). (J.B. Banawiratma, 2023). The power to manage the universe does not include the call to organize social life. A call that is strong with ecological rather than political overtones.

The interpretive approach is part of August Comte's non-positivism paradigm. In this research, phenomena have a set of meanings that need to be explored and understood together (Burrell & Morgan, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Political Demagoguery

A striking call was echoed by a political activist and senior SCIS researcher that politics is dirty, corrupt, full of deceit, and a breeding ground for crime to become *headlines* and public consumption. (J. Kristiadi, 2019). This fact is indeed visible to the naked eye. Elites in this country make politics full of dirty scenes. Legalizing all means for the sake of power leads to the division of fellow children of the nation. Yohanes K. Susanta indeed stated that there are no saints in politics. Politics is full of tricks, and the people are always the victims of politics (Susanta, 2019). That is how Machiavelian-style politics always seeks justification for everything.

Reform, expected to improve the complicated situation of Indonesian politics, provides an excellent opportunity for 'bad elements.' Instead of being an entry point for the involvement of good and righteous people, the political stage is filled with demagogues. A demagogue is a term to describe the bad characteristics of politicians whose presence is not to build goodness but to suck the joints of democracy so that democracy is in a dark room (Nitisastro, 2023). A demagogue can organize the

masses who are weak in healthy thinking to become the spearhead and shield for 'bad' interests. Quoting Elias Canetti's analysis, demagogues will control the emotions and consciousness of the masses so that the sub-human consciousness of the human being will be targeted. No wonder then that provocative sentences easily stir up the masses. The *subhuman* contains destructive impulses and actions that always consider people who are different from them as a parasite and must be conquered even with violence. (Gilbert Lumoindong & Greivance Lumoindong, 2023).

In addition, demagogues are good at playing the majority-minority issue. Majority-minority is a terrible term because it implies domination of the weak. Democracy is refracted into a term that is unique to the majority. Of course, this is a wrong interpretation. Democracy is not a term that favors the majority but a condition that provides opportunities for anyone who is competent to take part in the joint struggle to build the nation without questioning their religious identity or ethnicity. Conflicts based on SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Intergroup) as part of identity politics cannot be dammed if it has been echoed through the political stage. Demagogues do not like differences because they are considered to be a thorn in their side.

Ahead of the election, they make promises but easily break them once elected, and even when in office, they are overwhelmed by the desire for corruption. Humans are born with a number of identities attached to them (gender, ethnicity, skin color, class, and religion). Yoga Sukmana, in his analysis as quoted by Gilbert Lumoindong & Grievance Lumoindong, explains that these identities basically will not cause conflict as long as they are not exploited and echoed repeatedly in the public sphere. (Gilbert Lumoindong & Greivance Lumoindong, 2023)..

Another thing that does not escape the projects of demagogues is budget manipulation or corruption. Advertisements in print and electronic media popularly *known as "wani prior?"* (How much?) is satire that describes the profile of the elite in this country. Indonesia's Corruption Perception Index in 2024 is at a score of 34 (0-100 scale). This score is also the same score as in 2014. This means that there has been no significant change in the Corruption Perception Index over the past 10 years. (Detiknews, 2024). Based on the researcher's reading, corruptive actions occur because humans do not have imagination, so they do not have dreams of being good. Crime is seen as typical. Aren't corruptors intellectually intelligent people? Their intelligence is not contributed for good but conspiracy and crime.

Theological Perspective: The Revolution of Love

Wattimena, in his writing, states that politics focuses on the people's will. Therefore, politics is vital in building an increasingly prosperous social order. (Gilbert Lumoindong & Greivance Lumoindong, 2023).. Thus, politics calls us as Christians to be dedicated to upholding healthy political supremacy. The church is a fellowship of believers who have a mandate from Jesus, the Head of the church, to provide real action in the context of the life of the nation and state so that the organization of life can run in accordance with the noble ideals of the nation's founders. Otto Gusti (Otto Gusti 2011) in his writing describes the consequences that must be accepted and carried out by the church in the midst of a world that is crushed by sin and evil, namely as follows: *First*, the presence of God in Jesus Christ is a sign of salvation realized in the incarnation. Therefore, the congregation (Christians) is called to proclaim God's presence through participatory involvement. *Second*, God's involvement is an *affirmative action* that favors a life of justice and dignity. Therefore, if there are

irregularities and oppression in front of us, then the church and Christians take part in realizing liberation through healthy and substantive political mechanisms.

The Old Testament records how Joseph's role in the land of Egypt became the ideal foundation of a leader or official with integrity. The peak of Joseph's political career was built through enigmatic events, full of exhausting tensions. He was starting from being sacrificed on behalf of the hatred of his brothers to the test of integrity in Potiphar's house. The moment in Potiphar's house was the biggest test of his morality. (Gilbert Lumoindong & Greivance Lumoindong, 2023). Joseph's success in maintaining his quality made him a figure who was not only charismatic but had character. It was further explained that Yusuf was a figure who did not rush to hunt for a high position even though he had reasons for his dreams in the past. He is fully aware that becoming a high-ranking official is not a one-time magic result but a long and tiring process.

Likewise, Elijah's prophetic voice was not just about healing and blessing but a sharp critique of the manipulative behavior of the officials of the Northern Israel kingdom. Ahab and Jezebel were symbols of dark leadership that displayed immorality. It thus becomes clear that prophecy in Elijah's time always dealt with the socio-political situation. Ahab and Jezebel's evil conspiracy to seize the land of Naboth was not only a blasphemy against the law of inheritance but a violation of human rights relating to ownership (Brown, 2019).

Not to be overlooked is the role of Jeremiah, the young prophet who initially hesitated to undertake a great task. In the end, in submission to divine authority, he carried out his role in voicing prophetic messages to Southern Israel (Judah), which at that time was experiencing a downfall due to Babylonian expansion. A beautiful message from Jeremiah, even though Judah was experiencing oppression, it was their responsibility to pray for the welfare of the city because the welfare of the town as a place to live also had an impact on the welfare of the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 29:7). This verse is also an invitation to Christians throughout the ages to love and even pray for the place where we live. It is fitting that *where the earth is, there the sky is*. Christians should not be *apolitical* or even apathetic about the condition of the Indonesian nation, which is chaotic due to the destructive practices of the elite, but rather take part as the prophets did, namely voicing the prophetic message (Tandiawo, 2024).

Reflecting on the prophetic role in the Old Testament, Indonesia also had Christian and Catholic figures in the past who contributed greatly to the practice of national and state life. During the 1950s, Ignatius Kasimo was offered the position of Minister, which he firmly refused because he saw cabinet dualism. For Kasimo, politics is not a smooth means to power but a place of service for the benefit of many people. In contrast to today's elite, who fight for power and are even willing to use violence just for the sake of a handful of power. Politics must be based on vocation and dedication through which the grace of Christ envelops life (Otto Gusti, 2011).

In other words, the church encourages its people to be involved in politics, with the condition that politics must be a 'means' of proclaiming grace. Therefore, the church has a heavy and noble task of providing political education which will later become a spiritual provision in the practice of organizing the nation and state. In addition, the role of the church in providing education is nothing but a manifestation of the example of Christ who always defends the rights of the weak and marginalized.

From the description above, it can at least be concluded that the church invites people to be actively and effectively involved in realizing the revolution of love. The term 'revolution of love' is

borrowed from Ansel Alaman (2019), writing that the noble task carried out by followers of Christ in the political context is to carry out a revolution of love. The revolution of love is a radical effort by God's people to stem the procedural crimes deliberately committed by dirty politicians (demagogues). The courage to reject and oppose something sinister and conspiratorial is part of the revolution of love. Jesus' ministry for about three years succeeded in making the religious leaders who deliberately covered up the truth become rowdy and uncomfortable with Jesus' radical actions. But what Jesus and the disciples did in the end made it all the more visible that they had undermined the truth through the mask of religion. Although the cross was ultimately a tragic event in a political context, the presence and role of Jesus succeeded in exposing the untruth.

Conclusion

The political situation and conditions in Indonesia that tend to be negative leave a bad image (impression) for Christians. Politics is lived as something dirty, evil, manipulative, intriguing (cunning) and always looking for scapegoats to be the reason Christians are *apolitical* (allergic) to politics. As a result, the political arena only accommodates demagogues (butchers of truth), and the participation of Christians is minimal or almost non-existent. However, it is also undeniable that recently there have been Christians who are close to politics. It's just that they don't get debriefing (education) from the church. The church missed an important moment in preparing its congregation to enter the political stage. The result is predictable, Christian politicians are vulnerable to temptation and manipulative practices. They forget their primary calling as salt and light of the world and neglect their responsibility to defend minority groups who are often oppressed, weak, and lack access. The church must realize its role in educating the congregation while not getting tired of voicing the prophetic voice. That way Christians will continue to move to organize a better life.

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