

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AND THE AFRICAN CONSCIENCE

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Abstract

There is a contradiction between electoral violence taking place in Africa and the values central to an African Christian conscience. The new phenomenon triggering civil wars in Africa is electoral violence. The violence has direct impact on civilians. During the violence, people lose lives, property worth millions is destroyed, internally displaced persons emerge, yet others flee the country as refugees. The war is usually politically polarizing in pluralistic societies making it ethnic in nature. Once the violence breaks out, the war is fought by all including Christians who turn against each other. Using the judgmental and legislative conscience of the African Christian, can conscience address the problem of electoral violence in Africa and how can this be done?

Keywords: Conscience, Electoral Violence, *Gaudium et Spes*, Mature Conscience, Seared Conscience

1. Electoral Violence

Scott Straus argues that African guerrilla hostilities that spearheaded civil wars destabilizing the states have significantly reduced in frequency and intensity.¹ Despite Straus' encouraging findings, however, a contemporary new *modus operandi* of civil war

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¹Scott Straus, "Wars do End! Changing Patterns of Political Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa," *African Affairs*, 111/443 (2012) 179-201.

has emerged and it is engulfing Africa. This new phenomenon is electoral violence. While a vast majority of countries in Africa now hold legislative elections, the voting process is particularly associated with violence. As such, ensuring the quality of free and fair elections and the transparency of the electoral process that translates into legitimate democratic governance, public satisfaction and stability have been elusive.²

The end of the Second World War boosted democratization in Europe and Latin America. Conversely, in Africa, it was not until the end of the Cold war that democracies in Africa and the Asian states were accelerated.³ Despite the fact that Africa embraced democracy, inversely, after the introduction of multiparty politics in the 1970s, the transition from authoritarian regimes, to a consolidated democracy through a transparent election process has been hampered by violence. Violence during elections has become progressively and consistently protracted. Protracted conflicts keep recurring and nonconforming to conflict management mechanisms because their root causes have a historical past with a multitude of injustices.⁴

The protracted nature of electoral violence usually culminates with civil wars that target civilians. Other than targeting civilians, the sad feature of electoral violence is that in pluralistic societies, the violence quickly turns into ethnic arousing ethnic cleansing or genocidal determinations of persons perceived to be in opposition of the region's ethnic choice. Ethnic cleansing during elections renders a country or a region ethnically and politically homogeneous ensuring "a closed regional or country vote." A closed regional vote is where an ethnic group within a geographic region vote together as 'a block' for a particular candidate. The candidate is elected by 'leaders' of the ethnic group in a caucus to protect their political interests. While this is accepted in many ethnic identities, on the contrary, the closed regional vote violates the decision of individual voters to vote freely without coercion.

The minority populace within the ethnic region perceived as 'outsiders' are then threatened, raped, prevented from voting or are

²S. Darnolf, C. Ellena, E. Lippolis, E. Shein, C. Vickery, D. Murphy, J. Ober and N. Rasmussen, "Election Audits: International Principles that Protect Election Integrity," *International Foundations for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Democracy International* (2015) 1-17.

³Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1993, 4, 24-29.

⁴I.W. Zartman, *Preventing Identity Conflicts Leading to Genocide and Mass Killings*, New York: International Peace Institute, 2010, 3, 45.

eliminated. The war is fought using both sophisticated weapons as well as homemade devices usually called 'crude weapons' that include spears, blunt objects, stones, machete, clubs and knives. The electoral violence is therefore a civil war with much passion, intolerance and unabated injustice. The indiscriminate systematic and systemic elimination of another group amounts to a moral disaster. The flipside is that Christians turn against each other in these ethnic clashes. Christians fought each other in Kenya in 2008 election crisis killing over 1500 people, the Shona and the Ndebele in Zimbabwe in 1982-1987 killing 20,000 people, in Ethiopia in 2016 with over 250 people dead.⁵ The atrocities committed on individuals and on ethnic identities are passed on to the next generation through narratives pitting ethnic undertones for revenge.

Furthermore, the electoral process is often flawed and marred by fraud. Electoral fraud is an illegal, intentional interference and violation of the electoral process with a resolve to control the system, subsequently, affecting the outcome of the elections. There are several fraud techniques used during the election process. First, there is demographic control of the electorate by manipulating the voter's register. In these instances, the perceived supporters of the opposition are denied chances to register as voters. Secondly, fraud is practiced through disenfranchisement, a situation where the eligible voters are not allowed to vote on the election day. In Nigeria in 2005, human rights watch observed a large number of voters denied voting owing to a severe shortage of ballot papers.⁶ Thirdly, falsifying election results. Election results turn votes into political seats and legitimate leadership. Fraudulent election process falsifies results by ballot stuffing, tampering with or hacking electronic voting machines and the result transmission centre to alter vote tally. Electronic machines were tampered with and stopped working in Kenya in the 2013 elections, in Uganda in the 2016 elections and in Ghana in 2012.⁷

In this regard, the consolidation of democracy through an electoral process is morally decaying. Kofi Annan argues that free and fair

⁵Mwakikagile Godfrey, *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era*, Pretoria: New Africa Press, 2007, 36. For the Ethiopian statistics see Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: After a Year of protest, Time to Address Grave Human Rights Concerns," 9 November 2016. Available online at <https://www.amnesty.org/.../ethiopia-after-a-year-of-protests-time-to-address-grave-human-rights-concerns/>. Last accessed 10/12/2016. Kenya death statistics is given by Mara J. Roberts, "Conflict Analysis of the 2007 Post-Election Violence in Kenya," *New Dominion Philanthropy Metrics*, 14, 1 (2012) 23.

⁶Human Rights Watch Report, *Nigeria: Presidential Election Marred by Fraud, Violence*, April 25th 2007, 1-5.

⁷Timon Aineboona, "Biometric Verification on Polling Day," *New Vision* (2016) 1-3.

elections are the indispensable roots of a solid democracy.⁸ Though an election is not the only element in a democratic state, it is the foundation for a legitimate democratic leadership. The absence of a transparent election practice demeans the roots of a democratic process thus threatening the prospects of peace, stability, sustainable development and the gradual fortification of democracy.

Different academicians depending on the nature of the violence and the context in which it occurs define electoral violence variously. Gani Yoroms defines electoral violence as violence that takes place during elections in fragile democracies resulting from the failure to meet the rising expectation of the electorates.⁹ Gani focuses on fragile states, but they also take place in mature democracies — only the scale of violence differs. According to Ujo Abdulhamid, electoral violence is perpetuated in the form of thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and to cause bodily harm.¹⁰ Ujo's definition does not adequately mention the end result of the intended violence. However, Fischer defines electoral violence as "acts or threats of coercion, intimidation or physical harm perpetrated to affect the outcome of an electoral process."¹¹ Though Fischer in this definition does not mention the actors, victims, or method by which the violence is manifested, his definition captures the phenomenon and its intended outcome. As such, electoral violence is a strategy that uses violence on civilians and their property to skew election results during pre-election, election day and post-election period. This unique form of "new violence" occurs by organised acts seeking to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process by gaining an unfair political advantage over opponents. Such manifestations of violence have consequences that bear on the future of a society and its growth, undermining its chances of democratic consolidation, respect of human rights, focusing on the common good and good governance.¹²

⁸Kofi Annan, "Deepening Democracy: Why Elections with Integrity Matters," 4th March, *The Elders*,1 (2013) 1.

⁹Gani Yoroms, *Electoral Violence, Arms Proliferations and Electoral Security in Nigeria: Lessons from the Twenty-Fifteen Elections for Emerging Democracies*, Bingham: Bingham University Press, 2015, 4-5.

¹⁰Ujo Abdulhamid, *Understanding Elections: A Guide for Students and Election Managers*, Kaduna: Ayaotu Enterprise and Publishers Ltd, 2000, 1-3.

¹¹Jeff Fischer, *Electoral Conflict and Violence: Strategy for Study and Prevention*, Washington, D.C.: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 2002, 33-34.

¹²Machika U. Sule, *Causes and Consequences of Youth Involvement in Electoral Violence*, Paper Prepared and Presented at a Workshop on "Youth Against Electoral Violence" by Arewa Patriotic Vanguard in Nigeria on the 12 November 2009.

2. Manifestation of Electoral Violence

Election violence may manifest either at pre-election, during the election or post-election periods or during all these periods. The pre-election period covers the voter registration and the campaign season up to the penultimate day to election. Election day violence occurs on the actual voting date. Usually, voters' names are missing from the register, elections boxes are stuffed or election feedback tallying process is manipulated causing violent reaction. Post-election violence occurs after the election day, usually around the issues of fraudulent vote counting and open skewing of results either for incumbent or the opposition political party.

Many African countries brace themselves for violence every election year.

Some of the recent examples of election violence across the African continent are detailed below:

Country	Year(s)	Cycle of electoral violence
Burundi	1993- 2005/2010/2015	Pre-election, election day and post-election violence
Ethiopia	2005/2010/2015	Post-election violence
Uganda	2005/ 2010/ 2015	Pre-election, post-election violence
Nigeria	1964/1983/ 2003/2007/ 2011	Pre-election, election day and post-election violence.
Zimbabwe	1997/2002/ 2008/ 2014	Pre-election, election day and post-election violence
Ivory Coast	1995/2000/ 2005/ 2010	Pre-election and post-election violence
Lesotho	2007/ 2014	Post-election and pre-election violence
DRC Congo	2006/ 2015	Post-election and pre-election violence
Togo	2005/2010/2015	Pre-election violence and post-election violence
Zanzibar	2005/ 2015	Post-election violence just after the announced results.
Guinea-Bissau	2003/ 2008/ 2013	Post-election violence each election year.
Kenya	1992, 1997, 2002 ref, 2007-2008, 2013. ¹³	Pre-election, election day and post-election violence.

¹³The 2002 choice was a referendum in favour of the two proposed drafts for a new constitution in Kenya.

Zambia	2016, 2011 and 2006	Pre-election violence and post-election violence.
South Africa	2006, 2011 and 2016	Pre-election violence with death numbers escalating each election year.
Algeria	1992 and 2014	Pre-election violence
Tunisia	2010 and 2015	Pre-election violence
Madagascar	2001 and 2006 2013	Post-election violence Election day violence
Senegal	1988 2007/2008 2012	Post-election violence Pre-election violence Pre-election violence
Cameroon	2008 2011	Pre-election violence Post-election violence
Gabon	2009, 2012 and 2016	Post-election violence

Source: Straus Scott, Achieng Oyier Ondigo.¹⁴

The recent examples shown above are just but a few of the phenomenon from the African countries. The occurrences are widespread with at least more than a single incidence in most of the countries indicating its protracted nature. These manifestations are evidence that violent struggle for power during elections is taking over the peaceful process as the norm. Electoral violence is therefore, slowly but surely being accepted as part of the political process during elections. This explains its dominance in African states.

3. The Governance System that Generates Electoral Violence

Why are the stakes of election in these emerging egalitarianisms so high? According to Patrick Lumumba,¹⁵ political seats in Africa won through elections, not only give power, but are also economic in nature. The elections are fought over scarce and misappropriated resources. To this end, Lumumba states that political leadership in Africa is the shorter route to wealth, a wealth amassed without sweating for it in terms of land, cars, buildings and cash stashed in personal accounts both locally and abroad.¹⁶ Once a leader has overall undisputed power over the resource, smooth democratic transition

¹⁴Anne Achieng Oyier Ondigo, *The Role of Transformative Mediation in Electoral Violence* (Unpublished Thesis), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa, 2016, 3. See also Scott Straus, "Wars do End!...", 181-182.

¹⁵Patrick O. Lumumba, Speech in Accra-Ghana at the PAVA Memorial Forum on "Good Governance: Whither Africa?" 28th August, 7-11, 2015. Available at www.pavansah.org/.../uploads/2015/.../PLO-Speech-for-Pava-Forum-Ghana-v1.pdf. Last accessed on 11/12/2016.

¹⁶Patrick O. Lumumba, "Good Governance: Whither Africa?"

from one leader to the next becomes difficult as a predisposition to cling to power grows. According to Lumumba, the fear of legal investigation of the amassed wealth after office term leads to holding on to power through election rigging causing disgruntlement, violence and sometimes civil wars.¹⁷ The refusal to vacate office weakens democratic institutions through amendments of presidential term limits to retain power, fortifying presidential controls and governing by exclusion thus entrenching identity polarization.

Electoral violence is expressed in many ways. On the one hand, and in cases where the incumbent decides to cling to power, the violence is particularly premeditated and orchestrated; it is a well-planned approach to retain the status quo. On the other hand, the opposition leaders may want to take over power by force and use violence as a tool to arrive at their goal during the election period. The third manifestation is where the citizens spontaneously reject as fraudulent, the electoral process and the results through demonstrations. To keep the status quo, the incumbent reacts by unleashing the government security forces and pro-government militia to create violence and scatter demonstrators making the peaceful demonstrations turn violent. In all the three main types of materializations, the civilian is usually at the heart of the target. While democracy is a system by the people, for the people and with the people, when a democratic process like elections turn violent, popular sovereignty is frustrated. Popular sovereignty means that all political power ultimately rests with the citizens.

Although the civilian duties by most citizens in Africa is apt, and they easily support their government by submitting to laws, paying taxes faithfully and executing their duties, the return for this is generally a corrupt political elite who massively misuse government resources for personal gain. As a result, the citizenry feels short-changed over the years. In recent opinion polls carried out by a research institution IPSOS,¹⁸ sixty percent (60%) of Kenyans feel that the government is not heading in the right direction in terms of economics, politics, youth unemployment, inflation, shortfall in rule of law and infrastructure.¹⁹ In South Africa it stands at 61%, in Uganda it is at 74%, in Burundi it is 80% and in Nigeria at 74% as

¹⁷Patrick O. Lumumba, "Good Governance: Whither Africa?"

¹⁸IPSOS is an international Social Research Institute that carries out opinion polls and general research on public and social issues for evidence based decision-making.

¹⁹IPSOS opinion poll, 7th July, 2016. Available online at www.the-star.co.ke/news/2016/07/07/kenya-headed-in-wrong-direction-60-say-in-latest-ipsos-survey_c1382199. Last accessed 23/11/2016.

stated by Afro barometer, Transparency International and IPSOS.²⁰ The figures speak for themselves. The people feel there is leadership and institutional failure. Hence, electoral violence is one of the indicators of that failure. The virtue and ethics of distributive justice is inequitable. Majority miss out on the national resources. Wealth and political power in many of these states is increasingly becoming concentrated in the hands of a few political elites, their families and their friends. Impunity and the realization that with money they can buy their way out in many aspects including the legal loci, has made many of them immune to its citizens' problems thus thwarting one of the basis of good governance-the common good. Institutional structures are supposed to be geared towards the goal of fulfilling the common good works to benefit society as a whole in contrast to selfish private benefits to few individuals and sections of certain communities.

4. Conscience and Electoral Violence: The Implication of an Emergent Conscience

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, connects the political community to the common good through human conscience.²¹ It clearly states that the political community exists for the common good guided by the dictates of their conscience.²² The political community should take into account the corresponding duties including policy and structural amendments for ensuring that the common good is achieved and sustained. Conscience is "the moral judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing or has already completed."²³

James Keenan in a recent paper explains the four major contributions to the Church's understanding of conscience from the perspectives of the Hebrew Bible, Greek and Roman philosophy, St

²⁰IPSOS opinion poll, 2015 and Transparency International (TI) Burundi Country Profile and Facts, 2015. Available at afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/.../AfrobriefNo153.pdf. See also Sixtus Dong, "Afrobarometer: Ghana Headed in Wrong direction-82% of Citizens Say," 23rd March, 2016. Available at citifmonline.com/2016/03/23/Ghana-going-drain-afrobarometer/. Last accessed 15/10/2016.

²¹C.E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002, 75.

²²W. Skillen and R. McCarthy, ed., *The Political Order and the Plural Structure of the Society*, Atlanta, Georgia: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, 200-205.

²³*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1778.

Paul and St Thomas Aquinas.²⁴ He distinguishes between legislative conscience and judicial conscience.

The legislative conscience is a voice that accompanies us. The voice directs our lives. The conscience is not the heart but the voice being with us. The voice with us captures the *con* of conscience, a word that means “knowing with.” The book of Isaiah 30:20, “And your ears shall hear a word behind you: ‘this is the way; walk in it,’ when you would turn to the right or to the left.”²⁵

The listening voice of the legislative is also echoed in Hebrews 4:7, “Today if you hear His voice harden not your hearts,” and in John 10:27, “everyone who hears my words and puts into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” In this sense, the legislative voice, directs our lives.²⁶ It is the natural inner law working through the voice of conscience. Our work is to listen to this voice of God and follow this conscience.

The judicial conscience conversely judges the heart. James Keenan demonstrates that the first understanding of conscience is from the Hebrew Bible. Conscience in this Bible is equated to the ‘heart,’ a place where one recognizes one’s guilt.²⁷ As such the heart judges and convicts the self in an examination of conscience, a look back on the past actions as well as dissents our malevolent desires.²⁸ It is a moral evaluator of our behaviour. In the Hebrew Bible, God is the giver of grace that empowers our conscience. The heart is related to an active conscience that needs to be formed and through which one turns to God, Judges one’s past, guides one’s future and looks to be shaped by the law of God.

Secondly, James Keenan draws from the Greek and Roman philosophers that similarly consider conscience as judicial,

It evaluates the heart, but disturbs sometimes causing us distress as it judges over our wrongdoing. It awakens the wrongdoer with pangs forcing us to recognize our own misdeeds thereby encountering conscience. ‘A guilty conscience is one that recognizes a lack of connection between what we thought was acceptable and the guilt we feel afterward’ (Isa 30:21).²⁹

The conscience interrupts and provokes the guilt and pain of wrongdoing in its judgment. The encountering of conscience within

²⁴James F. Keenan, “Examining Conscience: Ancient Wisdom on Judgment Justice and the Heart,” *America Magazine* 214 (April 2016) 11.

²⁵Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 11.

²⁶Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 11.

²⁷Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 11.

²⁸Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 11.

²⁹Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 11.

our heart helps us to either have peace by validating us when we are right or have intra-conflict when we are wrong.

The African Christians are supposed to consider what our feelings are upon looking back to our past offences against one another in the name of elections. Using our conscience in a judgmental manner helps arouse the painful feelings contemplating our past vices and consequences of a violent electoral process that is dishonest. We need to denounce such a process and feel sorry for our past deeds. It should disturb, nag and even reprimand us that we killed one another, that we destroyed each other's hard earned property, that we were not good people to ourselves, our neighbour and before our God. The judicial conscience should give us no rest that without shame we yielded ourselves to prejudiced behaviours and that we failed to give good exemplary experiences to our youth and children. Our past judicial conscience should disturb us not to repeat the same vices.

Conversely, using our legislative conscience, we should design a way forward by listening to the voice of God, the voice that guides us towards being good and loving of our neighbour. How can we listen and move forward conscientiously. As human beings, our actions should be morally justifiable. We should make our own moral legislative decisions about what is morally objective rather than move with the masses. Our listening and obeying this voice within us should signal the moral truth and motivate moral conduct in the electoral process. Sincere diligent efforts towards our future actions with regards to elections should be laced with moral judgments of the past and the legislative conscience of listening and obeying the voice of God within us.

Thirdly, Keenan explains conscience from the perspective of the New Testament. He observes that in the New Testament, St Paul places conscience under the governance of the Holy Spirit, "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 9:1). The Holy Spirit assists us in knowing in what way God needs us to act. The conscience is written in everyone's heart and on the last day, all will be judged (Rom 2:14-18). Furthermore, Paul believes that through conscience we all grow together, both the weak and strong. St Paul then teaches Christians how to work with those who have the unformed conscience explaining that Christians are to love and help their neighbours, not scandalize them.

St Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae*, states that every variance with conscience, whether right or erring, is always evil. The error

though not from God, the dictates of an erring conscience, “puts forward its judgment as true, and consequently as being derived from God” (I-II, q. 19a.1); therefore, when erring conscience proposes something as being commanded of God,” conscience is what God gives us to discern the right, and must always be obeyed.³⁰ When we follow a dictate of an erring conscience, we have to determine whether we are responsible for the error, then we are not excused from the error, but if we could not have known the truth, then we are excused.³¹

Finally, *Gaudium et Spes* which hold the contemporary tradition about conscience states:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law, which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged... In a seared conscience, people care little for truth and goodness; hence the conscience by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin (GS, 16).

It is clear that the Church views conscience as both antecedent and consequent in doing good and avoiding evil.

A Christian person is called to be both authentic and human. They are both spiritual and political, an agent and an individual. The Christian then is called to a continued virtuous conversion striving in their decisions to live good Christian lives. Voting, in a Catholic’s view is a conscientious decisive moral obligation and a democratic opportunity one uses to shape one’s own society to be more respectful of the common good, human rights, value life and dignity of all people and particularly the poor and the vulnerable in our society. However, this is not so in these emerging democracies.

Voting in many African states reflects the highly politically polarized nature of the society with aims to factional control of the state resources. African Christians over the years have committed to ethnic regimes even when their conscience irked them against the atrocities committed by their ethnic group against others. Examples that cut across Africa include among others Rwanda in 1994, South Africa in 2015, Burundi in 2015/2016, South Sudan in 2013 and still ongoing.³²

³⁰Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 12.

³¹Keenan, “Examining Conscience,” 12.

³²Ciara Aucoin and Jakkie Cilliers, “Election Violence: Should South Africa be Worried?” *Institute of Security Studies* June 2016. Available at <https://issafrica.org/iss.../election-violence-should-south-africa-be-worried>. Last accessed 2/10/2016; Jean

We lack the capacity to stand out, we fear the threats that follow, we feel safe when we do not voice objection. We cannot be true to ourselves if we lack the virtues that reveal the truth. Who then do we blame when the conscience of truth fails the society during election processes? People vote for those they are affiliated to either religiously, ethnically or politically whether or not they have the capacity and the conscience for the common. This is a tragic mistake that keeps recurring in pluralistic societies. People end up not being well represented after all. Their representatives are easily bribed to pass bills that go against the interest of the very people who elected them.

Not enough people do vote with a clear conscience for the candidates whom they feel have qualities to enhance the deeply held moral principles of the societal good despite their political and ethnic affiliations. Hartley William avows that there comes a point in time when a person must reject to answer to unjust leadership, unjust ethnic choices made by political elites and refuse leanings to political party's if they are also to answer to their own true consciences.³³ Similarly, John Dobbins argues that if a practice compels you to do evil, then one has a moral obligation to violate it.³⁴ What these two practitioners mean is that if the ethnic, religious or political leanings are not honest, are fraudulent, are unjust, the populace have not only a right to reject them, but they are also obligated by their moral conscience to abnegate and defy them. Honest people must learn to commit on their own value systems to end electoral violence. In this way, the larger justice may be accomplished.

In democracies and civilian life, the personal conscience provides the moral material for interdependent cooperation and solidarity.³⁵ McCrudden also captures the notion that the personal conscience has implications for the social wellbeing. McCrudden states that a good

Claude Nkundwa, "Understanding the 2015 Electoral Crisis in Burundi," Available at htmburundi.org/.../2015/.../Understanding-the-Current-Burundi-Crisis.pdf; Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 161.

³³Hartley William's quotation at the Nuremberg trials in 1983. He was presenting the 1945 case at Nuremberg against twenty-two of Hitler's military and civilian Germans who had been accused of crimes against humanity during the Nazi violence. At this time, Adolf Hitler had long killed himself. Twelve of these men were sentenced to death.

³⁴John Dobbins, "Dissent is the Highest Form of Patriotism," in Jonah Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés: How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas*, New York: Penguin Group, 2012, 78.

³⁵James F. Keenan, *Ethics of the Word: Voices in the Catholic Church Today*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010, 48.

conscience best reconciles the interests of each individual with the interests of the larger community.³⁶ The good conscience is living what is true, honestly, well meaning and rightly. We cannot in good conscience depart from the truth for the good of the society. The personal and social conscience then takes on a more communitarian approach with regards to the practice of the common good exhibiting concern for human dignity, equality, unity, inclusion, distributive justice, education, health and care of the less advantaged. As stipulated in the *Gaudium et Spes*, common good is an important element for political leaders in restructuring social reforms that work for all humanity (GS, 26).

Cahill stresses the experiential and contextual perspectives in diverse variables on concrete issues of our society and deductively find convergent ethics for all humanity.³⁷ Hence, in diversity, commonality in shared values, principles and meaning can converge in a transcultural and global realm. Even though political leaders in pluralistic societies have different cultures, different political leanings, a centre of convergence is possible through conscience pursuing truthfulness virtuously. This logic is compatible with both the Christian and African expressions where we find commonalities when it comes to the common good. The African "Ubuntu," is a quality that expresses the essential human virtues of truth, compassion, humane deeds and collective responsibility in the common good regardless of our diversity. It states that, "I am what I am because of who we all are."³⁸ As such, there are commonalities in the common good as expressed in Christian values and the African principles.

Armed with both the African philosophy of Ubuntu and the Christian conscience, why are elections still violent in our countries? Why is truth elusive in our society in the process of democratic elections? Most African leaders and its populace from the sub-Saharan region have been and are largely Christians. As Christians we should through our individual conscience, become aware of our deeply held moral principles of truth.³⁹ In this context, questions

³⁶Christopher McCrudden, "Human Dignity and Judicial Interpretation of Human Rights," *The International Journal of Law* 19, 4 (2008) 665-724.

³⁷Cahill Lisa, *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 5.

³⁸Desmond Tutu, Jacob Lief and Andrea Thompson, *I Am Because You Are: How the Spirit of Ubuntu Inspired an Unlikely Friendship and Transformed a Community*, New York: Rodale, 2015, 39.

³⁹*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Conscience," Stanford: Stanford Press, 2016, 2.

abound on how moral reason and active conscience interact. Can moral truth and principled conscience be strangers to the mind? Is it that African conscience as well as Christianity has not penetrated the minds of many in such situations, or is it a sign of poor training and socialization? Are we faced by a dilemma of conscience? Is this the period of the conscience moral blind spot in Africa like it was in church history where there was conscience lax in cases of intolerance, crusades, world wars and slavery?

To answer these questions, Nussbaum argues that while conscience is precious, it can also be weak, vulnerable, capable of being wounded, and can be imprisoned.⁴⁰ When one decides to disobey one's conscience repeatedly and refuses to develop or listen to 'the God within' and the deep seated convictions, then the progressive continuous formation of the conscience is discontinued and the person's sensitivity to moral truth gradually becomes weak, lax, lulled, blinded, dangerous and eventually insensitive in developing convictions for true choice of good acts. According to St Paul, the people's conscience may become seared (1 Tim 4:2). This is what happens with the many political elites who are also believers who may cheat, be fraudulent, and manipulate elections. A seared conscience is a threat to peace and is geared to lawlessness and disorder during election violence. It shows just how easily and frequently the average [Christian or] Catholic may depart from the true conscience.⁴¹ Convictions are developed that politics is a dirty game, and that elections must be won by whatever strategy, therefore, stealing elections to win is not wrong morally. A continued practice of this then blinds the conscience and the practice becomes rationalized as the norm.

A blinded conscience is erroneous through a habitual commitment of sin.⁴² Could electoral violence occurring repeatedly be due to a weak conscience? Conscience dilemmas occur when one is both disposed to act in one way and chooses to ignore the conscience against an operative moral principle for power, desire, aspiration, passion, fear or lust.⁴³ It is a condition Thomas Aquinas calls

⁴⁰Nussbaum M. Craven, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality*, New York: Basic Books, 2013, 21.

⁴¹James F. Keenan, "To Follow and to Form over Time: A Phenomenology of Conscience," *Catholicism and Conscience: Rights, Responsibilities and Institutional Responses*, New York: Orbis Books, 2015, 1-13.

⁴²*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1793.

⁴³T.O. Okebe, *The Political Dilemmas of African Leaders*, Nairobi: Green Printers, 2014, 102-115.

“qualified perplexed.”⁴⁴ There are those who have been forced by external forces to either assist them cheat in elections or be eliminated. One would either choose truth or lose their lives. The political elite would also either choose truth or lose an election with all its power and control of resources. Conscience dilemma does not fit well with Agina’s view who argues that convictions of moral truth are formed to maturation gradually and that a mature conscience has right moral truth in antecedent conscience taken before action is performed. When and how does one reject self-interest, desires for power, the emotions involved and be moral at all costs? Agina argues that universal dictates of a mature conscience are authoritatively true and may not indulge in cheating.⁴⁵

People with formed mature consciences become responsibly and authentically involved in their political duties applying and voicing their ethical stances in the public square in favour of the common good. Linda Hogan discusses the ‘legalist’ and the ‘personalist’ conscience. The ‘legalist’ conscience insists on living by the rules alone, while the ‘personalist’ calls on Christians to be more active, take up more virtuous initiatives according to the conscientious dictates as gathered from the sacraments, the word of God and as led by the Holy Spirit other than just rules. Africa has suffered and continues to suffer because there are many good people who are silent instead of voicing, acting and mitigating electoral violence from its underlying roots. This silence has encouraged election anomalies.

5. Exorcising the Ghost of Electoral Violence: Conscience Formation

The formation of conscience is responsible for a proper functioning of conscience and the well being of the society. The conscience then has to be trained, disciplined and educated for an objective moral principle formation. Such a conscience will be a transformed one and is essential in ordering individual and societal life. To stand by true moral conscience, then the emergent and weak consciences require transformation. The formation of a conscience to maturity is not an easy task. It is a long journey from untruthfulness to truth. It requires the change of attitude, thwarting wrong external seared consciences and having strong convictions that the moral truth is freedom meant for personal development and the common good.

⁴⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964, I-II q. 19 art. 6, arg. 3. See also Giles of Rome, *Super Secundo Sententiarum*, d. 39, q. 3.

⁴⁵Charles Agina, *Conscience and the Cultural Traditions*, Nairobi: Bryers Publishers, 2013, 38-45.

The end of morals is to form the conscience by prudential judgment. A virtuous conscience is formed by virtues acquired, developed and maintained by learning what prudence is.⁴⁶ This is what we should do during elections so as to avoid the violence. We should be prudent enough not to be swayed by corruption or not to be manipulated by the political elites but stand up for the common good. Christians have the obligation to grow their ideal conscience of virtues.⁴⁷ They have to grow and become better Christians; they need to form a circle of Christians for true virtues either as virtuous Christians or in their small Christian communities. Christians know the truth but whether they have convictions about the truth depends on conscience formation and degree of growth in faith, scripture and prayer.

The formation of conscience is therefore a relatedness in virtue, practices of justice, temperance, fortitude, fidelity and self-care through the ministration of conscience own prudence that allows us to learn more and more about how we are to respond to God, neighbour and ourselves in love and the common good. Virtuous practices must become the exercises for the formation of a true, brave and courageous conscience.⁴⁸ The formation of a mature conscience is therefore viewed here is “a call to growth,” a moving forward, a stepping out that moves history and humanity forward and must be robust.⁴⁹ The call to growth aims at love that issues a pure true heart and a good sincere faith and conscience (1Tim 1:5). The formation of conscience entails more learning life’s virtuous lessons.

Growth towards a mature conscience for humanity also needs constant reminders and continued formation through the reading of the word of God in the scriptures. They are empowered through prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis explains that there is a restlessness in the soul that comes from the Holy Spirit, a good anxiety, which makes the souls restless to do good things...⁵⁰ The continuous formation of conscience through instructions from church ministers is important. This is because conscience requires refreshing, nourishing and feeding daily by consistently presenting the moral

⁴⁶James F. Keenan “To Follow and to Form over Time,” 6.

⁴⁷James F. Keenan, “To Follow and to Form Over Time,” 6.

⁴⁸James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2nd Edition, 2010, 27.

⁴⁹James F. Keenan, ed., *Catholic Theological Ethics, Past, Present and Future: The Trento Conference*, New York: Orbis Books, 2011, 25.

⁵⁰Pope Francis, 22nd September, ‘Pope Contrasts Restlessness made by Holy Spirit and Anxiety Caused by Unclean Conscience,’ *Zenit, The World Seen from Rome*, 2016.

truth that embraces the good. To love the truth, the Pope explained, does not only mean to affirm it but to constantly live it, to constantly witness it with one's work — "to live and work, therefore, with consistent coherence in regard to the words and actions of an individual." He noted that the question here is not whether one is or is not a believer, but rather whether one is or is not always being honest with oneself and with others.⁵¹ Taking everything into account, all humanity, individually and as a society also have a duty to always continue to form their consciences.

To support credible elections, the Church should work to re-conscientize the people. It should awaken their conscience and moral responsibility to truth. During the phases of electoral cycle, re-conscientization should be intensified and effort fully louder by church ministers encouraging the people to go back to their Christian conscience of moral truth and the African ethics for a credible, fair and transparent election process. The voice of the church needs to resound in all its church sermons, radio, television stations as well as in the social media reminding and calling people to be conscientious in their daily duties particularly with regards to the elections.

Christians too need to awaken in each other the conscience within. Reminding each other of the joy of doing good as opposed to evil during elections.

6. Why Have a Mature Conscience in Elections?

A mature conscience provides the sense of societal standards. The societal standards are required for a healthy community, a virtuous public leader and public office holder. Citizens with mature consciences learn to question systems that do not work for the common good. They question the fraudulent electoral systems and challenge those involved to vacate offices because they are incapable of truth, justice and fairness. The questioning brings back the power to the populace; it checks for balances and accountability, for community values, for clarification and clears the vicious cycle of moral dilemma experienced today with electoral violence. The questioning will also assist the society to grow and develop their youth in ways that are truthful, and move their country towards their goal of national unity, freedom, development and peace. In this sense, moral reasoning becomes a crucial part in developing the

⁵¹Pope Francis, 23rd September, 'Popes Homily for the Presentation of the Lord,' *Zenit, The World Seen from Rome*, 2016.

structures within states.⁵² Conscience then becomes an internalized behaviour in the society where cheating is prohibited by the public, parents, church leaders, teachers and relatives.

If we do not stand up for the truth now, then our society will become a people absent in the public square. Such a people are ruled by political elites they do not elect, by people with seared conscience, by people with impunity, and by people who have no intentions to promote the common good. A society of this nature will have its norms flouted by those who are supposed to defend them. It will be a defective society where laws and rules do not apply to all equally. *Sensus fidelium* calls for a faith lived in conscience, a people whose faith stems from their conscience and a people who arrive at responsible decisions of truth and find peace after such discernments.⁵³

The church has been silent except in certain spontaneous occasions as was the case in Zambia in 2016, where the Church intervened in the “indaba” session easing the pre-election tensed issues that had turned violent.⁵⁴ Similarly, other church interventions that mitigated election violence were in South Africa in July 2016, and in Lesotho in October 1998 and in 2015. Another recent good example is the recent intervention by the churches in Kenya who came together during an impasse between the opposition and government face off over the election management body (IEBC).⁵⁵ The daily demonstrations were turning violent as the police engaged demonstrators in running struggles with reports of people dying from police shootings. The Kenyan Church through a mediatory tone resolved the case nipping the violence in the bud. The Church came in time to educate the conscience of the political elites for truth and the common good. However, in many of the electoral violence in Africa, the mainstream churches have either been silent or were partisan and sometimes divided along ethnic lines.

According to Teresa Okure, there is a need for new practical measures of internalizing, that requires a courageous revision of the old-age church structures and the evolutions of a New Testament

⁵²Douglas Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre*, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2001, 171.

⁵³James F. Keenan, “Redeeming Conscience,” *Asian Horizons* 9, 1 (2015) 35-56.

⁵⁴Gavin Drake, *In Zambia, Cathedral Indaba Eases Political Tensions*, Episcopal News Service, April 2016. An Indaba is a word from Zambia meaning consensus building.

⁵⁵Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, an election management body in Kenya formed in 2011.

ecclesiology and Christology that serve as antidotes to the anti-gospel value systems.⁵⁶ The church needs to condemn electoral violence and the underlying causes of the problem. The church has a voice and can do better than it has over the years.

These avenues provide for the process of on-going formation and training of the conscience for truth. It will be an experience and socialization that Christians can relate to and mature their conscience. Mature conscience requires continuous training and a reminder to make the true voices within us to integrate with our outward actions and reactions. Consequently, a mature conscience transcends the fears of truthfulness and remains steadfast with the truth, believing that the truth will hold, prosper and free them.

7. Conclusion

It is true that we may not have been conscientious enough in dealing with the truth when it comes to elections. It is also true that conscience as an act of practical reason, can be interfered with by passion or ignorance to scatter the true conscience if it has not matured.⁵⁷ We can find that there is a trend and inclination of a weak conscience among Christians both as citizens and among the political elites. To change the route, we have to deconstruct what elections are meant to be, deconstruct our attitudes towards leadership and the dispositional belief that elections must be won at all costs and by any means. Deconstruct the structures and the face of illegitimate leadership focusing on duly elected leaders who can associate with the people and make policies for the common good.

The Church, its ministers and the people themselves must stop the realignment with political parties that do not follow the due true process of elections and begin robustly to form consciences of moral truth with the right virtues accepted by the society.

As Laurenti Magesa plainly puts it, we need to “demand to deconstruct or break down many historically established mental,

⁵⁶Teresa Okure, “Becoming the Church of the New Testament,” in ed. Orobator E. Agbonkhianmeghe, *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, New York: Orbis Books, 2016, 104.

⁵⁷Thomas Slater, *A Manual of Moral Theology for English-Speaking Countries*, New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012, 53; Henry Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology in Four Volumes*, 1:4, London: Sheed and Ward, 1943; James F. Keenan, “To Follow and to Form over Time: A Phenomenology of Conscience,” *Catholicism and Conscience: Rights, Responsibilities and Institutional Responses*, New York: Orbis Books, 2015, 1-15.

social, theological, attitudinal notions and structures that control life, including Christian life in Africa to reconstruct them anew in what will be a different form intrinsically and radically faithful to the original [conscience of truth]." He further notes that "deconstruction and reconstruction constitute the current vocation of the Church in Africa."⁵⁸ The African culture loves truthfulness and nature that is true to itself. African individuals have been socialized to mature their conscience of truth. The culture of electoral fraud is not acceptable in any Christian and African culture. The electoral process needs to be a process that is fair and transparent both as viewed and accepted by the Christian values and virtues and in the African philosophy. The process should reflect a response from an African Christian people, a people fully socialized and equipped with a mature conscience. The true African and Christian conscience should converge in the commonality of what truth is and the ethical virtues acceptable in the wider society and which the larger society holds on as true. We must change ourselves individually and socially. Our duty is to re-energize our conscience. The question is whether we are ready because for how long shall we continue to fight and die because of elections? A new dawn of moral truth is an essential imperative. A better Africa should emerge where elections will be guided by a true conscience and election violence from fraudulent and manipulated results come to an end.

⁵⁸Laurenti Magesa, "Truly African, Fully Christian," in ed. Orobator E. Agbonkhianmeghe, *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, New York: Orbis Books, 2016, 79-92.