

PROCMURA *Newsletter*

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The General Adviser's Reflection (contd...)

THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE *UMMAH* AS UNIVERSAL CONCEPTS THAT STAND THE RISK OF BEING MANIPULATED TO CREATE DISUNITY BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN AFRICA

It is well known that the universality of Christianity can ordinarily be seen by the fact that Christians are spread throughout the globe. On Christian solidarity in a spiritual sense, however, the universality of Christianity is seen by the Christian understanding that all Christians belong to the body of Christ – the Church. This concept means that all Christians everywhere and anywhere belong together in a mystical union that transcends political borders, colour or race. In Christ there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black etc.

It is also well known that the universality of Islam is also seen by the fact that Muslims are spread throughout the globe. The unity of Muslims, however, is seen in terms of the Islamic concept of the universal *Ummah* (Community) which Muslims everywhere and anywhere belong. This form of unity is understood to be both temporal and spiritual and thus transcends established borders of nation-states/countries. In the Ummah there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black etc.

The critical question for Christians and Muslims to ask themselves is whether they are African Christians and African Muslims or Christian Africans and Muslim Africans. In other words, whether they are Christians and Muslims who happen to be Africans or they are Africans who happen to be Christians or Muslims. We need to conceptualise this even when it comes to our own countries. Taking Ghana my own country to illustrate the point that we wish to put forward, the question needs to be asked: Are we Ghanaian Christians or Christian Ghanaians? In a similar vein, are we Ghanaian Muslims or Muslim Ghanaians?

We are aware that there are deep theological considerations to take into account when we attempt to answer these questions. Barring such considerations, the question far from being theological in the context in which it is asked, is an existential one. It is existential because there is evidence to suggest that because of the concept of the body of Christ and the *Ummah* Christians and Muslims in some parts of Africa tend to be antagonistic or even fight against one another when European and or the United States of America (perceived to be Christian) are at war with a Middle Eastern country or a predominantly Muslim populated country. Such conflicts are sometimes interpreted as a war between Christendom and Islamdom or historically speaking, the caliphate.

From PROCMURA's vast experience, we can say without reservation that unless and until Christians and Muslims in Africa accept that they belong to their respective countries and that such countries belong to the continent of Africa which is their continent, they will fight proxy wars in the name of the Body of Christ and the *Ummah* and end up destroying their countries and their continent.

On the political level, politicians capitalise on these Christian and Muslim solidarities and carry out their political campaigns making some unsavoury appeals to what they call the Christian or Muslim votes. The danger in these are that in some countries some religious groups take stock of how many of their co-religionists are in parliament and even plan to increase the number of their co-religionists in parliament. Some political parties and governments are even evolving rotational systems of governance whereby when the president of a country is a Christian, the vice president must be a Muslim and vice versa. On the facial level this may seem harmless to being recommendable. Looking at it deeply, however, the situation could lead to what PROCMURA refers to as "Religious Tribalism" where people vote for one or the other candidate not because they have good policies but simply because they share a religion with that person.

As Africa struggles to work on negative tribalism/ethnicism from the religious perspective, we will need to be careful so as not to replace it with "Religious Tribalism" which in our view, will militate against the unity of nations more than negative tribalism/ethnicism has ever done and continue to do.

Rev. Dr. Johnson A. Mbillah
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