



THE PART OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN THE PROCESSES OF EXITING ELECTORAL CRISES IN FRANCOPHONE BLACK AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: *The analysis presented in this paper starts from an observation that generally shows pluralist electoral competitions in Francophone (French-speaking) black Africa not as frameworks for the expression of political adversity, but rather as real moments of enmity, disorder and multifaceted conflicts. Indeed, the democratic processes initiated by most African States at the beginning of the 1990s did not allow the desired liberalization of the political field. They were confronted with the ruse of political leaders wishing to stay in power for a long time by developing strategies for circumventing real political pluralism, neutralizing and assimilating the opposition. The “passive democracy” that has finally been achieved is characterized by the continuation of monopolistic practices and habits in a context that is supposed to be politically liberal and plural. The resolution of the crisis which strewn the electoral processes in black Africa generally requires a strong implication of various actors and on various scales, in particular the religious actors. The part of the Protestant Church in the process of getting out of the electoral crisis is thus understood as the process of involving the Protestant clergy in the management of socio-political mores before, during and after electoral competitions. Undeniably, the function of the Protestant Church in French-speaking black Africa is not limited only to the mission of evangelization and prayers for peace in the nation, it extends to the management of these socio-political crises. This study is methodologically and theoretically based on documentary research and neo-institutionalism, taking into account the fact that the outcomes of electoral crises are above all political processes and action frameworks where institutional linkages mutually influence each other.*

KEYWORDS: Elections, Electoral crises, Exiting, Francophone black Africa, Protestant Church.



INTRODUCTION

By respecting the principle of secularism enshrined in most of the constitutions of French-speaking black African countries, the Church in general and the Protestant Church in particular has long remained on the side-lines of upac the management of political affairs, focusing on its only mission of evangelization and prayer. To the principle of secularism is added what Max Weber called the modern "disenchantment with the world", that is to say, the belief, attachment and trust in science to the detriment of religion and its precepts (Weber, 1913). The modern world is a world of rationalization, characterized by a rise in science which seems to want to explain and solve everything. In fact, Max Weber does not support the hypothesis of the disappearance of religious beliefs and practices in modern society. He is simply pointing out that religious ethics, which was once a determining factor in social conduct, has lost these modern societies. So driven by scientific rationality and *cartesianism*, some go so far as to maintain that religions such as Christianity, and Protestantism in particular, are pillars of the alienation and extroversion of African peoples (Melogo, 1997; Holder & Sow, 2014; Mukadi, 2016). These different factors have often contributed to the erosion of the scope of any dynamic of social commitment.

Yet there is no denying that the Protestant ethic is conducive to development and democracy. By taking a panoramic look at the states of the world where Protestantism is most deeply rooted (Germany, United States, England, Switzerland), we can see their very advanced level in terms of democracy and socio-economic development. This study lends credence to the expression of "healthy secularism" evoked by Pope Benedict XVI, which supposes a non-exclusion of God and a recognition of the Church's right "the right to pronounce on the moral problems which today challenge consciousness" (Pope Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 3). According to Loic Le Pape (2017), "The study of the interactions, hybridizations and reciprocal exclusions between politics and religion has become one of the privileged angles of observation of the most recent political dynamics" (p. 1). This article falls within this perspective. It borrows from Jean Marc Ela (1980), his questioning on the issues of faith and/or the social commitment of the Protestant Church in French-speaking black Africa. In reality, the Protestant Church fulfils an important function of social integration and therefore of social cohesion and even seems to replace political parties in the political education of the masses. Its role in the process of entrenchment of a democratic culture in French-speaking black Africa is not negligible. This study makes a point of honour to the place it occupies in the resolution of the electoral crises that arise in this geographical space.

Indeed, the electoral processes in many countries of French-speaking black Africa are very often strewn with disorder, violent confrontations, enmities of all kinds. It is on the basis of this observation that the French daily *Le Monde* went so far as to ask whether it was still necessary to organize presidential elections in Africa (Le monde, 2016). In a report it produced on conflict and political violence resulting from elections in Africa, the African Union Panel of the Wise (2012) observes that: "Elections have spawned conflict and violence and undermine ethnic and regional alliances, sometimes even threatening social order, economic development and efforts to consolidate regional integration" (p. 1). Reputed to be neutral, apolitical and impartial, the Church is generally asked – when it does not involve itself – to prepare citizens to make objective choices and to observe an attitude of fair play, in order to ease tensions between different political actors (including supporters of the ruling party in favour of a return to order and peace and the opposition party(ies) seeking to overthrow the order in power. It is therefore obvious that the participation of the Protestant



clergy occurs at all three stages of electoral crises, that is to say, before, during and after the elections.

The part of the Protestant Church in the process of exiting electoral crises is thus understood as its involvement and/or its contribution in the management of socio-political mores during electoral processes. To this end, the Durkheimian approach (Durkheim, 1968), which emphasizes the sacred-temporal dualism characteristic of all religions, is interesting in that, in its view, religion fulfils an important function of social integration and therefore social cohesion. Undeniably, the function of the Protestant Church in francophone black Africa is not limited only to the mission of evangelization and prayers for peace, it now extends to the management of crises in society, including electoral crises. This article therefore aims to better understand the role played by the Protestant church in the peaceful resolution of electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa.

This article is structured around three (3) parts. While the first presents the theoretical and methodological orientation, the second part traces and characterizes the democratic process in French-speaking black Africa while highlighting the role played by the Protestant Church in the said processes. And, part three (3) looks at the current collaboration between the Protestant clergy and political actors in the process of pacifying socio-political life in electoral contexts. It is above all a question of examining, not only the various mechanisms and strategies mobilized by the Protestant Church to ensure its participation in the resolution of electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa, but also of listing the various challenges it faces.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach Adopted

This study is theoretically informed by neo-institutionalism, taking into account the fact that the emerging from electoral crises are political processes, frameworks of action where institutional linkages mutually influence each other. Neo-institutionalism provides information on the logic of co-production and co-conduct of crisis exit policies by institutional (political and non-political) and non-institutional actors). The recourse to the comparison of analogous cases and to the comparison by the search for variations will make it possible to grasp, at the same time, the similarities, the variations and the specificities observed around the action carried out by the Protestant Church in the resolution of the conflicts in Francophone Black Africa. Documentary research, beyond the data and the literature that it allows to grasp on the question, appears as a modality compensating for the constraints that could be faced in carrying out a considerable number of interviews. The exploitation of information provided by the online press makes it possible to fill the void of empirical investigations on all the French-speaking black African countries studied.

The Involvement of the Protestant Church in Democratic Processes in Francophone Black Africa

After their accession to independences, the former French colonies did not wait long to proceed to the establishment, on their territories, of a one-party system. Still called a one-party system, this partisan system was considered by the new political orders established in this part of Africa as a strategy of exclusion and destruction of “the other” in the political field (Mondoleba, 2020). From then on, political otherness throughout the entire monolithic period was essentially conflictual, shaped by multifaceted enmities. The imposition of single



party regimes also deserves to be thought of, in the sense of Jean François Bayart, as “the vector of the process of reciprocal assimilation of the different segments of the elite” (Bayart, 1985, p. 109-138). For Bayart, the project of “national construction” brandished by the governments of that time constituted only a simple myth further justifying his monolithic inclinations.

From the 1990s, most French-speaking black African countries witnessed the first breaths of democratization which led to the relative liberalization of the political field. Indeed, “after nearly three decades of *monolithism*, social anger triggered the crisis of the one-party regime and prepared for the reestablishment of socio-political pluralism” (Zelao, 2012, p. 16). It was followed by the flowering of political parties and the emergence of a relatively active civil society and made it possible to put an end to the relationship of exteriority between the State and the Church (Mondoleba, 2020). One would have thought of a definitive disappearance of monolithic practices but in reality, this did not happen. The authoritarian depression, instead of the total liberalization of political life, did not allow the development of the action of the Protestant Church and other actors in the conduct of political affairs. The technologies of power conservation put in place by the various regimes in power have contained the action of the Church, and have reduced it to disputes and discreet, veiled and even sometimes unacknowledged protests. But gradually, the lock is loosened, and the Protestant Church openly asserts itself as an essential link in the peace process and especially in the resolution of electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa.

Post-monopolism and the reduction of the political action of the Protestant Church to denunciations and discreet and veiled protests

The electoral competitions that occurred from the 1990s in French-speaking black Africa differ from those that preceded them by the fact that they break with “elections without choice” (Sindjoun & Courade, 1996, p. 5). Indeed, the pre-1990 elections did not offer citizens the possibility of expressing their electoral choices in complete freedom (Arrey & Tametong, 2021). Democratic transitions have led to a reconfiguration of the political field and the relationship between the ruling elites and the populations. If during the period of the single party, the voter had only one competitor to choose, the progressive liberalization of the political field initiated since the 1990s now offers him the possibility of choosing among several candidates, the one whose political program and ideology suit their expectations (Kaptchouang, 2009).

As Luc Sindjoun and Courade (1996) have pointed out, the advent of multiparty politics in French-speaking black Africa has not put an end to the complexity of the “last word” that has always haunted the state since the monolithic period. For the author, the introduction of the multiparty system can be understood in this context as a “procedure of ‘authoritarian decompression,’” more than an opening of the truly competitive political market (Ibid.). The hoped-for change and alternation do not seem to be for tomorrow” (Sindjoun & Courade, 1996, p. 61). The party-states that have emerged, absorb through the game of alliances, the other political parties, thus giving way to a “centrist liberalism”, a “*Janusian democratization*” [*une « démocratisation janusienne »*] (Owona Nguini & Menthong, 2018, p. 97). In this context, a culture of protest, denunciation and demonstration developed, which eventually became a form of political participation. The “protest space” that it allows to structure is mostly composed of Christian Churches, student associations, bar associations, etc. (Lafargue, 1996). The Protestant Church has therefore invested in this phenomenon.



This role of contestation that the Protestant Church assigns itself is frequently called into question by certain political actors for whom the Church does not have the right to interfere in the management of political affairs. That the church must content itself with dealing with the purification of souls. In this wake, the Evangelical Church of Togo, followed in this by the main Protestant Churches of countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, and Gabon, have been forced to adopt “a strategy which combines an apolitical openness and effective support for the regime” (Zorn, 1996, p. 93). This strategy constitutes, according to Jean-François Zorn, the result of a double influence: “the patriotic loyalty currently preached by the pastors, reinforced by a pride in independence which is perpetuated, on the one hand, and the great embarrassment in the face of the serious breaches of the State to fundamental freedoms committed from the 1970s, on the other hand” (Ibid., p. 94).

Evolving in such political configurations, “the preferred mode of action of the Protestant Churches at that time [was summed up] in discreet interventions by Church leaders with heads of state. Coming together with the same concern for social cohesion, religious leaders and political leaders generally do not allow any element of their deliberation to leak out, except for press releases written in jargon” (Ibid.). In some countries (Benin, Madagascar, Congo-Brazzaville, Chad), the Church has undergone a process of assimilation by the regimes in place. This assimilation perpetrated by the political powers consisted in setting up mechanisms to control the Church and subject it to their ideologies (Onana, 2012).

The progressive affirmation of the role of the Protestant Church in the management of political crises in Francophone black Africa.

The years after 1990 were doubly characterized. Initially, the established political orders displayed a real distrust of democratic politics. In countries like Cameroon, there were marches to say ‘NO’ to the return of the multiparty system, organized by supporters of the regime in place. They considered that the return of the multiparty system would encourage the emergence of an ideological diversity and of political doctrines which would undermine the project of building national unity already begun, unlike the single-party system which has the merit of imposing to all a single ideology and a single vision of the nation. Gradually, the democratic processes in these French-speaking African states have made progress. Public opinion flourishes as the liberalization of political life intensifies. It can already be observed how the Protestant Church, often alongside its Roman Catholic counterpart, takes the floor and participates actively in the management of political crises in these States. Members of the Protestant clergy are even appointed to strategic political positions. The Church, which was previously suspected of being an aid to the regime and a relay for the settlers in Africa in general, is today increasingly called upon by the populations to intervene in the resolution of the electoral crises which arise here and there. The word of the church is expected, her voice now carries and counts; it is more believable than that of certain actors.

In Benin - a francophone African country where the first national conferences took place - this active contribution of the Protestant Church in the management of politico-electoral crises was already recommended in February 1990 by the Declaration of the Interconfessional Council of Protestant Churches of Benin in these terms: “The members of the Church are called to take sides, in a direct and responsible way, on the political terrain, according to what their conscience dictates, in the directions and in accordance with the options which seem to them the best. From these flows, within the Christian community, a necessary, unavoidable political pluralism, which the Church must learn to respect” (Kâ



Mana, 1993, p. 1). For Jean-François Bayart (1973), in Cameroon (as is the case in other French-speaking African states), three hypotheses can help to understand the involvement of the churches in general in the management of political affairs: “the Churches compete with the political structures of the regime and there is conflict; the Churches have tasks complementary to those of the State, a coexistence established; the Churches and the political structures of the regime agree to collaborate at different levels and a unity of action is taking shape” (p. 23). While modern society, particularly in the West, is witnessing a weakening of religious institutions due to the secularism movement, in Africa they increasingly occupy a vital place in the management of socio-political crises. Thus, the functional substitution is logically carried out in terms of collaboration and sometimes mutual support. For François Bayart, more directly, they go so far as to frequently put their excellent communication network at the service of the political authorities (ibid).

Analysis of the modalities of involvement of the Protestant Church in the management of electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa and the challenges to be met

It is above all a question here of gauging the mechanisms through which the Protestant Church contributes to the resolution of the electoral crisis in French-speaking black Africa. Moreover, in one of his publications on the political function of the Church, Jean-François Bayart postulates that: "Far from being monolithic, these churches are in many respects the heirs of the liberal left absorbed or destroyed by the system of government; as such, they exercise a tribune function and a function of occasional opposition which, ultimately, contribute to strengthening the consensus in the political system" (Bayart, 1973, p. 515). The functional substitution of the Protestant Church is logically operated in terms of collaboration and this mutual support sometimes. The analysis of the modalities or the mechanisms by which the Protestant Church participates in the process of constructively managing electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa will precede the prospective reflection around this participation.

The mechanisms of contribution of the Protestant Church to the management of electoral crisis in French-speaking black Africa

To avoid basing the analysis here on abusive generalizations, the reflection will be based on four countries that have been through at least one electoral crisis over the past ten years. These are Gabon, Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Cameroon.

The case of Gabon

Long after the advent of the multiparty system in the 1990s, Gabon remained a “democracy”, a “murderous democracy” in the words of Christ Olivier MPAGA (2016). Alice Aterianus-Owanga and Mathilde Debain (2016) also point out that the ballot reproduces, according to certain readings, "an eternal process of election rigging and confiscation, from the first multiparty ballot under Omar Bongo in 1993 to those of 2009 and 2016" (p. 157). It is a “soft dictatorship” in the sense of Bernault (2016) which has been put in place and which is perpetuated. The presidential election of August 27, 2016 therefore turned out, after those of 1993 and 2009, as one of the most disputed elections in the country. It aroused in part of the Gabonese population, “the hope of a 'new day'” (Ibid., p. 166). At the end of this election, Ali Bongo was declared the winner with 49.80% of the votes against 48.23% for Jean Ping. His election was immediately contested by a fringe of the opposition gathered around Jean Ping.



Protest movements will be organized on the streets of Gabon and will lead to a crisis that will extend over a relatively long period (Mondoléba, 2020).

In this context of the electoral crisis, the role of the Gabonese Protestant Church in easing tensions and pacifying the political environment is decisive. Thus, the Evangelical Church of Gabon, which embodies the largest Protestant congregation in this country, has several times taken the floor to call for calm. On September 17, 2016, the President of the National Council of the Evangelical Church of Gabon (EEG), Pastor Jean Jacques Ndong Ekouaghe, published a press release to invite Gabonese to manage with discernment the crisis that the country was already going through following the publication of the provisional results of the presidential elections on August 27, 2016. His message was addressed both to political actors, to those responsible for the electoral process and to the entire Gabonese people. In his address, “the man of God” first recalled that Christ taught man to love his neighbour and to live in peace.” He urged politicians to respect the choice of ballot boxes and ensure national cohesion. He called on the media to treat information with objectivity and neutrality so as not to contribute to the manipulation of public opinion. Voters and the people as a whole must, for their part, observe a peaceful attitude and respect for democratic values. For him,

“(…) the Church must play a prophetic role, a sentinel role, in order to bring peace, a true and lasting peace. As such, in view of this peace, it has the duty to raise its voice and to cry out loud and clear, in favor of truth and justice” (CEVAA, 2019, p. 1).

The organization of conferences is also a mechanism by which the Gabonese Protestant Church contributes to the process of pacification of the country. To this end, from July 9 to 10, 2019, gathered within the framework of the Organization of Christians for Peace (OCP), the pastors of the Protestant Church, those of the Pentecostal Church and the priests of the Catholic Church organized a Christian Symposium for Peace. The recommendations of the symposium were submitted to the Secretary General of the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG, in power), who promised to submit them to the President of the Republic of Gabon. Through these recommendations, the Protestant Church and its sister churches proposed to the Gabonese State a paradigm of plural Peace, structured around seven dimensions of Peace: peace “Pita” referring to food, agriculture and food, peace “Lamed” designating knowledge, school, peace “Shalom” which is the absence of war among others. On this subject, the Coordinator of the OCP, the Reverend Max Alexandre Ngoua, indicates:

“We are in a logic of pacification, pacification through peace. We announced, at the end of our colloquium, that we were to initiate a tour called the pilgrims of peace. This tour consisted more of being able to submit to all the republican, political, religious and civil society authorities’ reflections on Christianity. We were saying that the time has come for the Church to also think about society.”¹

However, it should be noted that the influence of the Protestant Church in government decision-making has considerably diminished since the reconversion of former President Omar Bongo and current President Ali Bongo to Islam.

¹ Faapa, « Gabon : Les recommandations du Colloque chrétien pour la Paix remises au SG du PDG », <http://www.faapa.info/blog/gabon-les-recommandations-du-colloque-chretien-pour-la-paix-remises-au-sg-du-pdg/>, consulté le 06/06/2022.



The Case of Côte d'Ivoire

In Côte d'Ivoire, the 2010 presidential elections gave rise to a socio-political crisis whose effects continue to be felt. It is a multi-denominational country where Christians represent, according to the last official population census (RGPH, 2014), 33.9% of the total population, i.e. 17.2% Catholics, 13.5% Protestants and Evangelicals, and about 1% adherents of African prophetic churches. Religion and the State maintain links of mutual aid, in that religious denominations benefit from the financial support of the government for the organization of major events and the construction of buildings (Miran-Guyon, 2018, pp. 1-21). This ambition to bring together the clergy and politics was driven by the man who is considered "the father of the nation", Félix Houphouët-Boigny, whose *philoclerical* conception of constitutional secularism was close to that embodied by the Anglo-Saxon model. "As a believing president, Houphouët-Boigny took for granted the fact that religions must play a major role in the development of the country, in dialogue with the State" (Miran-Guyon, 2006, p. 23). With regard to the Protestant Church, it must be said that it brings together several congregations, the oldest and most representative of which are, among others, the United Methodist Church of Côte d'Ivoire (EMUCI), the Union of Evangelical Churches and works of Côte d'Ivoire (UEESOCI) and the Christian Missionary Alliance of Côte d'Ivoire (CMACI). It played a major role in the process of exiting (getting out of) the 2010 electoral crisis. Its contribution to this way out of the crisis was made through two methods: warning and reassurance prophecies as well as awareness-raising and exhortation to peace.

The action of the Protestant Church in the process of emerging from the electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire was, in large part, operated by the prophetic accounts of pastors, the most famous of which is undoubtedly the Pastor of the Baptist Church: *Œuvres et Missions internationales Malachie Koné* (Miran-Guyon, 2014, pp. 73-90). Indeed, during one of his visits to *Radio Fraternité Divo* in 2009, the pastor affirmed that: "Since January 2005, God has not ceased to reveal to me that this Ivorian crisis will end in a very big war. This war will be both civil and military, and both political and religious." (*Ibid.*, p. 77). A few months after the outbreak of the crisis, precisely in January 2011, Pastor Malachie Koné, by noting the urgency for the Church to "stand up and lead the spiritual fight in favour of Côte d'Ivoire," made public another prophecy. It is expressed in these terms:

Indeed, in the dream, I saw that foreign forces had stormed Côte d'Ivoire, they attacked from everywhere with heavy weapons. The explosions were unbearable. It was almost chaos in Côte d'Ivoire [...]. Oddly enough in this dream, I did not see the Ivorian army at any time. These alien forces seemed to have the upper hand when all of a sudden there was confusion. Then, the situation was reversed and these forces fled. No one could explain how the situation was suddenly reversed. In this attack on Côte d'Ivoire by foreign forces, the victory of Côte d'Ivoire will not come from its army but from the Lord himself who will create a situation of confusion and lead to the flight of these forces. It is the army of heaven that will give victory to Côte d'Ivoire. The attack will be very violent and the damage will be significant, but God will restore peace in Côte d'Ivoire. (Miran-Guyon, 2014, p. 78).

The last sentence of this prophecy is interesting to understand the comforting dimension of the prophecy in question. Indeed, with this sentence, the pastor reassures and comforts "the people of God" that the war will pass and peace will prosper in Côte d'Ivoire. In times of crisis, such messages play an important role in the process of calming hearts and mental or psychological fortification. However, Pastor Malachi's prophecies have not remained without criticism. One of the things that some of his colleagues reproach him for is that he is a supporter of Laurent Gbagbo and his prophecy is intentionally oriented towards the defence



of the cause of the latter. In this momentum, Pastor Alla Sourkou, supporter of President Ouattara writes in *Sur la terre comme au ciel. H.E. Mr. Alassane Ouattara, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire according to the will of God (a book in which all his revelations since 2000 are contained)*:

God is the founder of democracy. For the Bible says: "When the people are many, it is the glory of a king; when the people fail, it is the ruin of the prince" (Proverbs, 14,28). Isn't that where the expression vox populi, vox Dei comes from? [...] God respects democracy. God is therefore with the majority of Ivorians who elected Alassane Dramane Ouattara on November 28. So, God did not speak to that liar, Malachi.

The contribution of the Protestant Church to the process of overcoming the electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is not limited to the use of prophecy as an instrument of appeasement and comfort; it also takes place through works of evangelization and awareness, and the constant dissemination of messages of peace to the Ivorian people. In this sense, the Reverend Dr. DION Yayé Robert, president of the Protestant Baptist Church, *Œuvres et Mission internationale (EPBOMI)* and leader of the evangelical Protestants of Côte d'Ivoire, never ceases to remind his faithful that: "*God wants peace, that's the reason for the church, that's the reason for evangelization. Ivorians need to live together in peace. We are called to cultivate peace between us because we are sons and daughters of the same father²*". For him, the Church of Côte d'Ivoire must make peace a common quest by multiplying evangelization campaigns. He further emphasizes that

There is tension because the gospel is not being shared enough. All the churches have to start preaching the gospel because all these politicians who are the actors of the troubles, who are the actors of all these factors of misunderstanding, of all these factors of contempt, most of them are in religious communities. There are those who go to mosques, who go to cathedrals, to temples. Everyone has at least what he can call a religion. If everyone returns to themselves and obeys what God says, peace will be (Ibid.).

The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the French-speaking black African countries most affected by crises of all kinds (Cros & Misser, 2005). Already, it should be recalled that at the end of 2011, the presidential and legislative elections were preceded and followed by violence which resulted in more than thirty deaths and a UN report denounced serious human rights violations (BCNDUH, 2016). The re-election of Joseph Kabila was contested by the leader of the opposition, Étienne Tshisekedi, ranked second in the presidential election. The social function of religion is observed there with the greatest acuity.

Sébastien Kalombo (2014) indicates that their role has been more assertive since the tense end of the mandate of former President Joseph Kabila from 2016. Religious groups do not hesitate to contribute to the resolution of the various socio-political crises that arise in the country. In this sense, the senior leaders of the Protestant Church, represented by the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), have regularly launched national awareness campaigns, sometimes accompanied by demonstrations, to demand justice and electoral transparency. The second largest religious denomination in the country, the ECC, "brings together more than 70 members of the ecclesial communities in the capital city of Kinshasa and all its communities are more or less marked by Pentecostal and charismatic influence" (Ibid., p. 60). According to Fath (2005), "Pentecostalism comes from Methodism (sanctification movement) which it

² [Eglise Protestante Baptiste Œuvres et Mission Internationale - Officiel](#)



also borrows from baptism (immersion of the convert) and from Afro-American Christianity (enthusiasm, possession by the Spirit).” He is therefore part of a Protestant formation, which does not mean that all Pentecostals or charismatics today could be qualified as “Protestants” (p. 376). In a country where 80% of the population is Christian and 30% is Protestant, the actions undertaken by the Protestant Church have a real impact on the behaviour of the population.

The Congolese Protestant Church sees elections as an essential modality for the appeasement of political life. For this reason, it has been involved in all phases of the electoral process to guarantee the electoral timelines, a minimum of transparency. It spares no effort to encourage the constant organization of elections in the DRC. In March 2022, the Protestant clergy followed in the footsteps of the bishops of the Catholic Church in protesting against a possible postponement of the elections to be held in 2023. The Protestant clergy reaffirmed their commitment to holding the elections on time. For the Reverend André Bokundoa-Bo Likabe, president of the Protestants,

Credible, transparent and peaceful elections absolutely deserve to be held in 2023. We should urgently find a national consensus around the prerequisites likely to officially start the electoral process. So far, we are only in political debates without formally starting the 2023 electoral cycle (RFI, 2021).

The Church of Christ in the DRC has, for its part, adopted a roadmap entitled “Cap 2023,” in which it formulates a series of pleas to the institutions involved in the organization of the elections and actions including the implementation work began on 12 April 2021. According to Reverend Éric Senga, secretary general of the *justice, peace and safeguarding of creation* commission, this roadmap also provided for activities to mobilize the population around the electoral issues (Ibid.). Before the elections, the Protestant Church has taken the habit of organizing, with the Catholic Church, ecumenical services to entrust the conduct of the elections to God. During these services, the Protestant clergy do not fail to urge the faithful to participate in the elections in complete transparency and serenity. In December 2018, an ecumenical service was organized by the Protestant and Catholic Churches with the aim of supporting the advent of peace in the country and the peaceful conduct of the elections of December 30, 2018. During their preaching/sermon, the Archbishop of Kinshasa and the Reverend Doctor André Bokundoa, after having all deplored the climate of violence in which the electoral campaign took place, wished that “that the day of December 30 takes place in fraternity and conviviality.” By urging the Congolese to follow the example of Christian unity symbolized by ecumenical worship, Pastor Bokundoa indicated:

How beautiful it is to live together. Collaboration with the Catholic Church is also harmonious beyond doctrinal differences. That the Congolese, speaking various languages, manage to speak the same language of peace by letting themselves be overwhelmed by love of the neighbour (Bokundoa, 2021, p. 37).

The final blessing addressed to the faithful who came to take part in this worship was expressed in these terms: “*We have a light heart; the Lord has certainly heard our prayer. May everything go well tomorrow.*” The Protestant clergy also advocates non-violence by calling on the faithful to “*not give in to tribal manipulation of any origin whatsoever*” in these dark moments in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo. To the Head of



State, the Protestant Church has recommended that he strengthen the mechanisms to fight against corruption, impunity and clientelism in the organs of the State³.

The Case of Cameroon

As the process of the 2018 presidential elections is launched in Cameroon, the security situation in the country is worrying. It faces both the incursions of the jihadist group Boko Haram in the Far North region, the “Anglophone crisis” fuelled by separatist groups in the North West and South West regions and the refugee crisis of Central Africans in the East region. For Hans De Marie Heungoup (2019), never since 1992 has a presidential election been held in such a context of insecurity. It is an election marked by the participation of new opposition parties including the MRC (Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon) of Maurice Kamto. At the end of it, Paul Biya is proclaimed winner with 71% of the votes, against 14% for the MRC of Maurice Kamto, 6% for the UNIVERS of Cabral Libii and 3% for the SDF of Joshua Osih. Maurice Kamto rejects these official results and indicates errors in the sums of the results. He presents a document containing other consolidated figures and which attributes to him the victory of the popular vote with 39.74% against 38.47% for Paul Biya. A series of marches protesting the official results will be organized by Maurice Kamto as part of his national resistance program: “*No to the electoral hold-up*”. Media arenas will be transformed into spaces of profusion of violent discourse and tribal hatred. The protest march organized by the MRC on January 26, 2019 turned into a riot in the city of Douala. It will be followed by a wave of police arrests of the leaders of this political party on January 28⁴. The Cameroonian embassy in France is invaded and ransacked in Paris by a hundred demonstrators demanding the departure of Paul Biya. This program of national resistance: “*no to the electoral hold-up*” of Kamto led to demonstrations and prolonged the post-election crisis.

On the occasion of the closing of the week on October 15, 2018, the Union of Baptist Churches of Cameroon (in its french acronym, *UEBC*) had clearly addressed the question of how to act as a Christian in the face of the multiple crises facing Cameroon. In response, *UEBC* called on Cameroonians to act as peacemakers (*CEVAA*, 2018). It should be added that at the beginning of the electoral year, precisely in January 2018, a crusade of fasting and prayer on the theme “40 days of intercession for Cameroon was initiated”; it ended with a great night of prayer held in Yaoundé at the headquarters of an evangelist organization. The prayer of the Church could be read on the large banner which was displayed at the entrance to the *Christ campus*: “*Cameroon: God bless you and keep you. Numbers 6: 24*”. The contribution of the Protestant Church to overcoming the socio-political crises in Cameroon also takes place through the channel of the ecumenical masses that it organizes in collaboration with the Catholic Church and Islam. These ecumenical services symbolize the unity and harmony between the three religious formations and illustrate the good example of

³ Lacroix Afrique, « En RD-Congo, l'Église protestante publie une feuille de route pour les élections »,

<https://africa.la-croix.com/en-rd-congo-leglise-protestante-publie-une-feuille-de-route-pour-les-elections/>

⁴ Opposition leader Maurice Kamto is arrested in Douala with two of his supporters, Albert Dzungang and Christian Penda Ekoka by the judicial police. At the same time, two other members of the MRC, Professor Alain Fogue, treasurer of the party and Célestin Djamen, were arrested at the general hospital in Douala, where he was receiving medical treatment for a gunshot wound inflicted on him. during this demonstration. Many other MRC activists were arrested in several cities across the country. Mamadou Mota, vice-president of the MRC, was notably arrested.



peace and unity by which they preach. Relative to the “Anglophone Crisis”, Protestant Clergies such as the moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) and the superintendent of the Full Gospel Mission in Cameroon have also been actively involved in religious diplomacy and facilitating peace talks at the macro, meso and micro levels of society.

Factors hindering the effectiveness of the action of the Protestant Church in the resolution of electoral crises in Francophone black Africa

The ambition of the Protestant Church to contribute effectively to the promotion of peaceful electoral processes in the states of French-speaking black Africa is hampered by factors of various orders that should be analysed here. First of all, it is necessary to take an interest in the cleavages increasingly observed within the Protestant Church in different congregations. In Cameroon, for example, Protestants have mostly organized themselves into Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Evangelical communities. The latter, embodied by the Evangelical Church of Cameroon (EEC), one of the most important Protestant churches, is, according to certain indiscretions, shaken by strong tensions against a backdrop of ethnic competition for control of the leadership of the institution. In fact, if one looks closely, although it is now established throughout the national territory, the Evangelical Church remains largely dominated by three large ethnic communities: the Sawas, the Bamilékés and the Bamouns. The management at the top of this Church obeys the principle of rotation between the nationals of the main sociological components. *“The election of the new president of the institution during the synod of April 22, 2017 resuscitated old ethnic resentments, resulting in the schism of the Sawa ethnic community which until now contests its legitimacy”* (Tchango, 2017). These ethnic quarrels within the evangelical church perfectly illustrate the tribal claims and hate speech that were observed in Cameroon during the 2018 electoral process. Logically, it becomes difficult for the Church to invest itself effectively in peace works while she herself is torn by tensions.

The same situation is observed in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, the Evangelical Church of Gabon, and the United Methodist Church of Côte d'Ivoire, members of the Community of Evangelical Churches (CEVA) were also shaken by the leadership crisis which led to their partition in the period from 2015 to 2017. A period during which these States were crossed by various socio-political conflicts. Moreover, it should be noted that the contribution of the Protestant Church to the resolution of electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa would be more effective if it were to be part of a scheme of frank collaboration and consultation with the other Churches. Unfortunately, we can deplore the fact that this collaboration – even if it exists – is marred by many pitfalls.

Moreover, the leaders of the Protestant Church are criticized for their strong rapprochement with the political elites in power. The rapprochement induces a form of moral corruption that encroaches on the impartiality and credibility of the Church. In December 2013, Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church in the world, insisted that:

The relationship between the Church and politics must be both parallel and convergent. Parallel, because everyone has their way and their various tasks. Converge, only in helping the people. Indeed, when relations converge without the people or by making fun of the people, then begins this union with the political power which ends up rotting the Church: business, compromises... We must proceed in parallel, each with their own method, his particular tasks, his own vocation. Convergent, only in the common good (...). The relationship



between the Church and political power can be corrupted if it does not converge only in the common good (Lacroix Africa, 2020, p. 2).

Finally, it should be noted that the Protestant Church is facing financial difficulties in operationalizing its peacebuilding programs before, during and after the elections, which cannot be ignored in this reflection. In Cameroon, recent news about a subsidy granted by the State to the Presbyterian Church has sparked a heated controversy in public opinion. As a reminder, on September 21, 2021, Pastor Bessala Mbesse, Secretary General of the Cameroonian Presbyterian Church (a Protestant denomination riddled with debts), had requested funding from the Head of State in these terms: "I come humbly to your High Authority, emblematic figure of national unity, peace and development of our dear and beautiful country Cameroon, request financial support from the State to the tune of 418,146,705 FCFA (638,391 €)." The Head of State paid the requested amount in full. Even if the reason for this solicitation was understandable, what one might fear from such acts is the compromise of the Church, which receives "the favours" of the government and to which it must be faithful and loyal.

Prospective analysis of the contribution of the Protestant Church in the process of emerging from electoral crises in Francophone black Africa

The work of German sociologist Max Weber (1904) set out to demonstrate the compatibility of Protestant ethics with the socio-economic development of societies. The penetration of Protestantism on the African continent during colonization does not seem to have been densely perpetuated after it. Catholicism and Islam assert themselves as the two most widespread religious denominations in French-speaking black Africa. Moreover, Protestantism is today confronted with the phenomenon of Pentecostalism which dilutes and sometimes confuses it. Taken in this sense, the work of territorial penetration must actively follow its course. Indeed, for the peace works of the Protestant Church to be sufficiently relayed, it must have, in each country, a critical mass of faithful who ensure this relay.

Moreover, one of the factors that overshadows the contribution of the Protestant Church in the electoral crisis resolution process is its weak communication around its action. This can be explained by its posture of humility and Christian discretion. But it is essential that the Church has the means of communication to convey its messages and make its actions known to the general public. For example, it can set up radio stations, TV channels and websites exclusively designed to communicate around its daily social actions. As part of our explorations for the realization of this study, we had great difficulty in finding information relating to the contribution of the Protestant Church in the resolution of the politico-electoral crises in French-speaking black Africa. Online research motives always led to the actions of the Catholic Church which are very visible in the media spaces.

In addition, the Protestant Church must equip itself with bodies specifically designed to intervene in the resolution of political and social crises. It must strengthen its social function and have its own early warning and early response mechanisms for the prevention of socio-political crises. These arrangements will enable it to produce annual reports on the security situation in the country, in which its proposals will be recorded. It appears the international community has also got a role to play in collaborating with the Protestant Church in order to facilitate its peace work in francophone black Africa.



The Protestant Church, an actor on whom the international community must count for its actions of peace in francophone black Africa

As it has been demonstrated previously, the Protestant Church, with regard to the role it plays in the process of exiting socio-political crises, has now become an essential actor in the international dynamics of the pacification of the electoral game in French-speaking black Africa. These electoral crisis can rightly be considered as situations which call on the populations of the States of this part of the world to explore what is best in themselves, in particular “their vocation to follow uncompromisingly in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in search of God, Love and Truth” (Pataya, 2013, p. 175). This ideal can only be properly achieved if the actors of the international community involved in the process of preventing and resolving electoral crises integrate the interest of collaborating with the clergy in general. Indeed, the construction of a lasting and positive peace requires the participation of a greater number of actors belonging to various social strata. It also requires taking into account a series of structural measures (economic, political, legal, cultural, religious, educational, etc.). Post-election policies are moments of reconciliation, and reconciliation is far from being a simple act of individual piety, because it is part of a broader sacrament that engages the entire community (John Paul II, 1984).

However, for an effective participation of the Protestant Church alongside the international community, in the prevention and peaceful resolution of electoral crises, the Protestant clergy must overcome their internal disagreements or, failing that, find common ground to project an image of impartiality to the people. Several commentators and analysts have often called on the Church to mediate between belligerents, as it has done in countries such as DRC.

CONCLUSION

The analysis and reflections around the contribution of the Church in the resolution of crisis and politico-electoral conflicts in Francophone black Africa illustrate at least two things: on the one hand, the democratic processes have not resulted in the taming of violence and the desired economic development of States. The electoral violence maintained by competing political actors requires the intervention of categories of neutral actors to domesticate them, and the Church is one of them. On the other hand, they make it possible to relativize the principle of secularism in its current formulation by inducing its redefinition. Indeed, secularism is understood today as the exclusion of religion from the various domains of society and its restriction to the domain of individual conscience. Secularism would be expressed in the total separation between the State and the Church, the latter having no right to intervene on issues relating to the life and behaviour of citizens; secularism would even include the exclusion of religious symbols from public places intended for the carrying out of the proper functions of the political community: offices, schools, courts, hospitals, prisons, etc. On the basis of these multiple ways of conceiving secularism, we speak today of secular thought, secular morality, secular science, secular politics” (Pope Benoit XVI, 2006, p. 1). Such an apprehension of secularism grants no place to religion in the management of political affairs in general. This would give the impression that God is not concerned with social issues. This study, more or less from the perspective of Benedict XVI for whom, humanity should today consider a healthy conception of secularism which recognizes for the Church “the right to pronounce on the moral problems which today challenge the conscience” (ibid.).



The analysis in this paper has shown that despite the institutional and operational difficulties, the role of the Protestant Church today remains decisive in the process of emerging from socio-political crises (in general and electoral crises in particular) and advancing peace and development in French-speaking black Africa. The contributions of the Protestant Church to peace are not to be demonstrated, as it is true that the values carried by the Christian Church are the values of peace, love, education, well-being, honesty, tolerance, justice, equality etc (Arrey, 2021). Thus, the analysis in this article and the lessons learned have important policy implications for all key stakeholders interested in the role of the church in promoting peace, security and development in Africa.

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